

Librarians in Learning Management Systems: Strategies and Suggestions

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Many colleges and universities offer online classes or at least incorporate some sort of learning management system (LMS) into traditional classes to create a platform for the instructor and students to communicate and relay information. Because of the increasing importance of technology literacy and the streamlined benefits of having a unified platform for each course, chances are that the LMS environment won't be going away anytime soon. So what can the library do to get in on this collaborative learning tool where students go to get information about assignments, grades, and guidance? As a librarian, can the LMS be a starting point for information literacy outreach to teaching faculty? If so, what could that look like? This article addresses strategies for establishing a library presence in the LMS and provides suggestions for creating information literacy and library resource modules.

Background and Opportunities

The LMS enables students to log into a course to engage with the content using an online interface which allows them to see and interact with course modules, assignments, files, announcements, discussion boards, and grades. LMS interfaces have a variety of settings that allow the instructor the ability to permit or prohibit access to librarians, teaching assistants, and students so a librarian must work directly with the instructor to decide on the librarian's contributions to the LMS and gain access to the interface.

Many researchers have commented on the technological challenges of integrating librarians into the LMS due to the fact that there are several LMS vendors with a variety of features and permissions. Because there are so many scenarios of LMS vendors and settings, there is no established standard for integrating the librarian into the LMS and many strategies are applied to specific situations (Farkas 2015, Hoffman and Ramin 2010, Mune et al. 2015). However, best practices have evolved by the librarian community sharing case studies and assessments of the library's integration in the LMS. Among the many challenges that can arise, faculty collaboration, technology support, and curriculum design are frequently reported. Getting to know the LMS interface and the collaborative landscape of faculty is the initial step that should precede any module development or implementation.

No matter which LMS is used or is planned to be used in the future, collaboration with the instructor will be foundationally important. Heinrich and Attebury (2012) attribute success in integrating the library into the LMS to "close collaboration with course faculty, including involvement in assignment design[,] access to the LMS," and "consistent communication between all parties" (p. 175-176). Communicating with faculty and being able to outline the various options of integration and any other time constraints or technological limitations will

help establish a mutually beneficial collaboration because much of the success of the library integration at the end of the course depends on “whether or not the course instructor promotes library use” (Farkas, p. 5).

Hoffman and Ramin (2010) describe a “librarian’s presence in an online course” as being “more than an academic solution: it is a powerful outreach tool” (p. 298). LMS integration not only allows the library liaison a “risk-free” way to offer library services to professors not willing to give up face-to-face class time, but the online environment enables the library to reach distance learning communities who could benefit from additional resources and guidance. The LMS enables the librarian to reach greater audiences for longer amounts of time, reaching students beyond the physical campus and extending the time from a “one-shot session” to becoming a resource throughout the entire length of the course.

Librarian’s integration in the LMS can be designed at the macro-level, creating generic library resource tools that will easily integrate into the LMS, at the micro-level, customizing library resources to a specific course or program, or at the embedded librarian level, with the librarian moderating a specific discussion board or assuming an active role during the course of the semester (Farkas, 2015). Each level of LMS integration depends on what the librarian can offer, what teaching faculty wants, and what will best benefit the students. Understanding the levels of integration and preparing what that might look like for a specific course can help the librarian when communicating with faculty on what services he/she can provide.

Strategies for Establishing the Library’s Presence in the LMS

As discussed in the previous section, it is important to understand the full picture of the LMS and identify which courses and faculty to approach. From the initial list of courses and faculty, the librarian should focus on building faculty relationships, identifying areas of customization, and knowing personal limitations. These defining areas will help librarians navigate the initial steps of establishing an LMS outreach initiative for the library.

Building Faculty Relationships

Faculty relationships are the key to establishing a presence in a course’s LMS. To help build relationships with faculty across campus, Wilson (2015) recommends that librarians try “presenting at department meetings, sending e-mails, and attending social events through the institution” while continuing to feed existing relationships and “keep[ing] conversation going” by sending “periodic e-mails, meeting for coffee, and chatting at institutional functions” (p.492). When a librarian has an ongoing relationship with faculty, they will be more likely to collaborate with him/her on adding library resources to the course’s LMS. These relationships open doors to collaborating on assignment design, granting greater access to the LMS, and can also lead to opportunities for more traditional library instruction sessions. Fruitful faculty relationships will also promote library services through word of mouth to students and other faculty.

Identifying Areas of Customization

Establishing the library's presence in the LMS is more than just curriculum design around information literacy modules. Wilson (2015) describes how the librarian has greater flexibility and reach within the LMS because he/she "is able to reach and provide tailored library services to both face-to-face and online students by customizing the role of the embedded librarian" (p. 491). Library content within the LMS should be integrated with specific assignments or learning outcomes of the course or program to ensure that the librarian's efforts will not be overlooked. Modules built within the LMS can provide critical information to the student in his/her time of need, so customizing the content at the micro-level to compliment the assignment, course, or program will help place library content in relevant context. Library resources, information literacy modules, and LibGuides can be customized to specific assignments, courses, or programs so that the students are supported directly. If the librarian's LMS access allows embedded librarian support, he/she can customize a library-specific discussion board with frequently asked questions or host live chat sessions. Other ideas for customizing information literacy and library resource modules will be addressed later.

Knowing Personal Limitations

When discussing best practices within an online course, Hoffman and Ramin (2010) explain that a library-specific discussion board and or integrating the library reference chat widget within the LMS prove to have the most student interaction (p. 294). If the librarian is successful in connecting with faculty members and becoming embedded in courses, he/she may quickly find that the requests are exceeding his/her capacity to support the courses properly, so involving other librarians from the beginning can "[partition] the workload and [help] instructors become familiar with more than one librarian" (Hoffman and Ramin, p. 298). Having modules prepared ahead of time can help librarians prepare for taking on multiple courses at a time. Librarians should prevent getting stretched too thin because meeting the needs of the students and the expectations of the faculty will pave the way for future collaborations.

Suggestions for Information Literacy Modules

To meet the needs of the digital classroom, librarians should consider creating digital content around information literacy that is relevant to the course and its assignments. Online modules reduce the librarian's limits on time and topics covered since the LMS allows students to go at their own pace and engage with the content that is relevant to their information need. So librarians may find more instructional freedom in LMS integration rather than getting cut short with "one shot" sessions. However, modules on the LMS can limit the way information literacy activities can be taught. When planning integration into the LMS, librarians should consider the variety of ways to customize the content by preparing a suite of resources, integrating multimedia, and staying organized.

Preparing a Suite of Resources

Create a suite of information literacy modules to have as examples when meeting with faculty. Mune, Goldman, Higgins, Eby, Chan, and Crotty (2015) suggest that the modules be designed in a way where teaching faculty "can select from a variety of standalone, customizable modules" so that the librarian and the instructor can easily identify which areas of information literacy should

be featured on the LMS and how to customize the modules to benefit the specific course outcomes and activities (p. 101). When the library content is adaptable and meets faculty needs, the content will more likely be promoted by the instructor and integrated into the class, contributing to the overall success of the LMS integration. This modular approach also prepares the librarian’s content to fit within most of the technological scenarios of the various LMS platforms and permission settings.

Modules built like an a-la-carte menu allow faculty to select which modules and customizations will best support the course curriculum. By breaking the information literacy resources into smaller chunks, the librarian can more easily revise and customize the module chunks to specific courses or programs. Table 1, derived from a modular outline Mune et al. (2015) created to align with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) information literacy standards, can be adapted by librarians to serve as a menu when meeting with faculty to select which modules can be included in the course and at what level of detail those topics should be taught (p. 110). Once the information literacy modules are selected and customized, librarians should “take the tests and view the videos in the sequence in which students will access materials” to ensure that the topics covered make sequential sense in the context of the assignment or the course (Heinrich and Attebury, p. 176).

Table 1: Suggestions for Information Literacy (IL) Modules

IL Topics	Modules	Customization Suggestions	Level of Detail (R=review; T=teach as new)
1) Research Topic and Question			
	Developing a Research Topic	Topic examples	
	Writing a Thesis Statement	Thesis examples	
2) Search Techniques			
	Choosing Search Terms	Keywords	
	Effective Searches	Databases	
	Peer-Reviewed Articles	Databases ; Articles	
	Journals	Journals	
	Newspapers and Magazines	Newspaper and Magazines	
3) Evaluating Sources			

	Types of Sources	Comparison Examples	
	Primary and Secondary Sources	Examples	
	Critical Evaluation		
4) Analyzing and Using Sources			
	Annotated Bibliography	Example	
	Literature Review	Articles with examples	
5) Citing Sources			
	Copyright and Fair Use		
	How to Cite	Citation style used	
	Plagiarism		

Integrating Multimedia

Enrich information literacy and library resource content by integrating multimedia such as videos, screen captures, tooltips, and chat. Heinrich and Attebury (2012) recommend keeping videos “divided into smaller modules, allowing for easier revision” to save time when updating and customizing the videos by simply replacing specific short segments (p. 176). Course - specific examples can be sequenced with generic information literacy lessons to create a customized video in a shorter amount of time. Multimedia such as videos, screen captures, and tooltips will help students interact with the content to replace the activities and instructor modeling used during traditional library instruction sessions.

Staying Organized

Because librarians will be recruiting and executing several LMS course integrations at the same time, it is recommended to document each instructor, course, customization, and results to plan for the current and future semesters. Having clear documentation of which modules are integrated in which courses will help the librarian answer student questions and promote LMS integration to similar courses. The librarian should keep track of the assignments and course activity throughout the semester so he/she can release modules at the point-of-need to “avoid overwhelming students at the beginning of the course” (Hoffman and Ramin, p. 301). If the professor requests multiple modules for a course, librarians can trickle in new modules over the semester to have an excuse to send an announcement to the students to call attention to the new content and remind them about the existing library modules.

As the semester comes to a close, it is important to “get feedback from the students and faculty” and “keep records for each course and statistics in general” (Wilson, p. 493). Depending on the

LMS platform, statistics may include clicks from the LMS to the library website, page views, average duration of time on each page of the IL module, video views, discussion posts, participation in a poll or other online activity, or research consultation contacts that can be traced back to the students in the course. All statistics should be documented with the course integration details to help improve future LMS integrations. These best practices for documentation and assessment will help with planning and improvement for future courses. It is in the librarian's best interest to work with the faculty to tweak involvement in the LMS to best fit the course's needs and the student's engagement so that he/she can count on having a presence in the LMS each semester.

Suggestions for Library Resource Modules

While information literacy modules are an easy sell for classes with a research assignment, they may not be used or promoted by the faculty if there is not a direct tie to the class. In addition to presenting information literacy modules, think outside of the box to prepare library resources that the teaching faculty can't turn down. Consider ways to have relevant content to add to any course such as promoting the library's services that are both general and program-specific. With the right selection of library resource modules, librarians can save faculty hours of student consultation. Similar to the information literacy modules, develop "chunkable" library resource modules that can easily be pieced together to create the magical formula for any course. To begin building a suite of library resource topics, start with frequently asked questions from the Library Circulation Desk and Research Center. What do students not know about using the library website or physical space? Other commonly used service points that are housed within the library like a writing center or tutoring service can be included too.

Library Basics

Library websites are not always user-friendly or intuitive. Schofield and Eccelstone believe that due to the bureaucratic culture of libraries, many websites were "built for stakeholders battling over real estate instead of being built with the users in mind" (Schofield and Eccelstone, 2016). To aid students in using the website, librarians can create support materials, interactive tooltip presentations, or video tutorials that guide viewers through the library website from the student's perspective. Call out specific areas of the library website that students may find helpful; explain what the various search boxes mean and in which instances the student would use them; describe the basic tips of searching the databases; and point out the research consultations and reference chat features. Distance learners may not ever step foot inside the physical library, so the library website may be his/her only option for having a campus resource that can promote his/her academic success. Lastly, building a permanent LibGuide specific to the course, program, or department can help students continue to access content relevant to their area of study once the semester is over.

Promote Relevant Service Points

While a math class may not be up for an information literacy workshop, they'd be happy to know what the math tutoring hours are in the Learning Commons. If the library doesn't house the tutoring center, offer the math club a space to meet with their appointments and small groups by

posting a tutorial on how to reserve a room. Same goes for writing centers, technology services, research consultations, computer lab hours, or other specialized services within the library. Table 2 provides an overview of suggestions to include in the library resource modules that should be customized to include other library services and course context.

Table 2: Suggestions for Library Resource Modules

Library Topics	Modules
LibGuides	
	Program Specific
	Course Specific
Library Website	
	Catalog (all search boxes)
	Databases
	Course Reserves
	Room Reservations
	Journals
	Newspapers and Magazines
Service Points	
	Reference Center/Consultations
	Live Chat Reference Help
	Citation Help
	Subject Tutoring
	Writing Center
	Technology Services
Contact Information	
	Librarian Liaison
	Library Hours
	Computer Lab Hours and Locations

Conclusion

If librarians are integrated into the course’s LMS and understand what the students really need, they can tailor teaching and learning services to the students. Face to face library workshops have a time and place for teaching information literacy and introducing library resources to the campus populations, but they can be limiting in time and location. LMS integration can supplement “one shot” sessions or they can be offered as an alternative way for the librarians to get in front of students. Burgoyne and Chuppa-Cornell (2015) also conclude that integrating the librarian into the LMS “[offers] the opportunity for going beyond “one-shot” experiences

because more time is available to develop scaffolded projects and guided application to achieve greater depth of learning” (p. 419). LMS integration can be flexible and far-reaching offering library help in a student’s time of need and should be considered as a first step of faculty collaboration. By integrating library resources into a course’s LMS, librarians are getting a virtual foot in the door of the classroom. Librarians may not have 50 minutes of undivided attention as they would with a face-to-face workshop, but LMS integration is a starting point for developing a course-related relationship with faculty and unveiling a range of concepts they could teach if given class time. Although the combination of in-person workshops and LMS module integration is ideal, either option affords valuable outreach and instruction opportunities.

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