4-2017

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Best Practices for Online Tutorials in Academic Libraries

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Introduction
The Rodney A. Briggs Library has seen countless changes since it started serving students. The latest has been the technology revolution; most students incorporate technology and the internet in their researching and learning. While there is an instructional librarian on staff to teach students how to navigate the databases and services available through Briggs Library, there is a need for online tutorials to support and provide information to online and distance students. By creating effective online tutorials Briggs Library can make their information and services accessible to all students in an increasingly technological age.

The purpose of my research was to improve online tutorials based on effective teaching strategies and learning styles, specifically, Universal Design for Learning and multimedia learning (audio, visual, and text). My research was part of a semester-long internship to gain experience in an academic library. As an education major I am exploring the different venues where teaching happens. Using my background knowledge of pedagogy combined with what I learned, I can be an effective communicator in areas beyond the traditional classroom.

Abstract
In a world that is increasingly dependent on technology, libraries must find ways to harness this tool to stay relevant to the communities they serve. For example, Briggs Library offers onsite training as well as online tutorials to reach all types of users. The purpose of my literature review and research was to identify the best practices for online. This was achieved by locating academic sources that described how other university libraries created effective online tutorials. I came to the conclusion that effective online tutorials meet diverse student learning needs by using similar teaching strategies. Furthermore, the various universities made successful tutorials by catering to different learning styles present in their communities. My recommendation to Briggs Library for creating effective and relevant tutorials was to survey the students’ learning preferences and consider applying multimedia teaching strategies.

Methods

Literature Review
- Gained learning styles background information
- Obtained specific best practices from academic articles

Research Design
- Watched online tutorials from University of Minnesota--Twin Cities
- Referred to Information Literacy Standards
- My project goal was to find best practices for the librarians to make more effective online tutorials.

Findings
Review of research illustrated that various universities made successful tutorials by catering to different learning styles. Further, pedagogy commonly used in classrooms was also found in the library and their online tutorials.

1. Identified three main learning styles: visual, physical, and verbal
2. Webb and Hoover’s strategy of Universal Design for Learning confirmed that students have diverse learning styles (2015)
3. Various user tests found the effectiveness of multimedia over text-only instruction tools (Scales, 2014)

References

Conclusion
I synthesized the information from my literature review into a recommendation for an online tutorial for Briggs’s Library including: Multimedia Use; Visual and Audio Techniques; Dynamic Style; Length of Tutorial and Presentation of Content. I proposed the multimedia aspects of audio, visual, and text formats as a more effective way of providing the information. Since Briggs Library has provided static tutorials which are underutilized, it would best serve the students’ needs to have dynamic tutorials. In regards to content and length, a dynamic tutorial should be about two minutes in length and follow the inverted pyramid content structure (Kern, 2013).

In summary, I learned that libraries are institutions of learning and, similar to elementary school classrooms, need to know the population they want to serve. In order to effectively communicate information, teachers and librarians need to have clear expectations for their students and find the best teaching practices. In my education courses I learned in order to teach students you must first know students—their background, personal preferences, and prior knowledge. In the classroom I have created and implemented effective lessons. Through this internship I was able to see the same theory in practice in another medium, a library online tutorial.