

The Library in the LMS: More than Tools!

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Abstract

With SSU's freshman population increasing rapidly and only ~2 FTE teaching librarians in our small library, we can no longer meet every faculty request for a class visit and need to supplement our in-person program with online instruction. Without the option to develop a credit-bearing information literacy course, we looked for new ways to provide instructional content through the learning management system (LMS). In this presentation, we will share how we used Moodle to create portable "modules" of instruction. These short teaching supplements can be used stand-alone, or adapted to the content of any instructor's course. This venture is not without risks! The SSU Library is cultivating a role as a leader in academic technology on a campus where many have yet to realize the benefits of a hybrid program. We are not just using the LMS to embed library tools--we are modeling new pedagogy for our campus.

Introduction

While many libraries use the LMS to embed tools such as search widgets or links to databases, we created the Moodle Information Literacy Project to provide "modules" or lessons adapted from a traditional in-person instruction session. With the growing freshman class (over 1800 in Fall 2013), we cannot visit every section of freshman GE courses. Our faculty expectation and desire for information literacy instruction at SSU is still strong and not something we want to discourage, so we're developing alternate ways to meet their requests. We converted our lessons to a portable module using Moodle's "book" format. It can be zipped up, downloaded and imported into any Moodle course. Faculty see how the book will look by enrolling in our "course," viewing the content and then downloading individual modules. Anyone is free to modify a lesson as needed to make it relevant for their course. We developed three modules: media literacy, evaluating information, and avoiding plagiarism. The design requirements included a range of criteria, from discipline flexibility to varying user technical expertise. Modules must be ready-to-go for those who don't want extra work, and also adaptable for those who want more control.

Using Moodle this way reduces the number of individual courses we visit *and* reduces redundancy for students, as we promote the online content to specific GE courses and decide what content is covered in which classes. This transforms our IL program into a hybrid program and gives us a seat at the table during campuswide discussions about academic technology, where many are uncertain of its teaching benefits or just unsure how to proceed. This is an opportunity for us to be campus leaders, and despite the inherent risks, we're proud the Library has hosted professional development events for faculty to learn new ways to teach in the LMS.

Description

Our interactive presentation was built on audience knowledge and participation. We alternated between demonstration of our own content and group discussions. First, we asked all members of the audience to sit in groups according to their campus LMS (including a section for those who are exploring new software or don't have an LMS). We wanted people to have more relevant discussions during the session.

At the start of our presentation, we provided an introduction to the challenges we face at SSU with our instruction program given the student body size and our small library faculty (described in the Introduction above). We discussed the history of Moodle implementation and use by our faculty across campus. We gave a brief overview of our goals in creating the Moodle Information Literacy Project, and then we asked participants to reflect on their own instruction goals and what lessons they might be interested in moving online. We provided a group brainstorming worksheet—paper copies were distributed and an online version was available for those with devices at the ready.

After the initial group brainstorming was complete, a few audience members shared what they had discussed. Then we moved back into demonstration mode and showed the audience our Moodle course page. This included an overview of the page layout, the outline of basic information about each of our three modules, and a very detailed, step-by-step presentation of one of our modules (“Finding Your Voice & Avoiding Plagiarism”). We discussed the components of each module, which include activities for students of all learning styles. Each module contains opportunities for students to read, watch, write and discuss. These components comprise our instructional design method and we use them as a mantra (“read | watch | write | discuss”) as we design each lesson plan. The individual pieces are packaged into one “book” module, so files such as Word/PDF, video, etc., and other activities do not have to be linked or downloaded separately. Though they can be downloaded separately, it makes it easier to get everything at once using the book format and makes the presentation of information clearer. This way the faculty on our campus can download the lesson as a complete package.

We then broke out into groups again for another discussion. We asked audience members to think about the ways that lesson plans can include each of these components and how they can be packaged together in other LMS software besides Moodle. Each group had a lively discussion within their own LMS group. Then several audience members shared their thoughts and we had a discussion as a whole about the ways LMS's are used in various campuses and how libraries are teaching online.

All of our worksheets, our PowerPoint file and additional resources were made available in an online shared drive: <http://bit.ly/CARLLMS>

Key Points

The main takeaways we hope people took from the session can be divided into two categories: key points we hope they got from our presentation (demonstration of our site and our experiences at SSU), and key points we hope they got from their own group discussions.

Takeaways from our presentation and demonstration

From our presentation, we hope they understood the motivation behind our decision to teach part of our content online. Since Sonoma State University does not have a credit-bearing information literacy course, and the teaching librarians cannot possibly meet with all of the

classes that want an in-person session, we decided to make online, portable versions of our in-person sessions. Participants got hands-on time to envision which of their in-person lessons would work well in this way.

We also hope that participants learned a little bit about our instructional design process. We attempted to show how they could make parts of a lesson more digestible online (using our “read | watch | write | discuss” design). We employ this design every time we create a lesson for our Moodle Information Literacy Project. To date, we have anecdotal evidence that faculty appreciate this design and format, and we are currently exploring other ways to gather data on this project. Faculty who have enrolled in our course to download the content have been contacted for feedback. We’re also currently developing a survey for *all faculty* at Sonoma State University to ask them how they use online tools and resources in the overall online environment (if they teach online), and specifically how they would prefer to receive online instructional content from the Library.

This exchange between the Library and other faculty is an ongoing process. We want to create relevant content that is easy to use, but we are also interested in cultivating a leading role in the use and design of classes in our learning management system. The data gathering gives us another opportunity to strengthen these associations, makes faculty outside of the Library share about their own experiences with the LMS, and has led to consultative relationships that come into play as they develop their content. This gives the Library opportunities to be involved in assignment design, resource advocacy, and professional development.

We hope that participants learned how they might be advocates and leaders on their own campus for issues regarding instructional design and using the LMS.

Takeaways from participants’ group discussions

In their learning management system groups, participants engaged in lively discussions about what content from their own teaching they would like to translate into a portable, online module. There was no end to the items they thought could be shared online instead of in person. Some of the ideas shared with the group included resource demonstrations and concept exploration. Suggestions for how to teach these items online included doing demonstrations, and including external web content (specifically TED Talks). At this point in the session, one participant noted that even if she developed this great online lesson, there remains the challenging question of how would she get faculty to use it? We believe these reflections and shared commentary were beneficial to the group as a whole.

In response we spent more time discussing our growing involvement in the learning management system. We shared tactics for getting faculty on board, such as our Moodle Peer Demonstration Day, which is a professional development event where faculty show how they use a particular function in the learning management system. This peer style of demonstration is very popular, and since the presenters come from several specific schools in the university, they draw crowds from every corner of the institution.

We also emphasized how these lessons had to be incredibly easy to use. We demonstrated how faculty could view the content as students would, then easily drag and drop it into their own course. By creating a “package” of content, faculty do not have to fix or adapt the lessons they obtain from our course. The package simply plants itself into their course and unpacks itself. The opportunity to adapt the content is optional. This is why we spent the second part of the session asking people to consider the various resources and tools within their learning

management system. We wanted them to be able to take the lesson they picked at the beginning and really consider how it would fit into the tools they can access. Picking the right tool or resource within the management system to share and deliver the content is key to successfully gaining new faculty users.

We found that participants shared a lot of details within the group discussions about tools they used for the different LMS's at their own campuses. Admittedly, participants may have left with more questions than answers, but all of the breakout discussions were lively, and it was clear that these discussions would continue in their various libraries. We believe they walked away with ideas and possible plans for their own online instructional content. The Google folder remains open for those that want to do the exercises in their own institutions, review the answers the groups gave, and share the tools they are deciding to use for delivering their "portable" content. The resources can be found at <http://bit.ly/CARLLMS>.