

Creating Connections: Community Enrichment for Distance Learners



Introduction

Since 1988, the librarians at Gonzaga University's Foley Center Library have extended their instruction services to distance students. They have extended those services even further in more recent years, teaming up with online programs offered by the university.



Image by Foley Center Library



Services have been both synchronous & asynchronous, offering one-on-one interactions with the librarians. But is there room for more?

Yes!

Enhancing Student Learning

What if online students had the option of crafting their own library experience even while being hundreds of miles away?

The program offered by the Foley Center Library allows students to:

- Participate in brief (15-20 minute) webinars on library resources
- Connect with librarians and library staff
- Connect with fellow students



Image by Mary Watkins

Through connection, students create their own community.

The Project

This project progressed in two concurrent parts:

- Web conferencing technology for use by librarians and students was investigated through research and meetings with library departments and Information Technology Services.
- Webinar templates were created.

Zoom, a web conferencing tool, was tested to great success and recommended as a way for librarians and students to connect with each other in the pilot of this program.

The webinar template allows instructors to insert relevant information into a preset format, allowing them to get right to their students!

The Project, Continued

With this program, instruction librarians can connect students with library resources and walk them through using them, including:

- Databases
- Online library orientations
- Primo searching
- RefWorks

Sessions are recorded, meaning any student who could not attend or who simply wishes to watch a session again, needs only to click the link to the uploaded video.

Using surveys, information was collected regarding what kind of usage the library website receives and what kind of instruction distance students would like.

Further surveys will be held at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year.



The Impact

This program will be implemented by the librarians at Foley Center Library during the 2016 fall semester. It will allow distance students to tailor their learning experience outside of class, adding a further unique layer of interaction through a community-oriented setting.

The library will add a powerful tool to its already impressive arsenal of reference and instruction available to online students.

Online students will have the opportunity to craft a learning experiencing hand-in-hand with the library, similar to that of their on-campus counterparts.



Image by Mary Watkins