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Can you hear me now? Creating a Library Class in an LMS to Reach Out to Students

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Can you hear me now? Creating a Library Class in an LMS to Reach Out to Students



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ABSTRACT

In the Fall of 2016, SWBTS (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) Libraries designed a Library Blackboard course into which all students would be enrolled. The course was not a class for which students were physically present and received a grade. This class served as an online resource for assisting students in building research skills as well as a place that students could discover library services. This essay covers the design and layout of this course as well as how it has impacted library services.

Introduction

SWBTS Libraries serve a seminary which offers master's and doctoral degrees along with Scarborough College, which offers bachelor's degrees. The institution is comprised of students from all over the world. The seminary offers both online and distance education programs in addition to traditional residential programs. The SWBTS Libraries utilize a variety of methods to inform students of online resources, library services, and special events.

Over the past few years SWBTS librarians have created LibGuides designed to help students with the research process. These LibGuides are utilized for a variety of purposes. In addition, several professional staff have created YouTube videos about using library resources and databases. Links to these guides and videos have been posted on the library webpage.



Figure 1: Homepage of SWBTS Libraries' LibGuides

SWBTS Librarians also participate in the Personal Librarian program in which students receive weekly email messages from designated librarians. These emails are sent out to inform students regarding the various services SWBTS libraries provide, promote library events and offer help for library research. This has been beneficial for promoting the library and engaging one-on-one with students. The emails have also helped students identify and develop relationships with library staff.

Library Course Design and Implementation

Even though the LibGuides and videos have served as convenient methods to post information about the librarians' services, some students did not know how to get to our webpage in order to view the LibGuides and videos. The Personal Librarian messages have allowed the librarians to provide information about resources and establish communication with students. However, as discovered through the results of end-of-semester surveys, students do not check campus email accounts regularly. So, we realized that even though we had been reaching people through the past couple of years, we were missing a significant majority of our students.

Many students utilize Blackboard: the Learning Management System at SWBTS. In the Fall of 2015, the office of Information Technology created a folder for each class in Blackboard, providing access to library resources, such as EBSCO's Discovery Service, library databases, chat and texting services, and LibGuides.



Figure 2: Course on Blackboard with shells on the left. These shells are in every course.

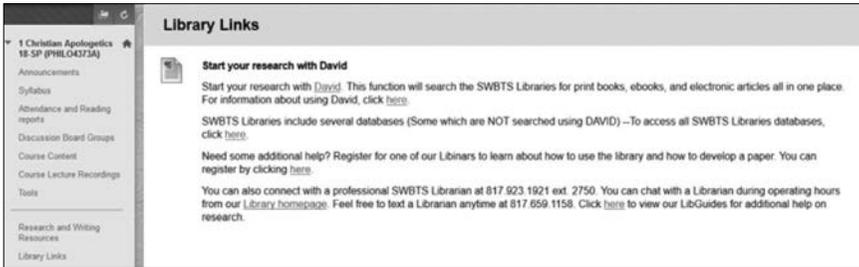


Figure 3: Information on SWBTS Libraries

Also, in Fall 2015, SWBTS Libraries started offering a Research Coach program for interested professors. The professors' classes were paired with a professional librarian. The Research Coaches are embedded librarians within specific courses. They send a couple of emails to classes that they are assigned in order to inform students of resources. In these emails, Research Coaches also make themselves available for one on one research consultations. Sometimes the professor in the class will invite the Research Coach to his or her class to give an instruction session.

In the Fall of 2016, the Office of Academic Technology approached the library with an idea to further expand its presence in Blackboard by creating a course exclusively for SWBTS Libraries. This would not be a course for which students would receive a grade. Rather, it would be a course serving as a resource for students.

SWBTS libraries offer their services through a "class" in Blackboard, entitled "Library Research, Services, and Resources." All of the SWBTS community are enrolled into the course indefinitely. The class appears on their homepage in a box called "My Organizations" with other courses that the school has created such as the writing center and technology classes. The homepage for the course includes the Library's YouTube welcome video. The staff also embedded a Springshare LibAnswers chat box into the Blackboard homepage. Different library services are put into different shells within the class, each of those shells contain LibGuide links and embedded YouTube videos. Memes and humorous pictures of librarians have been posted within the class to decrease stress and library anxiety.

A specific folder was created within the Library class that is labeled “Online/ Distance Students.” Even though most of the information in this folder duplicates information about library-services, past library surveys indicated that online and distance education students desired the resources which they could utilize to be clearly labeled. On this page the library also makes distant education students aware of the ACL Reciprocal Exchange, hoping that some will utilize it.

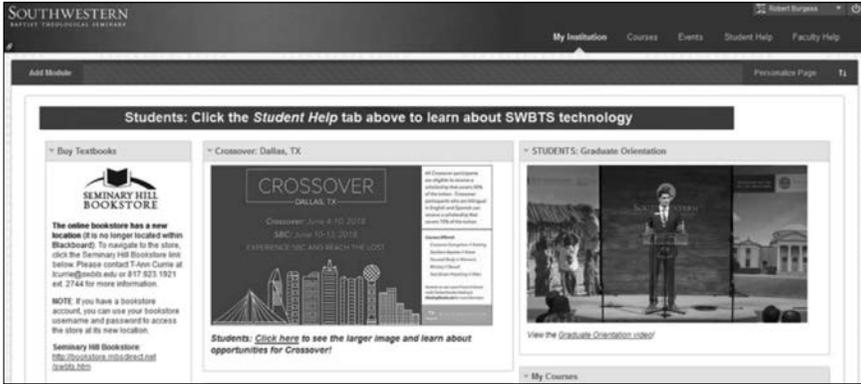


Figure 4: Top of Main Blackboard page

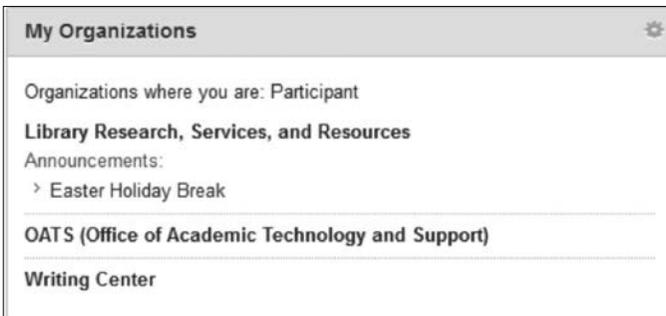


Figure 5: My Organizations box



Figure 6: Top of SWBTS Libraries Blackboard Homepage



Figure 7: Bottom of SWBTS Libraries Blackboard Homepage with Chatbox

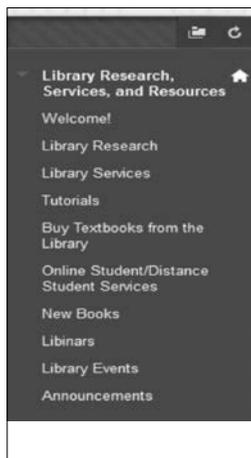


Figure 8: Library Shells

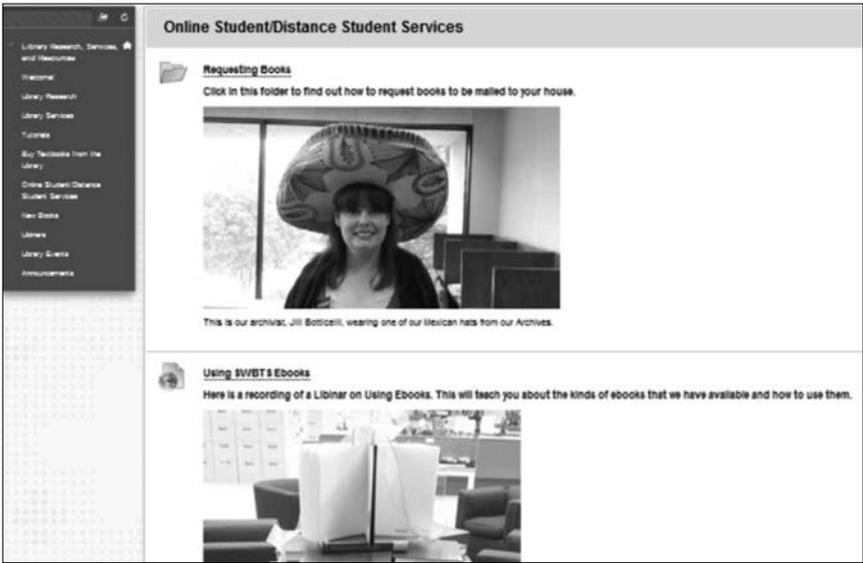


Figure 9: Top of Online/Distance Student Services page



Figure 10: Bottom of Online/Distance Services Page

The Blackboard course brought more attention to the SWBTS Libraries YouTube channel. The channel usage has risen since the videos were embedded as course content. During the 2015/2016 academic year, the channel had 2,553 views with a total 6,131 minutes watched. During the 2016/2017 academic year, the channel had 3,424 views with a total of 10,417 minutes watched.

SWBTS Libraries have also used Eventbrite for students to register for events such as Coffee Talks with special guests; library tours; and Libinars, short instructional seminars about library services. Library staff have been putting these links in emails which they send to students whom they serve as a Personal Librarian. These links have been on the library's webpage as well. Although, SWBTS Libraries have seen some success with this, it was decided that Blackboard, which allows the library to post announcements for library events, was a more economical tool. When the SWBTS Libraries post announcements, students are notified when they login to Blackboard. The announcement notification will stay active until students click on it. Utilizing Blackboard as a venue for announcing these events has increased the attendance of all events hosted by the SWBTS Libraries.

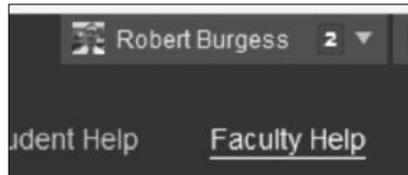


Figure 11: Notification alert in Blackboard

SWBTS Library staff have been collecting survey data from students since the spring of 2015. The purpose of the survey is to gather information about the students' perceptions of library services. Using the announcement feature in Blackboard to post library surveys has given it more exposure to students. Since SWBTS Libraries have used the notification feature, there has been a substantial increase in survey responses. The announcement feature appears to have given the library more exposure with the students and it is one of the most important components of the course.

On the Spring 2017 survey, a question sought to determine the usefulness of the Blackboard library course. Forty-eight percent of respondents indicated that the course was helpful. However, 31% said that they did not know about the library Blackboard class. Eighteen percent of the respondents stated that they did not need the course and 3% said they found the course unhelpful. Library staff will need to figure out how to increase awareness.

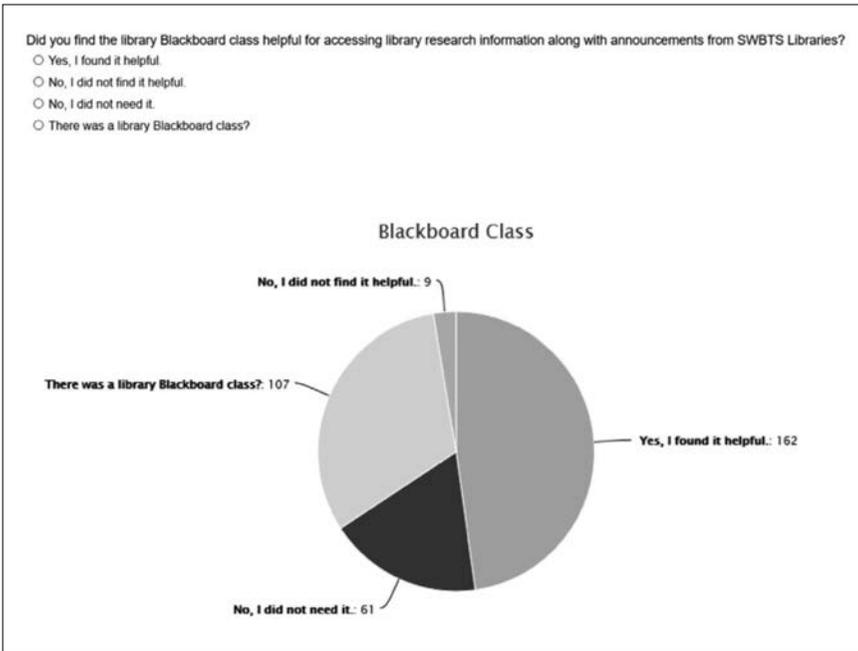


Figure 12: Results from the 2017 survey

The challenge at this point is deciding the future of the Blackboard class. Library staff must investigate how to make more students aware of the Blackboard class. In the summer of 2017, SWBTS librarians started developing information literacy modules through Springshare LibWizard. Library staff will seek to develop student research skills with these tutorials.

Library staff have found that having their own class in Blackboard has increased visibility to the student population. SWBTS Libraries design is unique compared to other schools who have embedded library services as part of the learning management software, serving alongside of personal and embedded librarians, and information literacy classes. However, through coordination with various administrative departments, this model could be implemented at other institutions that have Blackboard or a similar resource. †

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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