Kathryn Yelinek and Michael Coffta

The value of graduate internships in creating online tutorials

Working with instructional technology students

As academic libraries experiment with ways to reach increasingly diverse and wired students, the online tutorial has become a go-to tool. After all, online tutorials can alleviate the demands on librarian and classroom faculty time, provide consistent delivery of content, and provide personalized and just-in-time instruction at the student's point of need.

Not all tutorials are created equal, though, and developing online tutorials requires an investment of time, talent, and resources. Making that investment can be difficult for librarians with limited time and without training in technology or the pedagogy of online teaching. What options are available then to librarians who want to develop high-quality, pedagogically sound tutorials?

This article examines one option used at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania (BU): the establishment of a library internship for students in our university's Masters of Instructional Technology (MSIT) degree program. While internships are not new in libraries, and while the LIS literature discusses the benefits of internships for LIS students and even for non-LIS undergraduate students, there has been little discussion of non-LIS graduate students interning in libraries. This article is intended to show how one such internship benefited our library. Indeed, by combining the time and technology talents of the interns with the subject matter expertise of librarians, we were able to develop several online tutorials that otherwise would not have been created.

Establishing an internship with the MSIT program

The MSIT program at BU is a nationally well-regarded program that engages students in the study of the analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of instruction. The study of instructional technology encompasses the use of various media and technologies to enhance learning in diverse environments, including classroom, blended, online, and mobile learning settings. Both authors of this article graduated from the program, and one of the authors serves as Library Liaison to the MSIT program, keeping close ties with the program in promoting its goals.

With a firm grasp of the capabilities of MSIT students, the librarians of Andruss Library sought to initiate an internship to aid in the design and development of online tutorials. The librarians have designed and developed several tutorials with varying instructional goals and target audiences, including

Kathryn Yelinek is research librarian/coordinator of government documents, e-mail: kyelinek@bloomu.edu, and Michael Coffta is business research librarian at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, e-mail: mcoffta@bloomu.edu

our well received General Library Research Tutorial. We wanted to expand our offerings of these tutorials and saw the opportunity to provide quality learning experiences to MSIT students. With a "wish list" of tutorials, and knowledge that supervising interns requires time and energy, the librarians committed to hosting MSIT interns in spring and summer 2012. The authors of this article served as co-supervisors for the interns.

MSIT interns complete a minimum of 240 hours of professional level duties with an organization. While most are paid internships, Andruss Library did not compensate either of its MSIT interns. We recruited interns both through an advertisement on the MSIT's e-mail list and during the MSIT program's three-day Corporate Advisory Council, when prospective employers and prospective supervisors for interns are invited to interview students. In preparation, we developed an invitation for applications, which outlined the library's internship objectives and required qualifications, such as technology competencies. This invitation indicated that the intern would:

1. cooperate with the BU librarians to design and develop interactive tutorials to promote information literacy among undergraduate students,

2. communicate with librarians to share drafts, storyboards, etc., and

3. collaborate with librarians to create assessment instruments for student learning.

Qualifications included:

1. completion of Advanced Instructional Design course,

2. ability to work independently,

3. solid communication skills,

4. progressive skills in Adobe Captivate and Flash,

5. ability to cooperate with subject matter experts to design and develop assessment tools, and

6. skills in video editing preferred.

These criteria and objectives led to clear expectations on the part of the applicants,

and facilitated a straightforward interview process. During the interviews, we required all applicants to show a portfolio of their previous instructional design work. The MSIT students who participated in each of Andruss Library's internships were both highly competent and fully prepared for the enterprises ahead of them.

Experience during the internship

In order to meet the 240-hour requirement, both interns worked approximately 20 hours per week. While it would have been ideal for the interns to have their own designated work area, space constraints meant they needed to share their work area with Access Services staff on a "time share" arrangement. Because the interns would be working mostly with Captivate in order to build tutorials, Captivate 5 was installed on their computer. In addition, the interns were given access to all of the library's network drives so that files could be easily shared.

While both internships began with face-to-face meetings in order to set expectations and decide on work schedules, much of the communication during the internships was carried out by e-mail. This occurred due to simple staffing constraints, as it often proved impossible to get one intern and two supervisors together on a regular basis for any length of time. While e-mail got the job done in conveying information, it sometimes led to a delay or mix-up when some point was misinterpreted. As a result, we did try to check in whenever possible with the interns, and there were several meetings when only one supervisor could be present. There was also one joint meeting during each internship with the internship coordinator for the MSIT program, both supervisors, and the intern. This meeting was a time for the coordinator both to ensure that the internship was progressing smoothly and to learn how well the MSIT program was preparing its interns for future employment.

For every tutorial created, we tried to follow the standard design process taught in the MSIT program, although this was sometimes

modified or shortened due to time constraints. In general, the process began with a task analysis, in which each step or concept to be covered in the tutorial was identified. This often took the form of an outline provided by the supervisors. The intern then took that task analysis and turned it into a storyboard using Microsoft PowerPoint. This process allowed us to determine how transitions between concepts worked, where a concept might need additional clarification, and where we wanted to insert any quiz questions. It also allowed us to determine the color schemes and graphical "look" of any particular tutorial. The storyboarding stage often led to substantial tweaking, and later on we learned not to take so much time in this stage. This stage was also sometimes skipped for extremely short tutorials.

Once the storyboards were approved by both supervisors, the intern created the tutorials in Captivate and sent the first draft to the supervisors for review. After several rounds of revisions, some of the tutorials were sent to all librarians in Andruss Library for additional feedback. The decision on whether to allow the other librarians an opportunity to provide feedback depended on the topic and time pressures.

The interns' experience

The two interns were asked for feedback on their experiences after their internships. When asked what appealed to them about the internship, both indicated that they enjoyed using Adobe Captivate and, on a minor note, enjoyed working on campus for the sake of proximity to MSIT professors and overall convenience. When asked about reservations about doing an internship in an academic library, one expressed a concern that the library's name may not have the same impact on a resume as perhaps a large commercial entity. The same intern frankly admitted that before agreeing to the internship, she thought that the content may be boring. Interestingly, however, both interns indicated that they learned a tremendous amount about library research and resources during the internship.

One commented that learning to use intricate aspects of databases, as she did during the internship, will help her professional life.

While both interns appreciated the practice in communicating in a professional setting, there was some dissatisfaction with the dependence upon e-mail. Nonetheless, both interns felt that the up-tempo pace, the frequency of the communications, and overall need for thoroughness served as solid preparation for a professional environment. They felt that the internship reinforced and promoted independent work skills and time management skills. Furthermore, both interns stated that they felt that the technical, organizational, and cognitive skillsets of this internship would be transferable to other professional settings in other organization types.

Overall, the interns felt that the internships were excellent opportunities to both exercise and expand their expertise in instructional design. A comment shared by both interns was a need for greater freedom beyond using Captivate. Nearly all of the library tutorials were made in Captivate, providing a relatively consistent look and feel. In order to keep this consistent look—and to facilitate the creation of the tutorials—nearly all of the interns' projects were also completed with Captivate. The interns were provided with the source files of previous tutorials to serve as templates, or they used one of their previously completed tutorials as a template. Nevertheless, they enjoyed making the instructional content delivery interesting and engaging in Captivate.

The tutorials were well received, and have been incorporated into the library's Web site and information literacy instruction.[1]

Advice for creating your own internship

MSIT students are creative, innovative, and highly skilled. The very core of their discipline is to analyze learning needs from literally any walk of life and enable learners to effectively learn and apply relevant skills and knowledge. The partnership established in an internship will be remarkably productive

Chapel Hill; phone: (203) 432-8424; e-mail: patricia.thurston@yale.edu.

University Libraries Section. Marilyn Myers, University of Houston; phone: (713) 743-9803; e-mail: msmyers@uh.edu.

Western European Studies Section. Sarah Sussman, Stanford University; phone: (650) 723-9481; e-mail: ssussman@stanford. edu.

Women and Gender Studies Section. Diane M. Fulkerson, University of South Florida-Lakeland; phone: (863) 667-7868; e-mail: diane.fulkerson@gmail.com.

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for both parties. Allow them to stretch their imaginations in terms of both instructional content delivery and assessment. As with all internships, there needs to be a significant amount of planning, instruction for the intern, structure, and communication.

If you are not fortunate enough to serve at an institution with an MSIT program, look for similar programs in your area, or inquire about internships in Education or Computer Science programs.

Note

1. To view the tutorials created by these MSIT interns, go to http://guides.library. bloomu.edu/MSITtutorials. *ᴎ*