Guiding students to quality academic resources via the Library
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Goals of the project:
- Experience how Moodle works: as a teacher, a learner, and a course designer.
- Learn various Moodle tools, capabilities, and limitations.
- Engage with other faculty to see how they use Moodle and how the library can support them.
- Explore ways to highlight a variety of library-funded information resources.
- Experiment with embedding library and information resources directly into Moodle pages.

Outcomes
- Create a Moodle page (or two) that provides examples of how to embed specific library resources.
  - Library Resources: 10+ ways to use them in Moodle
  - More Library Resources

Background:
To facilitate the transition from WebCT to Moodle in a very short time frame, Sonoma State University created several Faculty Pilot Programs to create a core of faculty ready and excited about the new possibilities Moodle brought to their course development. I participated in the Faculty Moodle Demonstration Project, Summer 2010.

I had planned to teach a course in the fall, so this was a perfect opportunity for me to redevelop the course taking advantage of Moodle features and really thinking about Moodle from a teaching and learning perspective. A couple of weeks into the pilot I discovered the program I was to be teaching in was cancelled, so I decided to redirect my focus. Why not create a resource page for faculty, giving specific examples and instructions of how to embed the library’s information resources.

It soon became clear that it’s easy to make a simple link to the library’s catalog or to course reserves, but I wanted to explore ways to break out of the silos in which library resources tend to cluster. I wanted to minimize the number of clicks students have to make before they actually get to the resource they need. I also saw this as an opportunity to highlight some of the cool but lesser-known resources available via the library.

Library Resources: 10+ ways to use them in Moodle
The first page I created was to focus on some of the basics: linking to databases, research guides, course reserves, specific articles, ebooks, adding Librarian contact info, and including RSS feeds. There was more I wanted to add, but that was enough for one page.

My strategy was to use a two-column topic outline structure, with the main frame featuring the type of resource and the how-to instructions. For each resource I gave at
least one example of what it might look like; most examples used an html block on the right hand side, but I also gave examples of adding links as resources in the main frame.

Note: since our Moodle site is open to SSU users only, for this presentation I’ve included screenshots of the main pages, and snippets of the instructions, when needed to illustrate a point.
On the detailed instructions for Embedding Library Databases (Example #1), I provided screenshots of key steps, along with hints about capturing the right link or embed code, and toggling to the code view in an html block. At this point I assumed most readers were beginners, and that the detailed screen shots would help them work through the trickier parts. After several experiments, I decided to use the “Compose a web page” feature under “Add a resource” for the longer how-to instructions. This would enable the user more easily open the instructions in a new window or print them out.

Snippet of Example 1 - detailed instructions for Embedding Library Databases.

I found Jing (http://www.techsmith.com/jing/) to be a lifesaver for making annotations!

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One of the biggest challenges was getting the two columns lined up consistently, so that the example in the right hand column would line up with the description in the main frame. Sometimes I added filler “hints” to force the right hand column farther down the screen. The alignment changes, depending on the width of the screen and individual preferences for viewing text, so I had to settle for a close approximation.

With the links to the research guides, I wanted to highlight some of the guides created by librarians that faculty could use to use to reinforce and/or supplement their assignments. These examples included literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, subject-specific guides as well as course-specific guides, such as the Nursing Research Guide, which has a good section on evidence-based practice.
When talking about course reserves (#5), I gave instructions for adding a block or a resource, but also suggested bypassing reserves altogether by linking directly to the materials. I also added a hint about copyright issues regarding fair use and reserves (since I needed some filler in the right hand column), taking the opportunity to provide information as well as instructions.
The whole issue of getting the right link is tricky, and I tried to provide hints where appropriate. Although a bit arcane, I included an example about proxy wraps, hoping to provide a hint to the tech-savvy faculty as to why a link might work from on-campus, but not off-campus. To the uninitiated it can be a bit intimidating. It’s also difficult to adequately explain about session IDs in URLs and why those URLs won’t work as links. Since these pages could also be used by members of the Moodle Support Team as they helped faculty create their pages, I hoped these hints could provide them clues as well.

Since there are so many exciting ways to use RSS feeds, it was hard to decide what examples to use. I provided links from many disciplines to try to spark ideas. I also included more detailed instructions, with screen shots, on how to capture the RSS feed and then configure it with the right format to fit the space.
In some cases, such as link to ebooks (#9), there were many different ways to link to them, so I focused on finding them, and then linking to one ebook vendor. I also pointed out and linked to my second page, creatively named More Library Resources, which has a long section about linking to electronic dictionaries and encyclopedias.
More Library Resources

By the time I finished the first page, I realized I still had lots of examples I wanted to give, but I didn’t want the page to get too unwieldy, so I created a second one.

On the More Library Resources page I decided to focus more on content and pedagogy and less on specific step-by-step details. I wanted to highlight some of the cool, but sometimes underutilized, resources that I thought might be appropriate. If nothing else, I wanted folks to think, “Wow, I didn’t know the library had that!”

With the dictionaries and encyclopedias, I wanted to give examples of specific titles and how to find them, but also examples of how they could be used. I also wanted to model good practice of citing sources (see 1.1).
Again, I tried to caution folks about the importance of getting the right URL and provided tips on how to determine this.

When I came across a cool Moodle feature, such as the random glossary (see 1.4), I looked for resources that would work with it to create a link between the authoritative library resources and the fun tool. In this case I suggested an activity where students use the subject dictionaries available via the library to find terms to add to the glossary activity, then used the random glossary block to display random entries on the page (changing with each reload of the page). This gets students into more authoritative resources, while giving them an opportunity to show their work on the course Moodle page.

Example 1.4: Glossary linked to random glossary entry on right

Have your students create a glossary of terms using these dictionaries, then have the random glossary entry display on your page. (see example 1.4, below and to the right)

Example 2 Linking to SSU ScholarWorks

SSU ScholarWorks is a great place to provide public access to faculty research and presentations. Linking to these resources is a simple way to provide access to the students 24/7, instead of forcing them to use your own. Use the URL listed in the record as the link type.
The SSU library has recently added more streaming video and audio, so this was a good opportunity to show off some of these great resources and the variety of ways they can be embedded.
Google makes it very easy to add a search box to a Moodle page. It’s also a good opportunity to remind folks about changing their Scholar preferences to link to the library’s holdings.

Finally, I added a block that links back to the first page, *Library Resources: 10+ ways to use them in Moodle.*

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**Letting faculty know about the pages**

Once the pages were active I announced them to the other members of the Demonstration Project, where several folks picked up on a few of the features, especially the box for searching several databases simultaneously. I also posted it to SSU Moodle User Group. A more targeted campaign will be launched this fall through the library’s “What’s New” newsletter to faculty, a mention at the beginning-of-semester School meetings, targeted email, and postings on the library and campus websites.

One creative means of getting the information out came after conversations with our campus Moodle administrator, who came up with a great idea. The SSU Moodle User Group automatically adds each Moodle course instructor and/or developer to the User Group on a nightly basis, so we turned my pages into two metacourses, which link to the User Group. Now, faculty with Moodle courses will see my two courses listed under their “My courses” menu.

One piece of the puzzle not yet complete is the assessment. Since Moodle is still new to most people on campus (only one full semester under our belts), it’s too early to tell whether or not it has had the intended impact. Most faculty are still early in the Moodle learning curve and want to get the basics up and running before tackling too much more. My hope is that as they get more comfortable with Moodle they will be willing to try some of the additional possibilities. I will continue to monitor the statistics for the pages to see how they are getting used.

**Conclusion**

This is the kind of project that can really get the creative juices flowing. Every time I added a new resource I thought of others to add. Why limit it to just library resources? Why not include links to resources, for example, at the Internet Archive, or MERLOT, or Library of Congress, or the myriad of primary source websites and databases. How could we tie it in to the California State University systemwide initiatives on Affordable Learning Solutions (ALS) and Accessible Technologies (ATI)?

The challenges, of course, are finding the right combination of interesting ideas, level of detail, and up-to-date instructions, as well as generating continuing awareness and interest.

The project did meet my goals in terms of learning how Moodle works and the importance of keeping the audience in mind by modeling good Moodle behavior. Working with the various types of resources to determine how to best incorporate them gave me a much better understanding of how the library can support faculty efforts to incorporate the rich array of resources available to students. The possibilities are endless!

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