

Developing, Designing, And Delivering A Credit Library Research Course Using WebCT

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Introduction

The major purpose of an academic library is to serve the curricular and research needs of its student constituency. While this has never been an easy task, it has become much more difficult in the “information age.” There is no longer a “typical” college student: many students are returning to school after long absences to find a totally different educational environment; younger students have grown up with computer/video games and expect all information to be presented in an electronic/interactive/graphical format; many students have work and family responsibilities in addition to class responsibilities and cannot (or will not) accept the role traditionally assigned to 18 year-olds with no other responsibilities than to study. Few are content to listen to the “sage on the stage” impart knowledge and wisdom for extended lectures, and most want information at a time and location convenient to them – in a format convenient also. Regardless of background, preparation, or even determination, many college students face their studies ill prepared to perform efficient and effective research in an information-glutted environment with research requiring the mastery of a variety of forms and formats. In an effort to prepare students for life-long learning in an information society, an increasing number of academic libraries are offering research and/or information literacy courses. To address the demand for information at a time and place of convenience, many of those courses are now being offered on-line.

At the same time, the environment for scholarly communication has become a moving target. About five years ago, Ingram Library at the State University of West Georgia provided its first web page as a beta site for the Library of Congress’ Thomas Information Services. Today, we offer nearly 12,000 electronic journals, 14,000+ electronic books, and hundreds of electronic indexing, reference, and other full-text resources through that same web page. The State University of West Georgia is a member of the University System of Georgia, and has fully implemented the GALILEO (Georgia library Learning Online) interface. Additionally, we have developed many local search interfaces and indexes that are available only to our students. These engines and techniques represent value-added “works in progress” toward accessing and entering the scholarly communications process – and research structure – that few students, whatever their background, can anticipate.

Ingram Library faced an additional factor in dealing with its students: during the late 1990’s, as many as 25% of its students did not step foot on campus – the university had a large off-campus program, with two official sites providing service through contract services, and many smaller locations offering courses on an *ad hoc* basis. Ingram Library had an award-winning Distance Learning Program offering services to those students, but

actually providing instruction to those students in a changing information environment was becoming increasingly problematic.

Ingram Library began offering a core-curriculum 2-semester hour course via WebCT beginning Fall semester 1999. This presentation will focus on the development, design, and delivery of such a course from both an administrative and instructor perspective. We will also present some information concerning student reaction to the course.

Background

Librarians at UWG have both faculty status and responsibilities. They are required and expected to satisfy instruction, research, and public service activities in the furtherance of the institutional mission. All lower division library/bibliographic instruction is coordinated through an Instructional Services Division of the Library. Each librarian has departmental liaison responsibilities (with budgets to match) and must provide upper division and graduate bibliographic instruction to satisfy expected course outcomes. During a strategic planning process that addressed areas of instructional expectations, librarians were able to propose and have accepted, University-wide, a library research course. During a later transition from a quarter to a semester calendar, that course was changed to an elective, 2 semester hour course that satisfied core-curriculum requirements. In both instances, librarians played key roles in Faculty Senate committees and in the approval process of both the program, and its introduction into the core curriculum. As part of the core curriculum, the course became extremely popular with students in a face-to-face format. Growing demand for additional sections of the course, and for web-based courses prompted an investigation to find a solution for both problems.

Several factors influenced the decision to offer a web-based version and to select WebCT as the course management tool to design the course. Even though funds had been diverted to redesign building space, classroom space was at a premium; we faced difficulties in arranging librarians' schedules with increased demand for classroom teaching; the University had a site license for WebCT; the UWG office of Distance Learning offered training and support in utilizing distance learning technologies in course design; and the University administration continued to offer incentives to develop techniques to comply with a new strategic goal to integrate technology into the operational processes of instruction.

Finally, UWG became a participant in a number of state and regional activities which placed new expectations on Library services: UWG became a participant in the GeorgiaGLOBE project (a project of web-based continuing education); it was part of a small coalition of system institutions offering a web-based MBA program; and it became one of five host institutions for Georgia E-Core, a system-wide web-based program for providing core curriculum coursework for undergraduate students. It appeared clear that both the institution and the system were going to present Ingram Library with a growing cohort of students who would need bibliographic/information skills that they would not have when entering the new electronic programs.

Development, Design, and Delivery

The resultant course was designed by one librarian, as a complete online implementation of the existing face-to-face course since accreditation standards require comparability between distance and classroom instruction. There have been instances in which classroom instruction has been changed to reflect web-based techniques. Technical support was provided by the Library Systems Office and by the University Distance Learning Department. Files were composed in a standard word processing program, then uploaded to the course management software. The course consists of assigned textbook readings, online lessons containing stated objectives, worksheets, mid-term and final examinations, a calendar, online asynchronous discussion, and a final project that must be submitted – in paper – to the instructor. There are deadlines for various assignments, but students may work ahead. The course is taught by librarians who are part of the instructional Services Division. Fall Semester 2002, with a total student population of around 9000, nearly 275 students were taught in 11 course sections. To accommodate different learning styles and preferences, we continue to teach a couple of classroom sections each semester, but the online version is increasingly the norm.

Outcomes are assessed through an online evaluation form that is standard across the campus for all online courses. Additionally, the course has built-in pre- and post-test competency components. The instructors constantly scrutinize the anecdotal feedback from evaluations and make changes to the course on a semester-by-semester basis.

Insights

Faculty and students have generally adapted well to the online course. While some students equate ease of access with an “easy” course, that misconception is quickly dispelled. Discipline for both students and for instructors is essential to the success of an online course. Flexibility is a positive factor for both faculty and students.

Our experiences suggest several essential elements to an online course: constant monitoring of student progress; real-time office hours in addition to virtual instructor access for students; collaboration with other faculty to improve the course design and content; face-to-face orientation sessions for students; and frequent initiation of and encouragement for online discussions among students and faculty.

Future Directions

The LIBR 1101 course at Ingram Library is a work in progress. Originally designed, developed, and taught by one librarian, it has become a collaborative effort among several instruction librarians who routinely teach the class. Currently, there is a review underway to completely evaluate the course. Planned changes include adding self-tests to reinforce concepts and increasing flexibility in content areas so that student assignments can be developed to focus on disciplinary/subject areas of other courses. Beginning Summer semester 2002 the course will become an integral component of a

“First Year Program” designed to increase student retention. At-risk students will be advised to take the course. With the increased demand, all library faculty will rotate into the teaching pool for the course.

Beyond the immediate future, it is difficult to predict what path the course will take. Five years ago, few at Ingram Library would have thought teaching nine sections of an online research course either possible or desirable, but Library faculty have come to appreciate the value of electronic delivery and recognize it will continue to play a key role in the future direction of delivering library research instruction.



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05/14/02



UWG Background I: Administrative

- On-going strategic planning process
 - Requires evidence of strong ties to institutional goals
 - Supports organizational restructuring
 - Supports internal reallocation of resources



UWG Background I: Administrative

- On-going strategic planning process
 - Requires evidence of strong ties to institutional goals
 - Using technology throughout instructional and learning processes
 - Enhancing student research
 - Supports organizational restructuring
 - Supports internal reallocation of resources



UWG Background I: Administrative

- On-going strategic planning process
 - Requires evidence of strong ties to institutional goals
 - Supports organizational restructuring
 - Redefinition of performance criteria to include instruction
 - Shift in personnel from tech to public services
 - Move from quarter to semester system
 - Introduction of new core curriculum
 - Supports internal reallocation of resources



UWG Background I: Administrative

- On-going strategic planning process
 - Requires evidence of strong ties to institutional goals
 - Supports organizational restructuring
 - Supports internal reallocation of Resources
 - Services re-prioritized
 - Resources follow re-prioritized functions
 - Electronic classroom
 - Instructional Services suite – offices/group work area



UWG Background I: Administrative

- On-going strategic planning process
 - Requires evidence of strong ties to institutional goals
 - Supports organizational restructuring
 - Supports internal reallocation of resources



UWG Background I: Administrative

- Continuing Administrative/Institutional support
 - Institutional computer access policy
 - All students must have computer access
 - Operating system/network support
 - University Distance Learning Department/ITS
 - Full time support for WebCT
 - Support in campus-wide assessment
 - Design/implementation support



UWG Background II: The University Community

- Librarian status
- Diverse student population
- Institutional life cycle – a culture of change
- Multiple delivery points



UWG Background II: The University Community

- Librarian status
 - Librarians are tenure track faculty
 - Librarians serve on key committees in Faculty Senate and on other University-wide committees
- Diverse student population
- Institutional life cycle – a culture of change
- Multiple delivery points



UWG Background II: The University Community

- Librarian status
- Diverse student population
 - Student population – 9000+/-
 - Many are 1st generation college students
 - Returning non-traditional students
 - Broad demographic mixture
- Institutional life cycle – a culture of change
- Multiple delivery points



UWG Background II: The University Community

- Librarian status
- Diverse student population
- Institutional life cycle – a culture of change
 - Increasing focus on faculty/student research leads to higher admission standards – 60% of incoming students accepted 1997 would not be admitted 2002
 - Largest provider of online instruction in University system
 - Greater emphasis on liberal arts & sciences & broad array of graduate programs
- Multiple delivery points



UWG Background II: The University Community

- Librarian status
- Diverse student population
- Institutional life cycle – a culture of change
- Multiple delivery points
 - Three official off-campus centers
 - As many as 20 contracted locations each semester
 - Accreditation standards require equal services to both on-campus and off-campus students
 - In some semesters, less than 80% of students served on-campus



UWG Background II: The University Community

- Librarian status
- Diverse student population
- Institutional life cycle – a culture of change
- Multiple delivery points



UWG Background III: External Factors

- University System of Georgia electronic projects:
 - GALILEO
 - Statewide databases/full text services
 - GIL/Including Universal Borrowing
 - Statewide Union catalog/direct delivery to students at any location
 - ECore/Online MBA/Georgia Globe
 - Complete series of online degree/curricular programs
- Core curriculum changes for semester conversion
- Changing nature of scholarly communication



UWG Background III: External Factors

- University System of Georgia electronic projects
- Core curriculum changes for semester conversion
 - Locally defined core requirements – communication, critical thinking, computer literacy, global awareness: the library course is purposely identified with critical thinking and communication, rather than computer literacy
 - Emphasis on research process, rather than literacy “skills”
- Changing nature of scholarly communication



UWG Background III: External Factors

- University System of Georgia electronic projects
- Core curriculum changes for semester conversion
- Changing nature of scholarly communication
 - Five years ago: beta test-site for LC Thomas web page
 - Today
 - 14,000+ full-text ejournals
 - 20,000+ full-text ebooks
 - Value-added services provided by Library systems/technical services through Library gateways
 - Physical building can no longer be “laboratory” for learning Library/research processes



UWG Background III: External Factors

- University System of Georgia electronic projects
- Core curriculum changes for semester conversion
- Changing nature of scholarly communication



Leveraging Success: An Administrative Viewpoint:

- Additional positions – administrative support for additional or adjunct teaching positions
- Library services are viewed as closely tied to institutional goals
- Enhanced/Sustained funding
 - Library is not viewed only as a black hole
 - Library is seen as income center
 - Last year Library generated \$323,112 income
- Tighter integration with/participation in academic programs and governance of the institution



LIBR1101 -- Academic Research and the Library

- Introduction to
 - academic research and the use of the library
 - access, evaluation, and use of information sources
- Emphasizes effective and efficient use of the library, information resources, and technology
- Part of core curriculum (2 hrs. credit)
- Taught by library faculty
- Student must have access to an academic library
- Taught 100% online



LIBR1101 -- Academic Research and the Library

- Introduces students to academic research and the effective use of the library
- Provides an introduction to efficient and effective use of library and information resources and technology
- Provides instruction in the access, evaluation, and utilization of disciplinary literature
- Emphasizes modern methods of information retrieval, using online, interactive computer capability.



Course Includes:

- 14 Lessons – each with its own objectives
- Glossary available from icon on course homepage and linked throughout lessons
- Optional self-tests (for some lessons)
- Worksheets (for some lessons)
- Application assignments that focus on discipline/subject
- Online asynchronous discussions
- Exams
- Final Project



Lessons Introduce Students To

- Types of libraries and their purpose
- Research process
- Structure of literature
- Documentation
- Various information sources (electronic and print)



Worksheets

- May be printed off for offline completion
- No time limit for completion
- Available until due date
- Submitted online
- Graded (with instructor comments) online



Exams

- Available to students for 24 hours on designated date
- Have a time limit
- Are taken, submitted, and graded online
- May be instructor or computer graded



Final Project

- Provides hands-on experience in the research process for a specific topic
- Student selected (instructor approved) topic



Evaluation

- Campus-wide evaluation form
- Distance Education evaluation form
- Pre and post-test
 - Computer graded
 - Grades not available to students
- Ongoing evaluation by instructors



Tips for Success

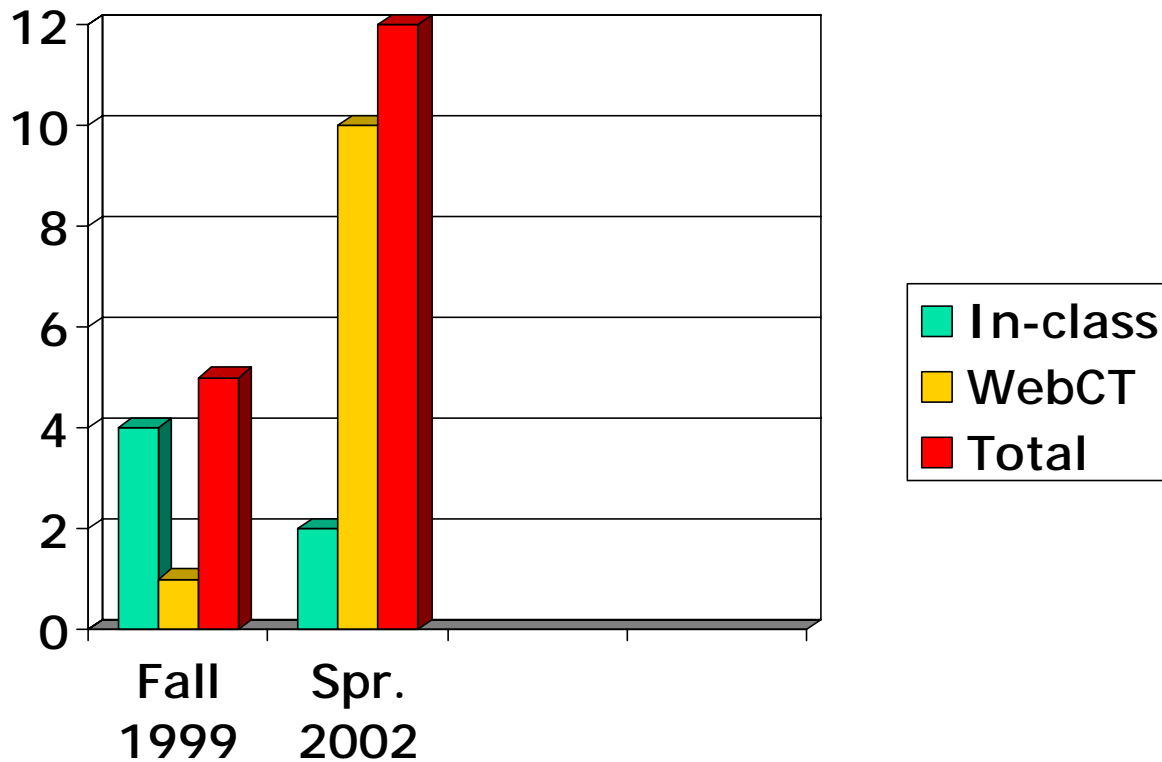
- Provide student support
 - Student orientation sessions
 - Instructor accessibility (real and virtual)
- Provide instructor support
 - Orientation for new instructors
 - Experienced instructors work with new instructors
 - Departmental meetings/discussions
- Remain flexible



Student Orientation Sessions

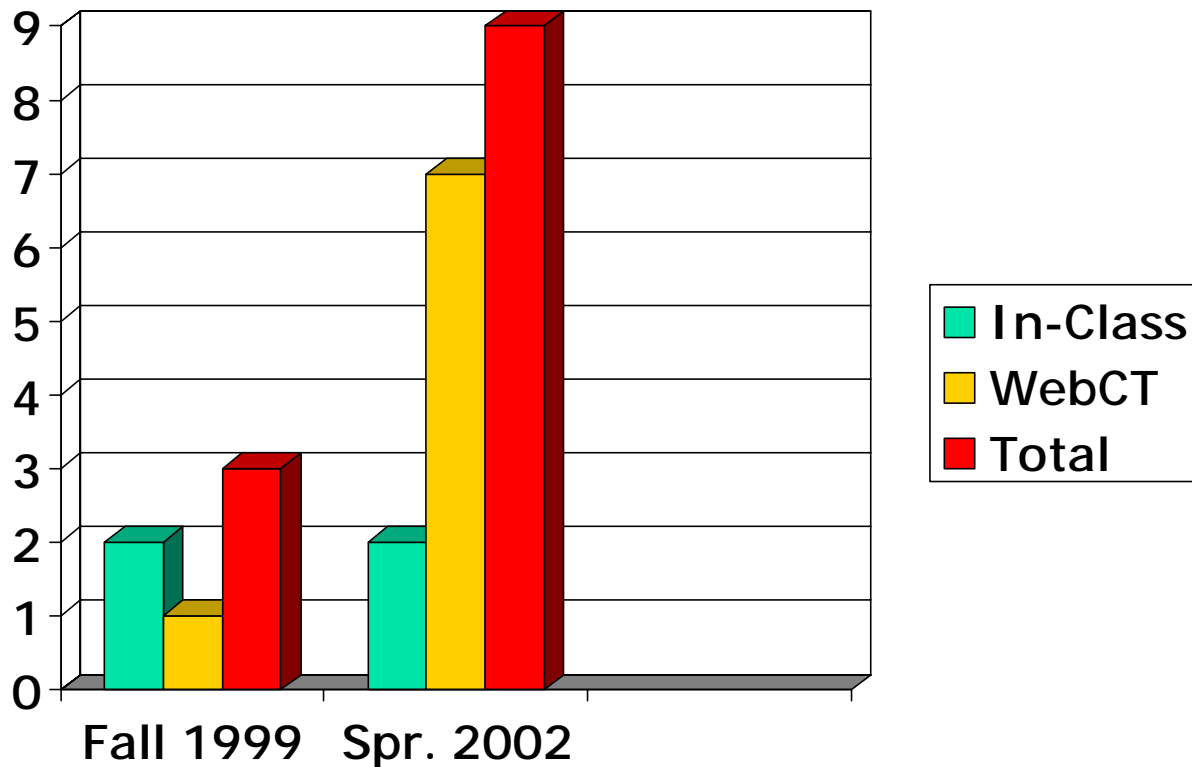
- Provides overview of course
- Multiple sessions offered at beginning of semester
- Students required to attend one session
- Approximately 1-hour in length

Courses by format



Instructors Teaching LIBR1101

- By format





Impact on Library

- Part of planned change within library
 - Instructional Services Division
 - Shift from reference model to instruction model
 - 30-minute instruction sessions on specific topics
 - Liaison directed instruction for upper division and graduate courses
- Promotes collaboration among librarians
- All librarians teach
- Enhances image of librarians across campus



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<http://www.westga.edu/~library>

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