

# Building a Campus Presence One Page at a Time: Web Strategies for the Small College Library

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Small college libraries do not have the large numbers of staff and professionals of universities to create and maintain a significant Web site which may include extensive library and Web information, online tutorials, and guides to print, database, and Web resources in a variety of disciplines. Yet those of us at small college or campus libraries wish to be seen as up to date on the campus, and we also wish to reach out to faculty and students and stretch our reference and instruction capabilities. This combination of needs and limitations can be frustrating, yet there are strategies for achieving a greater online presence and furthering the library's campus presence.

An opportunity the online environment offers is collaboration with faculty in combining class syllabi with library reference and resource information. Many faculty are placing their syllabi, including details of term paper assignments, on the Web. By the same token, many librarians provide class handouts of library and Web resources appropriate to particular assignments. On the Web, these two can be combined, and students can read about their assignment and have information available at the same place on how to start their research. An e-

mail connection to the reference librarian and a connection to the online catalog add to the value, and all of this is available anytime, anywhere, at the convenience of the student.

Large universities have the capabilities to create major projects involving faculty / librarian collaboration on the Web. For example, the TWIST project at the University of Iowa<sup>1</sup> is a "project to create a model training program for librarians and faculty on networked information resources." This site includes collaborative pages of many faculty and librarians, and it offers not only resource help for particular assignments but also tutorials in a variety of library and Web research skills.

Collaboration with faculty need not be limited to major projects of a university, however. Even a librarian at a small campus can create a collaborative page with one interested faculty member at a time. The library portion of the Web page may include links to the online catalog and/or helpful online databases (or referral to specific CD-ROM databases), guidelines for Web evaluation, a few significant reference sources and Web sites, information on making bibliographies, and an e-mail connection to the librarian for personal help.

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The Berks Campus of Penn State University, located in Reading, PA., has 1,750 full-time equivalent (FTE) students and 97 FTE faculty, and courses are primarily lower division. The library has three full time librarians, two full time staff, four part time staff, and several student assistants, including two during the summer sessions. Inspired by the University of Iowa's TWIST Project, as Reference Librarian I thought a collaborative Web page could be developed with one faculty member in political science whose students needed help with term paper research.

There are four political science courses offered each year at the Berks Campus, and there were several problems in these classes. The students were using the World Wide Web indiscriminately for their research. The students were also ignoring print resources and/or were not seeking help from a librarian. The professor could not devote a full class period to library instruction, and in any case the classes were large and unwieldy in the library. In an effort to guide students, I had created a general handout in the past, but this needed to be updated and did not include Web information.

From the professor's point of view, he did not have a Web page and had neither the time nor the desire to learn a Web editor. Yet he felt frustrated by subtle pressure on the campus to have a Web site for his courses. In this environment, it seemed that both the professor and I could benefit from a Web collaboration, and when I approached him in January of 1998 with this proposal, he readily agreed. This was to be a summer project in preparation for classes the following fall.

Although I knew both basic HTML and how to use a Web editor, I also recruited help from a summer student assistant who knew a Web editor and had some experience creating Web pages. The student assistant, the political science professor and I met and planned the layout for the site, using content provided by the professor and me. The student could do the manual work, including finding and adding copyright-free graphics and backgrounds for the site. Making Web pages can be time consuming, partly because creative activity is seductive, but with this arrangement my time was only spent on content, layout, and troubleshooting, rather than on the manual labor.

The resulting Web site includes the professor's professional and course information, and a research paper help page, which contains links to:

- his guidelines for term papers;

- the university's plagiarism information for students;
- the university library's online catalog and database system;
- a help link to my e-mail;
- political science Web sites collected by the professor and by me, some of which have brief annotations;
- a short information sheet on evaluating Web pages;
- a section on citing print and Web sources in a bibliography using MLA, APA or Turabian formats; and
- for each of the four political science courses, a page listing appropriate reference books and databases, with annotations, including a link to the library system from each database name.

These last four items were written by me. The site can be viewed at <http://www.bk.psu.edu/faculty/newnham/RNHOME2.htm>.

During the semester, I spent fifteen minutes in each political science class showing the Web site, explaining its features for the students as they began work on their papers, and encouraging them to e-mail or come to me for assistance at any time.

In order to accommodate students who are not comfortable with computers or the Internet, or who have limited access to computers, the professor had handed out his syllabus and assignment information in class. However, at the end of the semester over half (57%) of the class members reported having accessed the course Web site. Of those that used the Web site, 80% found it helpful and informative for information about the course, and 86% found it helpful and informative for working on the term paper. Comments indicated that students appreciated having access from off campus at any time, having information on creating bibliographies, having a link to the online catalog, and having access to the professor's pages, even though those had been given to them in class. Even those students that chose not to use the Web were introduced to the reference librarian in class and were made aware of the availability of help for their research.

### **Strategies for Success**

The elements for success in a project such as this are: building relationships with faculty, being prepared to author Web pages, and planning the collaborative Web page.

### ***Building Relationships with Faculty***

- It is important to be building relationships with faculty from the time you begin work at a college library. If possible, volunteer for committees with faculty, eat where they eat, visit their offices, or otherwise spend time with them. Offer new faculty an orientation to the library and its services, including library instruction. Use any new library development as an excuse to invite faculty to come to the library, such as a presentation on new databases or CD-ROMs in their field.

- Be assertive with any faculty who assign term papers, and offer your help with library instruction, handouts, or any way you can help them and their students.

- When planning a Web collaboration, try to meet a faculty need as well as your own, which will be more likely to lead to agreement. For example, the political science professor needed a faculty Web page. As another example, a science professor for whom I have done library instruction had mentioned that his class Web page needed to be updated and reorganized, so I have offered to help him if I can also add library content, and he has agreed.

### ***Preparing to Author Web Pages***

Before approaching a faculty member, it is a good idea to prepare for the work involved in this project.

- Look for student or staff assistance. The librarian's time need not be spent on the mundane aspects of Web page creation except for design, planning, and troubleshooting. Some students, especially upperclassmen, have some experience in Web page creation. Ask professors of computer science to suggest students who might want a job with the library, or even ask current library student workers if they have Web page experience. Sometimes staff members in a library develop an interest in Web authoring, as well. Check with the Head Librarian for permission to use staff members for these projects, which could actually make their jobs more interesting.

- Even with help, the librarian needs to know how to create Web pages as well, in order to be able to make quick changes or corrections in the future, and also in order that the librarian, not the assistant, is the final designer. There are many good Web editors that produce pages in a What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get (WYSIWYG) manner. However, one should also know the basics of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), as even good Web editors do not always perform as ex-

pected. In those instances, the page must be brought into a simple word processing program such as Notepad or WordPad for manual correction to the source code.

- *Smart Computing* published a primer called "Build a Web Site" in two parts<sup>2</sup> which explains very basic HTML and recommends learning it before progressing to WYSIWYG authoring of Web pages. There are also a number of Web sources for learning HTML. An excellent place to start is the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, which has published the *NCSA Beginner's Guide to HTML*<sup>3</sup>. Another excellent resource is the *HyperText Markup Language Home Page* at the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)<sup>4</sup>.

Steps in Planning the Web Pages

- Get all the faculty member's information, such as syllabus and assignment handouts, in electronic format. These are probably on a disk already. If there is a problem such as MAC/IBM incompatibility, having the professor save documents in plain text (ASCII) format to send to you as an attachment to e-mail will work, or you can simply have him/her copy the documents into the body of e-mail messages to send to you. If the materials are only in paper format, a program called Omni Page Pro Version 8.0 allows scanning text into a word processing program. In this form, a student assistant can clean up the text to make it look like the original.

- Plan the library portions of the Web pages. Type into word processing the library information, such as annotated lists of helpful reference sources, descriptions of appropriate databases, a cheat sheet on creating a bibliography, and a brief Web evaluation page. Plan to use fonts, colors, and white space judiciously to make the pages appealing, and try to keep each page relatively brief, as students usually do not want to read a wall of text.

- Decide on the layout for the site as a whole, in conjunction with the professor and the assistant. The site should not be confusing to students, and consistent links at the bottom and/or top of each page will facilitate movement around the site.

- Decide on links, such as an e-mail connection to the librarian and/or the professor, links to the online catalog and databases, and appropriate Web links for the subject. In the case of database links, be sure not to bypass security systems, as Web users from outside your college or university will also be able to read these pages.

- Decide with the professor whether to edit his/her information. The professor may or may not wish to do this, and there may be only a few instances where it is

necessary. For example, it is best to be non-specific with dates on the syllabus, so that online changes need not be made every semester. It is simpler to list classes as week one, week two, etc.

- Be willing to create a basic faculty home page also, as this is part of the incentive for faculty. The professor's curriculum vita can be used, as well as a list of his/her publications. However, do not include any personal addresses or phone numbers, only the office address and phone.

### Conclusion

As a result of this project, the political science professor and I have an even more comfortable relationship than previously, and more political science students are aware of the availability of library assistance for their research. More information is available online than I would have had time to present in one library instruction session, and each semester a number of the students approach me in the days and weeks following the brief in-class presentation of the Web page. Students report the course Web site is helpful and informative about the course itself, the expectations for the term paper, and the resources available for writing the term paper. Many students like the user-friendly interface of the Web, and they appreciate being able to access the course information and research assistance when they need it.

As reference librarians try to reach more students on and off campus and offer more research information, the World Wide Web is a logical venue. A Web page created in collaboration with a faculty member offers

increased visibility of the librarian and of research assistance. Students can be guided to good quality, relevant Web sites for the discipline, appropriate databases and reference sources, and help with their bibliographies. As the Web becomes increasingly prominent as a campus resource, reference information can be combined with course information to attract students to see the library and the librarian as up-to-date resources for their research. With development of faculty relationships, careful planning, and wise use of student or staff assistance, even a librarian at a small campus or college library can build a Web presence on the campus, one page at a time.

### References

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