

Contributed Papers at MAC

Session 1:

Location: Caribe E - Eleuthera

You Built It. Did They Come? - Web Site Usability Issues and the War with Web Presentation

Everyone is telling you that you need a web presence. You've built a web site. Is it meeting your patrons' needs? How can you find out? Can your visually- and auditorially-challenged patrons interact with your web site? Will your web site work with handheld computing devices? Does it do all of these functions and still look interesting. Is it engaging? These were just some of the questions we asked ourselves in the fall of 2000 when VCU Libraries staff began a major overhaul and redesign of the Libraries' web site. This paper will discuss how presentation and usability are often at odds with one another as well as provide a general overview of usability issues and techniques to consider when reviewing your web site with new eyes.

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Distance Education or Classroom Instruction - Does it Make a Difference to the Instructor or the Student?

Distance education has become a viable alternative to providing educational opportunities for students and working professionals. Flexibility in scheduling, elimination of travel expenses and the widespread use of the Internet are some of the key advantages to Web-based education. Distance educators need to modify the content, exercises, and teaching styles to accommodate learners who are not physically present. Distance learners must also make accommodations in their learning styles and behaviors in order to absorb the material presented. These issues were addressed during the development of a Web-based distance education course for the Medical Library Association, titled Evidence-based Medicine and the Medical Librarian. As we developed the course, questions were raised as to how this really was different from a traditional classroom experience. In order to quantify the differences, 2 of the developers of the Web-based course presented the same material as a traditional classroom course at a professional association meeting. This paper will analyze the differences between these two delivery mechanisms, distance and classroom, for the same course by focusing on course preparation, presentation of the information, student evaluation and long-term retention and utilization of the information.

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Using Electronic Tools/Resources to Train Student Workers

This paper seeks to encourage library circulation administrators to integrate electronic tools/resources into their training programs to create a better student work force. Stacks management plays a crucial role in library services. Ensuring access to needed information is essential for user satisfaction. But, training student workers to manage the stacks well, including shelving correctly, can be very challenging. Most student workers are young and inexperienced at using libraries. Stacks management may seem tedious to them. Appropriately incorporating electronic technology in training will stimulate their learning.

The paper shares information about a training program that has been developed and successfully used at the Health Sciences Library of West Virginia University for the past three years. The program includes using presentation software to guide student employees in learning about the library and their job duties. Stacks management skills are emphasized. The knowledge is reinforced through a grand tour of the library, the use of LC Easy, and hand-on training activities. LC Easy is training software that allows individual users to learn shelving by the Library of Congress system at their own pace.

The program illustrates how to systematically integrate electronic resources into student training. Improper integration could confuse and intimidate learners. A carefully designed program featuring electronic tools can make learning more interesting as well as effective. This training program will continue to be developed. Web-based interactive training will be added in the next stage of development.

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SESSION 2:

Location: Caribe D - Dominica

Digital Document Delivery in West Virginia: Supporting Health Care Education Through Technology

The Health Sciences Library at West Virginia University has transformed several traditional services through digital technologies - reaching out to not only our local campuses but also to the various parts of our rural state. Digital document delivery via the Web provides access to current health care information to faculty, staff, and students who find it more convenient to receive requested articles electronically without coming to the library; the Rural Health Education Rotation students in the Schools of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy completing their field assignments at numerous sites throughout the state; clinical/field faculty and hospitals throughout West Virginia; and health care practitioners in various areas of the state. While our initial efforts have included home grown systems utilizing basic software, procedures, methodologies, we continue to explore what is being used elsewhere as well as staying abreast of new open-source products in addition to commercial software developments, e.g. Prospero, Relais Express, Ariel enhancements, etc. We continue to test new products designed for digital document delivery management and expect to see continued improvement and refinement in how we provide electronic document delivery. The vast majority of articles that the Health Sciences Library borrows or lends are sent directly to the user's desktop. The issues involved in getting full-text documents to the user's desktop, the collaborative efforts involved, the software/hardware requirements, and the user education necessary for successfully utilizing digital information will be explored. Electronic information delivery is no longer considered cutting edge but a service deemed essential by library users.

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Faculty and Student Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Online Course Modules: Are Modules a Hindrance or Help?

Purpose: Evaluate the perceptions of one class instructor and first year pharmacy students towards online modules used by the Health Sciences Library for instruction.

Methodology: Online survey of pharmacy students, interviews with instructor and library staff.

Abstract: The Education Services department at the Health Sciences Library at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill currently develops online course modules in collaboration with the School of Pharmacy. These modules are serving as a pilot for online instructional technology use by the Library. The modules, assigned to first year pharmacy students, ask a variety of questions designed to provide information seeking and skills development using MEDLINE, International Pharmaceutical Abstracts, INFOTRAC, the library's online catalog, and various Web sites. Following a 50-minute demonstration lecture early in the fall semester by library staff, the students are assigned modules 3 separate times throughout the school year to complete for credit.

Findings: 81 out of 118 students completed the online survey. Of these students, 86% preferred using the online modules as opposed to a comparable written assignment. Reasons cited for preferring the online modules included convenience, shorter completion time for assignment, ease of use, and the option of completing the modules on their own time from anywhere that has Internet access. Students who preferred written assignments (14%) as opposed to the online modules cited access problems and uncomfotability using computers as some reasons influencing their choice.

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With an Eye on the Horizon -- VCU Libraries Pilot Chat Reference Service - LiveHelp

VCU Libraries staff began a LiveHelp pilot project to offer online chat reference services to library patrons using software from HumanClick.com. Ensuring the success of LiveHelp included choosing software, hours of service provision, and the level of staff to operate the service. Evaluation questions considered included: What are the costs in time and personnel? What type of questions were asked and by whom? Are the operators technologically adept handling communicating without typical non-verbal behaviors? This paper will discuss why one might want to implement a chat reference service, the variety of issues to consider when planning a chat reference service and report on the success of the VCU Libraries' chat reference pilot.

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