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Collaborating with Library Course Pages and Facebook: Exploring New Opportunities

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Abstract

Technologies like library course pages and Facebook offer new opportunities for librarians and faculty to collaborate, integrate library content and services into student work spaces, and support and expand student learning. During spring semester 2011, a library course page was developed for a graduate-level education class and sent to the instructor for review. That led to comment and expansion of content on the course page. After this interaction, the librarian joined the course Facebook group to explore this venue as an embedded librarian. This article includes the librarian's and instructor's perspectives about this work. Collaborative use of social networking tools offers promise for a deeper and a wider range of learning opportunities by potentially enlarging the range of participants in the learning process and by moving class conversations beyond the limits of traditional course management systems.

Keywords: course integration; social networking; collaboration; Facebook; embedded librarianship

Introduction and Librarian Perspective: Laurel Haycock

Like other librarians at the University of Minnesota, I began to work with our new system for generating library course pages when it was implemented prior to fall semester 2010. These pages are aimed at integration of library content into course materials and thus the student's academic workflow. Our course page system was developed to respond to the challenge of integrating default and customized content into more than 5000 courses.¹ The library course pages also gave us new opportunities as librarians to collaborate with faculty to identify content directly related to their specific, current instructional work and to post that tailored content to the course pages. The project described here was a collaboration between a librarian and an instructor to integrate library content and services into a specific course using innovative technologies with the overall aim of supporting student learning.

The tactic of integrating library resources and services into students' course workflow using technology has been valued by academic librar-

ies. Popular methods include incorporating library content into course management systems and offering library course and subject guides.² The specific strategy at the University of Minnesota Libraries developed out of our previous system for course pages, results from interviews and surveys of faculty and students, data codes called *affinity strings* assigned by the University based on an individual's area of work and study, and the recommendations of a course integration subgroup.³ The survey results suggested that faculty preferred a system offering both customized, course-specific content from the library as well as general resources. Affinity string data offered a vehicle for customizing the content by general subject or department. More extended, customized, subject-specific content can be added by liaison librarians in collaboration with course faculty. The library course pages are offered as stand-alone resources linked on the library web pages as well as being available for use in course management systems.

This collaboration might be thought of as an example of virtual embedded librarianship, a way of being on-site but not in-person using technologies including social networking. The con-



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cept of *embedded* librarianship has been the focus of a number of recent articles, presentations, and discussions and is a likely component of the future of academic libraries.⁴ As has been suggested, key components of this model involve moving out of traditional roles and locations and working directly and collaboratively with faculty as part of their teams in research and teaching on a project or programmatic basis.⁵ Others have employed technology to do this type of work from a distance, for example, with online library instruction.⁶ One successful in-person embedded librarian project in a College of Education was implemented at California State University and developed out of the library goals of building closer relationships with faculty to support student success.⁷

As a librarian serving several departments in the College of Education and Human Development, I started creating library course pages after reviewing the fall semester 2010 class schedule. As a general approach I added content that appeared relevant for a specific course including links to library tutorials, e-books, journals, and services. I also included links to resources external to the library and university. Some content was appropriate for a number of course pages instead of one course, so I made templates to efficiently reuse content for different course pages. For example, I used a template of resources about citation managers on a number of course pages. After initial content was added to a page I contacted faculty members by email to invite review and collaboration on further page development. In general, faculty responded with enthusiasm about their course pages and also with questions about other library services that might support the course. Some also shared their syllabi, which offered me further opportunities to refine the course page content.

In one case the instructor's comments suggested broader pathways for collaboration and additional development of instructional content for the page. This course was *College Students Today*, a graduate-level course offered jointly through the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development and the Department of Educational Psychology, both housed in the College of Education and Human Development at

the University of Minnesota. The instructor's preference was to not ask students to purchase textbooks or course packets and instead to link to content via the library and other sources. In response to this preference, I added specific e-resources identified from his syllabus including links to e-books and a journal. Some collection development was necessary for linking to e-book copies instead of print copies. The page offers customized content through a *Resources for Your Course* tab, a general resources tab, and the option of course reserves.⁸ Links to other library services are also on the page (Figure 1).

Additionally, the instructor requested specific instructional content related to the process of identifying seminal articles and the number of times articles were cited. From the syllabus I identified the need for information about creating and presenting poster sessions. I added additional appropriate resources to the course page for both areas of content. Listening and responding to these requests contributed to relationship building over time.

As another component to the course, the instructor decided to create an open Facebook group, *College Students Today*, as a venue for group feedback, discussion, and sharing of knowledge among the participants. I decided to take a risk and join the Facebook group to offer comments and suggestions from the library as an off-site embedded librarian. Over the course of the semester I added posts about using citation managers, finding articles about student success, and accessing e-books. Figure 2 illustrates a librarian post about citation managers.

When the semester was over and the Facebook group was scheduled to end, a participant suggested that the group was helpful as a current awareness and discussion tool and wondered if it could be continued. With some consideration of focus, purpose, and support for the project, the instructor renamed the group to *Today's Colleges and Universities*, changed it from open to closed, and began posting content during summer 2011. The current aim of the new group is to "post relevant resources to assist graduate students, staff, faculty, and administrators to enhance undergraduate student learning, access,



The screenshot shows a web page titled "LIBRARY COURSE PAGE" for "EDPA 5704" at the University of Minnesota Libraries. The page is organized into several sections:

- Header:** "LIBRARY COURSE PAGE" and "UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA LIBRARIES".
- Course Selection:** A dropdown menu set to "EDPA" and "5704" with a "Go" button.
- Navigation:** Tabs for "Resources for Your Course", "General EDPA Resources", and "Course Reserves".
- Main Content:**
 - Title: "EDPA 5704 : College Students Today"
 - Updated: "Last updated January 20, 2011"
 - Maintained by: "Laurel Haycock hayco001@tc.umn.edu"
 - On this page:**
 - [Readings of interest:](#)
 - [Get Started: Planning:](#)
 - [Find seminal or core sources:](#)
 - [Need to search for articles?](#)
 - [Want tips on poster presentations?](#)
 - [Course links:](#)
 - Readings of interest:**
 - [Demonstrating Student Success: A Practical Guide to Outcomes-Based Assessment of Learning and Development. Bresciani, Marilee J. \(2009\); Stylus Publishing.](#)
 - [Journal of College Student Development, Volume 50, Number 6, November/December 2009](#)
 - [Making their own way : narratives for transforming higher](#)
- Left Sidebar:**
 - "Chat with a Librarian" form with fields for question and email.
 - "Library Links" including "About Library Course Pages" and "University Libraries".
- Right Sidebar:**
 - "Need some help?" with contact info for Laurel Haycock.
 - "Need help organizing your research citations?" with information about RefWorks and workshops.

Figure 1: Library Course Page for College Students Today

and success.”⁹ This refocused Facebook group continues to develop its sources of support and scope. The membership has begun to expand to include other faculty, staff, administrators, and students on campus and beyond. As a librarian I view this refocused group as a new opportunity to offer current awareness and promote our library resources and services to a broader group of users.

Faculty Perspective: Andy Howe

The primary purpose of the Facebook group for the graduate course was to offer supplemental material for the course that would assist deeper learning. A secondary purpose was to provide tutorials that taught students how to access additional supplemental resources on their own. In my experience, these resources need to be presented at the most relevant time for students to take advantage of them, meaning the presentation of the materials and tutorials needs to be aligned with the course schedule. To accomplish

these objectives, collaboration with the librarian was essential. In this case, the librarian needed to understand not only the course schedule but a basic knowledge of each topic to provide relevant information. I needed to understand basic library services and resources to speak to students about these services and the purpose of the Facebook group. Surprisingly, it did not take us much time to gain this common sense of understanding.

The concept of *embedded librarian* through collaboration came to life as the course progressed. As I posted timely resources (e.g., articles, reports, media, etc.) that were directly connected to recent topics of the course, the librarian would often follow with library tutorials and additional support materials for students to go deeper into the topic. I too would follow her lead when she posted material by bringing the resources posted on Facebook into the on-site course discussions. The collaboration between



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Figure 2: Example Librarian Post on Facebook

the *embedded librarian* and me, the *tech reluctant but willing instructor* helped shape the Facebook group to exceed its objectives.

How do we know we succeeded? Throughout the semester I would ask students if they were finding the material helpful and/or using the Facebook group. Each time I asked the students, the majority found the material useful and were using the material presented. As the semester progressed, more and more students integrated the supplemental material into their work, demonstrating a deeper understand of the course topics. At the end of the semester, I asked if I should continue using the Facebook group if I taught the course again, and all students supported the idea. Many students thought other instructors should use Facebook in a similar way. As has been mentioned, the Facebook group continues to exist and is growing in its membership. All but two students in the course remain in the Facebook group even though the course ended several months ago. Because of these and other indicators of success, I plan to

use Facebook again no matter which course I teach.

Collaboration among librarians, faculty, and students through social networking technologies hold great potential. For example, inviting other faculty within and outside the college or university into the Facebook group can provide even deeper learning for students while giving them access to prominent researchers on relevant topics. Because traditional courseware products that are often used in higher education typically do not support outside members inside the course, Facebook is a good alternative. Faculty who teach sections of the same course can share resources using a separate or the same Facebook group. Given the ease of setting up a Facebook group, faculty and librarians can use material from archived groups for new courses. Collaboration with an embedded librarian holds great potential for innovation that enhances learning and development of students as well as librarians and faculty. In this initial project, we just skimmed the surface of this potential through our collaborative effort.



Conclusion

Academic librarians recognize the need for collaboration with faculty to best support courses and place library resources directly in students' work spaces. Library course pages and social networking tools are technology-based means for work as an embedded librarian. Concerns that if one course has a Facebook page they will all need them, or that the project is not scalable, could become barriers for exploring innovative methods of offering library services. Yet, time, thought, and a willingness to try new ways of offering library services are needed as we develop new approaches and environments for academic librarianship. Not all classes will have Facebook pages or tailored library course page content, however our work with faculty can be enhanced by a flexible strategy of exploring and responding to new types of opportunities. Facebook and other social networking tools offer platforms to reach our many users not in the traditional flow of library resources as well as those who are. Discussion of the evaluation of the effectiveness of social networking as part of library services is needed. In this case, the instructor's conversations with the students and his observation of their work suggested success. Having clearly defined project goals may help us further understand how to evaluate the impact of this type of work.¹⁰

New roles and opportunities for librarians are emerging as we are challenged and encouraged to move out of the traditional library environment and into new ways of working. Our collaborations with faculty can lead us in new directions. Social networking systems like Facebook offer one way to humanize the library, communicate a friendlier image, and meet our users in their work spaces.¹¹ Integrating library resources and services into course workflow is another strategy. In the project described here, an interesting opportunity started with work on a library course page. That evolved into another opportunity to work on Facebook with the class, and then to the current awareness and discussion format of the Facebook group that serves a broader audience on campus.

Endnotes

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