Web-Based Library Instruction for Government Documents

Stephen Allan Patrick, East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, TN

Depository librarians are charged with making their collections more accessible to different audiences in a variety of ways. One of the avenues available to academic librarians is through library instruction, either basic or specialized. With the advent of the Internet and other electronic means, Web-based library instruction is becoming more prevalent and can be used in multiple settings. While depository librarians tend to instruct users in a one-on-one setting, being able to reach larger groups or entire classes at a time is highly desirable.

For those of us who have participated in library instruction at our respective institutions, there are a variety of challenges which prevail and serve as deterrents to overall learning. These basic challenges include the time of day, food or caffeine deprivation, sleep deprivation, the lure of different forms of entertainment, or the lack of teaching faculty present during the instruction session to name a few.

With the advent of electronic resources, various student or user needs have been determined to be most important. Among these basic needs are the ability to define sound search strategies, how to select and use the multitude of search engines available, how to evaluate electronic sources for appropriateness and quality information, and how to cite the electronic sources selected.

Many librarians have come to realize that there are definite student or user benefits to Web-based library instruction. Web-based instruction can accommodate different learning styles and abilities of students and allow for unlimited drill and practice of important materials or resources. This form of instruction also allows greater flexibility for students who are self-directed or motivated, as well as provides a variety of resources to distance learners or users beside those who found your library's Web site serendipitously.

There are also a variety of librarian or faculty benefits to Web-based instruction. One of these benefits includes better facilitation of resource management. We all understand the importance of current information and most resources can be updated more frequently electronically. Instructors have easier access to information during Web-instruction sessions and they don't have to lug around book trucks loaded with potential resources. Cost-saving

factors are in place in many institutions and Web-based instruction can help reduce internal/external printing and copying handouts which become outdated the moment they are done.

Another benefit of Web-based instruction is that it can allow instructors to cover additional or more appropriate materials in less time, as well as allow for flexibility during an instruction session to go off on tangents and explore other possibilities. However, one of the greatest benefits to instruction, if pursued or marketed appropriately, is that it can increase collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty in providing relevant bibliographic and electronic resources for students.

Of course, there can be a downside to this type of activity as well, and that includes increased expectations of students, users or faculty alike. Instruction Web pages can also increase the workload of already overburdened librarians and staff, as well as create a false sense of security when providing well-meaning and additional support for faculty.

There are a variety of primary objectives which can be derived from Web-based instruction. Web pages can serve as an effective instruction tool. Personal notes can be tracked for future sessions, many of which may become Web pages in their own right. Resources, such as syllabi, class assignments and selected readings, provided by teaching faculty can enhance the library instruction Web page or, if provided by faculty, can serve as links to library Web pages.

The key rule to good Web page design used for library instruction is to keep it simple. A lot of graphics are not necessary. It's the information that's most important. However, if you use a lot of graphics, remember to include a text version for those who don't have access to high-powered PC's. Also use bold font if your library uses a projector for presentations. One should also not use anything smaller than font size=3 if projecting images on a screen. This should allow a greater number of students to see the information.

When preparing Web pages for library instruction try to include several basic features. Standard links should be made to a listing of search engines, a variety of electronic evaluation tools **[http://www.etsu.edu/library/eval-www.htm]** and examples on citing Web resources **[http://www.etsu.edu/library/citing.htm]**. Your pages should also include a variety of both print and electronic bibliographic resources owned or accessed by your library.

Library instruction Web pages should link a variety of Web resources, such as other depository library home pages in your state or region, and GPO gateways. Of course, no Web page should be without obligatory links to GPO Access **[http://www.access/gpo.gov/su_docs/]**, the Federal Web Locator **[www.law.vill.edu/Fed-Agency/fedwebloc.html]**, GovBot **[www.business.gov/]**, **[Search_Online.html]**, and the GODORT handout exchange **[www.lib.umich.edu/libhome/Documents.center/godort/bibl.htm]** to name a few. Remember to include the URL alongside the name of the Web site for those who need to print a hardcopy of your Web page for future reference.

Value-added information will enhance your library instruction Web site in the eyes of your users, besides giving you extra help or reminders to special materials found in your collection. Suggested value-added resources may include a list of topics from useful ready reference materials, outlines of articles from major related reference tools, specialized or customized bibliographies on hot topics, case and legislative histories.

In summary, Web-based library instruction when well-prepared: allows for:

- better organization of resources on a variety of levels

- adds ease of use from versatility of design;

- enhances the overall learning experience for students and instructors;

- generates constructive interaction between teaching faculty and librarians;

- facilitates resources management; and

- increases librarian/faculty collaboration or interaction.

This presentation focused on the way the East Tennessee State University Libraries has approached the concept of library instruction in an electronic environment and how a similar approach can be used in providing both minimal and value-added access to depository items and collections. The ETSU Libraries home page **[http://www.etsu.edu/library/etsulibs.htm]** is designed and conceived with access and classroom instruction as a primary objective. Their Web pages are continually being evaluated for user-friendliness and redesigned for greater flexibility in classroom utilization.