Project Charter
Improving Online Student Success & Attainment with Embedded Librarians
December 22, 2011 (Final)

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Executive Summary

The Library’s integration into Academic Affairs recognizes the important connection library services retain with student success and attainment at Columbus State Community College. The Library’s alignment with the academic side of the College creates synergy with a renewed eye on library initiatives and partnerships that directly contribute to student success and attainment. In Fall Quarter 2011, the Library partnered with Instructional Technologies and Distance Learning (ITDL) on the Blackboard Virtual Library Project, the purpose of which is to increase the Library’s presence in Blackboard and successfully connect online students to library services. The Library’s ongoing projects to create online library tutorials and LibGuides—online, general or specific guides that direct students to the best library or web resources available—serve as important components of the Blackboard Virtual Library Project.

The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) established “Standards for Distance Learning Library Services” in 2009 that underscore the importance of online students’ access to library services and emphasize that online students are entitled to library services comparable to students in the traditional, face-to-face classroom. Indeed, these standards stress that access to not only library resources but also direct access to librarians unequivocally correlate with online students’ success and academic achievements. The Blackboard Virtual Library Project and the creation of online library tutorials and LibGuides represent significant steps in the right direction to ensure online students have access to the same high-quality library services as face-to-face students; however, much work remains.

The Improving Online Student Success & Attainment with Embedded Librarians project further addresses the issue of online students’ access to librarians, library services, and library resources. The project also relates to Student Success & Attainment, which is a top priority President/Cabinet level goal. Data collection serves as a key aspect in the initial process of the project and the development of an embedded librarian service at the College. Research, literature reviews, and best practices at other academic institutions will serve as a foundation for the project.

Upon project approval, a program Steering Committee and appropriate subcommittees with campus-wide involvement from the Library, ITDL, Academic Affairs, IT, and faculty will be established within the existing shared governance structure, specifically the curriculum committee. With the beta testing of a librarian embedded in a Blackboard course and additional data collection, the ultimate goal of the project is to improve student success and attainment in online courses by providing online students with innovative and exemplary library services at the point of need in Blackboard.
Introduction

This Project Charter for the Columbus State Community College’s *Improving Online Student Success & Attainment with Embedded Librarians* project contains information about the project’s purpose, background and history, objectives and goals, scope, project milestones, and organization. Information about major assumptions, current barriers, critical success factors, guiding principles, project roles, and project responsibilities also resides in this document. The project’s overarching goal is to contribute to the College’s student success and attainment initiative.

Purpose Statement

Student success and attainment is a top-tier, Cabinet/President level College initiative. Columbus State needs to enhance online students’ performance to ensure they are academically successful. One way this can be accomplished is by embedding librarians into online courses. An embedded librarian is defined as *a librarian who is integrated into an online course and who collaborates closely with faculty to offer information literacy instruction to online students as well as reference and course research assistance, to support curriculum, course goals, and educational outcomes.*

Data-driven decision making will be employed during the project to inform the initial direction and then throughout the life of the project (via formative evaluations) to indicate where modifications to the implementation need to occur. Then, data will be collected to conduct summative evaluations, which are expected to reveal the level of achievement reflected in online students’ success and attainment.

Best practices address not only rigorous foundational work including benchmarking with other institutions, clearly and consistently communicating institution-wide, and soliciting input from all affected parties, but also systematic monitoring and evaluation of the product and addressing unmet needs. Also reflected in best practices are service elements designed to enhance the online experience.

With their use of search engines such as Google, instead of turning to librarians for course research assistance, students clearly place an emphasis on what is convenient, accessible, and familiar rather than what provides quality information; an understanding of students’ information-seeking behavior will guide how the project addresses the online course(s) research component(s).

Finally, appropriate avenues for collaboration will be created and nurtured. All stakeholders will be encouraged to collaborate, especially librarians and faculty, to improve students’ information literacy and equip students with the tools and confidence they require to succeed not only in their college courses but in the future marketplace.
Background and History

Online courses, defined as "those for which all regularly scheduled classroom time is replaced by required activities completed at distance and managed online," currently comprise nearly 30% of total college enrollment in the United States. Associates-degree granting institutions, such as community colleges, enroll more than half of the nation's online students.

Columbus State’s online education allows students the flexibility they need to earn a college degree, which they may not otherwise accomplish given changes in life circumstances. In SP 2011, the College offered 460 online courses with 1,061 sections. Of the 29,460 students attending Columbus State that quarter, 45% (13,372) took at least one online course. Nearly half (6,507) those students took only online courses. The trend at Columbus State is clear with the number of students enrolled in at least one online course nearly doubling in five years to a high of 13,372 in SP 2011.

The growth in online enrollment is expected to continue especially considering online education provides much-needed flexibility to students in scheduling classes and minimizes the cost of commuting. This growth requires an expansion of online student support services such as admissions, advising, registration, financial aid, career services, counseling, and library services. Support services must be designed and implemented around the learner with online students having the same access to resources as on-campus students. Student services interact with the learner at every phase, from pre-enrollment advising to post-completion placement.

The classroom experience phase of the learner’s experience forms the largest portion of the learners’ online interaction with the institution. In determining the project focus, the question, “What will best help a student succeed in an online class?” was posed. The stark reality is that students fail or do not complete online classes at a higher rate than in the traditional classroom. At Columbus State in SP 2011, 32.9% of online students did not earn credit for at least one online course versus 24.8% of students in traditional courses. Of these online students who did not earn credit, 3,094 (53%) failed at least one online course while 28 students received a grade after the end of the quarter in one or more online courses. The College does not track the number of Incompletes given in a quarter.

Research identified major contributing factors to the lack of online student success, with a lack of adequate preparation in terms of learning style and technological capability (readiness) ranked as the primary factor. The College is working toward addressing this readiness factor, equipping students with the necessary tools to succeed online before they enter the online classroom.
Closely following the readiness factor, research revealed that students perform much more poorly in online classes where there is a high sense of isolation, characterized by lack of communication and lack of connectedness. In fact, early in the development of online education, researchers determined interactivity to be a critical predictor of student success in online classes. Simply put, the more and varied a student’s interactions with other individuals—the instructor, fellow students, and additional support—the more likely s/he is to finish, and finish well. Columbus State’s online faculty creates and employs strong course designs that integrate both synchronous and asynchronous learning, along with various types of interactivity. Just as online faculty employs different tools to engage students, a librarian also can be employed to provide support to faculty and students in the online learning environment. Research shows that integrating librarians into online classroom experiences greatly enhances connectedness in the particular class, thereby fostering student success. In addition, individualized, classroom-based library instruction develops information literacy.

Information literacy forms an essential building block in every student’s ability to succeed not only in an online classroom but in the academic and professional careers pursued over a lifetime. A lack of competence and confidence in how they conduct course research, evaluate and use information compounds the problems online students face as they struggle to succeed. The 2010 Project Information Literacy Progress Report, “Truth Be Told,” contains results from a survey of 8,300 undergraduate students from 25 U.S. academic institutions on this topic. Of the students surveyed, over 84% expressed difficulty in starting their course research and 61% struggled with eliminating irrelevant search results. Despite such difficulties, only 30% asked librarians for assistance although 63% of the students wanted to improve their course research skills. Based on their findings, the researchers emphasized a critical need for librarians to partner with faculty, writing centers, and centers for teaching and learning to develop rubrics to better instruct students about the course research process. As the researchers observe, “[I]t is essential for librarians to teach and train students about developing and honing research strategy with some assurance” and that “instructors should emphasize the research process and hold students accountable for the research that they do conduct.”

In another study titled “How Students Use the Web to Conduct Everyday Research,” 95% of students surveyed rely on search engines, Google in particular, to conduct everyday research, compared to 14% of students who also consult librarians. At Columbus State, faculty who teach face-to-face courses contact the Library to schedule bibliographic instruction sessions during which librarians teach students about the course research process, avenues, evaluation, citation, and avoiding plagiarism, among other topics. A session often caters to a specific assignment and typically lasts for about an hour. In 2010, the librarians taught 379 bibliographic instruction sessions to
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5,635 students. Often, library visits were one-shot instruction sessions, although a librarian can convey only so much information in one hour. The Library works hard to encourage faculty teaching face-to-face courses to schedule bibliographic instruction sessions, which serve as an important vehicle to connect students with a librarian knowledgeable of their course research needs. At present, however, no library orientation program or the means for web-based, bibliographic instruction within Blackboard exists for online students.

Online students must go outside the Blackboard learning environment to connect to library services. The Library website serves as an online student’s access point to search the catalog or log into research databases to find scholarly articles. Students who require course research assistance may email a librarian, call the library, or physically travel to the library to consult a librarian in person. Through OhioLINK, the KnowItNow (KIN) Academic chat service is available for students to chat or instant message (IM) a librarian, and while a number of CSCC librarians participate in KIN chat, students may connect with a librarian from another OhioLINK-member institution. To meet the needs of students who do not receive any library orientation or bibliographic instructions, currently the librarians are creating general or subject-specific LibGuides, which students may access through the Library website. Online faculty has the ability to embed a LibGuide or link the library homepage in his or her course shell.

In recognition of the impact LibGuides can have in reaching online students, ITDL has partnered with the library to work on The Blackboard Virtual Library Project, which aims to increase the library’s presence in Blackboard with the inclusion of a “Library” tab next to the “My CSCC,” “My Courses,” “My Organizations,” etc., tabs visible when students log into Blackboard. When students click on the tab, they will access a library page containing LibGuides, tutorials, search widgets, and other helpful information in a user-friendly format. A logical next step is to embed librarians directly into the online course itself, just as a journalist is embedded in the field amongst the action. Such a service exists at the point of need and customized for a specific course. With Columbus State’s ever-expanding online learning program, the time is ripe for the College to research and test an innovative library service that meets the information needs of online students, increasing student success and attainment.

Objectives and Benefits
Objectives

• Identify and evaluate what online library services Columbus State Community College provides to its online students and what the College plans to implement;
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- Research online students’ needs, expectations, and information-seeking behaviors related to library research conducted for assignments in online courses;
- Research embedded librarians in online courses offered at other colleges and universities;
- Identify and examine best practices for implementing embedded librarians in online courses offered at Columbus State;
- Research and examine the project’s financial impact and recoveries.

Benefits
Convincing benefits for the presence of embedded librarians in online courses abound. An embedded librarian service:

- Expands library services for students beyond traditional reference desk or one-shot instruction sessions into a digital environment for stronger connections and ongoing interactions between librarians and students;
- Exists at the point of need in Blackboard for ease and convenience, directly connecting students to a librarian who aids students in meeting course goals and educational outcomes;
- Increases shared responsibility and collaboration between librarians and online faculty to advance students’ information literacy, better impart course research skills to students, and facilitate student success on course research assignments;
- Provides library orientation and course-specific library instruction in Blackboard as an important service for students and faculty and enables librarians to help online students develop information literacy and course research skills;
- Improves online students’ awareness of library services and resources, better marketing the Library’s value beyond a physical location;
- Creates and strengthens cross-functional partnerships across the College’s disciplines;
- Creates a forward-thinking service arising not only from collaboration between departments within the College but with collaboration from other academic institutions with embedded librarian programs.
**Scope**

The scope of the *Improving Online Student Success & Attainment with Embedded Librarians* project focuses on the one element identified as having the most impact on online student success and attainment at Columbus State. The team anticipates that formative evaluations conducted during beta testing in two online courses may necessitate modifying the online embedded librarian model, which will require further beta testing and formative evaluations until a satisfactory model emerges. The following fall within the scope of this project:

- Piloting the project by embedding a librarian into two online courses (one in Arts & Sciences and one in Career & Technical);
- Providing communication between the course librarians and online students via electronic mail and instant messaging/chat, phone, face-to-face; or discussion board;
- Establishing periodic discussions between faculty and librarians;
- Soliciting assistance in obtaining academic resources such as videos, web annotation, and Blackboard;
- Implementing the same resources in online courses available in traditional courses;
- Expanding to additional online courses based on outcomes.

The following online services available to students are outside the scope of this project:

- Apply to attend Columbus State;
- Apply for financial aid;
- Register for classes;
- Pay fees;
- Purchase, rent, and ship textbooks;
- Seek academic and career advising;
- Obtain transfer information;
- Obtain tutoring;
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- Communicate with faculty and departments by electronic mail and instant messaging/chat;
- Research or introduce new chat software, such as Meebo, or other tools outside of what is already available in Blackboard;
- Access the online course catalog.

Project Milestones
Milestones reflect major target accomplishments over the course of the project, impact most subcommittees’ work efforts, and are well understood by all subcommittee and project team members. They are significant points in time, tangible achievements, key meetings, key decisions made, key communications, etc. Milestones serve as the foundation for project planning, progress reporting, and help ensure focus on the most important events. This is “milestone-driven work planning.” The following is the most current list of project milestones and due dates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
<th>Assigned to</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop Charter</td>
<td>12/6/2011</td>
<td>Transformers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve Charter</td>
<td>12/23/2011</td>
<td>Angelo Frole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct online student survey</td>
<td>2/17/2012</td>
<td>Transformers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capture and analyze data</td>
<td>3/9/2012</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present LI project to President/Board of Trustees</td>
<td>5/1/2012</td>
<td>Transformers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select classes for beta test</td>
<td>5/4/2012</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop curriculum for beta test classes</td>
<td>6/29/2012</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop programming (script) for embedded librarians</td>
<td>10/28/2012</td>
<td>IT &amp; Steering Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Install embedded librarians in Blackboard for beta test courses</td>
<td>12/17/2012</td>
<td>IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch beta testing of two online courses</td>
<td>1/14/2013</td>
<td>CSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey students, faculty, and librarians in beta tested courses</td>
<td>5/10/2013</td>
<td>Transformers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze survey results and adjust areas as needed</td>
<td>5/15/2013</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
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</table>
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Project Organization

This project, in association with Dean Tom Erney (Distance Learning) and Mr. Bruce Massis (Director of Library Services), will report to Dr. Jack Cooley, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. Both Dean Erney and Library Director Massis will play instrumental roles in working through the intricacies of this project with all the stakeholders. Library Director Massis will play a lead role in the project organization because the project will encompass his staff and department.

This project is organized into several information gathering areas. First, an understanding of the online student population and what they want/need to be successful is critical. Second, the team wants to understand the students’ knowledge/perception of available library services. In addition, it’s imperative to understand how to get the student body to embrace library services as a positive and supportive process to help their learning and class experiences. Third, understanding how to engage the College’s faculty to support the idea and practice of embedded librarians in online courses would guide the project’s implementation. Finally, the team wants to understand from a structure point of view how to make an embedded librarian in every appropriate online course taught at the College a reality.

Based on initial research, having embedded librarians in appropriate online courses could be similar to having a tutor or a study partner in every online course. There are seven members with diverse backgrounds who comprise the Transformers team, bringing their experience, talents, and skills to bear on addressing the issue of online student success and attainment. Three team members work directly with students in teaching/mentoring/tutoring/advising capacities, a significant asset given the project’s student focus. One member has extensive experience working on teams/committees, writing, developing questionnaires, and outreach. An academic librarian serves as a team member who can speak to the online student success and attainment issue directly. Four team members have online teaching experience, providing valuable insight for this project based on first-hand experience. Additionally, the course curriculum and project management experience bases are well covered by two team members. Everyone works well together and is supportive of one another. We have shared the workload, dividing the Charter’s sections among the team to develop and then recompiling them into one document for review.

Major Assumptions

1. Students will adapt, use the embedded librarian service, and find it valuable;

2. Administrators and faculty will value the opportunity to learn and share knowledge;
3. Library services and information literacy play a role in college success and attainment;

4. Students are encouraged to make full use of the services;

5. It is possible to provide equivalent library services to online students;

6. Librarians will be proficient with Blackboard from both a designer and end-user standpoint;

7. Communication between librarians and course faculty will remain open;

8. Each librarian will clarify with the instructor what his/her responsibility will be with the course and what level of support is desired;

9. The College has a unified definition for online student;

10. Faculty is familiar with library services;

11. Faculty knows how to create an online course;

12. The College has defined what quality online education looks like;

13. Online students will utilize embedded librarian services at the point of need in Blackboard.

Current Risks, Barriers, or Constraints

The following is an initial list of potential project barriers, which serves as a guide to effectively eradicating or mitigating many of the identified problem areas.

1. **Lack of full institutional support.** To be successful, this project requires full organizational support from the president down through the departments. Library Services will need the support of IT to provide the infrastructure to develop a successful product.

2. **Lack of complete investment in the product.** While organizational support is important to the success of the project, the College must consider this an investment. It has to be set up, nurtured, and supported as it takes on a life of its own by becoming a viable learning tool for online students and faculty.

3. **Ignoring biases.** All biases toward library services from students and faculty would derail a promising student success and attainment model and must be neutralized.
4. **Considering technology to be more than a tool.** Technology is not the driving force behind the desire to create embedded librarian services in online courses. It’s imperative to remember the educational needs of the College’s online students are driving the need for an embedded librarian service.

5. **Insufficient and/or ineffective communication.** To ensure online student understanding of and participation with embedded librarians, the College must determine online students’ preferred method(s) of communication and utilize appropriate tools to their best advantage via a strategic marketing/outreach plan. In communicating the embedded librarian concept, it will be important to market the concept and services correctly to both students and faculty.

6. **Lack of resources.** The provision of adequate resources will be critical to effectively implementing the online embedded librarian service. Required resources could include additional librarians, staff, and IT management and support personnel. Increased funding would need to be allocated depending on the number of human resources added as well as the cost of meeting infrastructure needs.

7. **Competing demand for limited resources.** The College has finite resources to address a multitude of new and ongoing initiatives, not to mention maintaining the current level of service to the community. Funding, personnel, time, or infrastructure issues could cause this project to wither and die.

**Critical Success Factors and Guiding Principles**

1. **Support institutional goals and vision.** The embedded librarian services project needs to directly contribute to the College’s mission, goals, vision, and values. Indeed, it “provide(s) relevant, thorough, state-of-the-art technical education that prepares students to prosper in the world of work.”

2. **Organizational support.** Strong support from management and stakeholder groups from different departments, such as the Library, ITDL, online faculty, and IT, is vital to the project’s success. Ongoing commitment to the project and its goals, at all stages, remains essential to ensure the project benefits the College as a whole.

3. **Willingness and openness to enact change.** Stakeholders must be motivated by a shared sense of purpose. Emphasis should be placed on resourcefulness when confronting barriers stonewalling processes with “no” or “it can’t be done.”
4. **Promote constructive debate.** All viewpoints are valued to ensure the exploration of every option and issue.

5. **Students are the driving force.** Technology is an important component of the embedded librarian project, but it does not supersede the needs of online students’ success and attainment.

6. **Early identification of risks and issues.** Risks and issues identified early in the process allow the project team to better anticipate and resolve barriers to the project and its implementation.

7. **Investment.** Appropriate institution and stakeholder investment of resources—people, time, and funding—is critical to the success of the project.

8. **Clear Communication.** Open communication must exist within a stakeholder’s department as well as with other stakeholders’ departments. Each group must understand the unique perspective of other groups involved in the project and possess an awareness of the framework/culture in which each department works.

9. **Clearly defined milestones and goals.** Once realistic expectations and goals have been established, key milestones must be met and contributions made by all involved stakeholders for the project to succeed.

10. **Research and evaluation.** Thorough research must be conducted to examine, develop, and refine best practices for the implementation of the project. Research may involve literature reviews, surveys, focus groups, and site visits to other institutions. The gathering of survey data and statistics after implementation is crucial to gauge impact and success.

11. **Learn from and collaborate with other colleges.** Embedded librarian projects have been implemented successfully at other institutions and Columbus State can benefit from the best practices established by these institutions. The College stands as a partner with other academic institutions.

12. **Process is data driven.** Informed decisions are made throughout the process and decisions supported by collected data and research.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Many roles and responsibilities have been identified for this project. The following table summarizes the roles and associated key responsibilities along with general level of involvement.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steering Committee Members</strong></td>
<td>Make key project decisions, help resolve major issues, help mitigate major risks, track progress against project milestones, effectively represent cross-section of many program stakeholders.</td>
<td>Part-time throughout the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subcommittee Chairs</strong></td>
<td>Manage the work of the subcommittee and manage the involvement of the subcommittee members, facilitate recommendations on decisions owned by subcommittee.</td>
<td>Part-time throughout the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subcommittee Members</strong></td>
<td>Participate in subcommittee work including: initial assessment, remediation, recommendations, key decisions, policy change recommendations, task groups as needed, and issue resolution.</td>
<td>Part-time throughout the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Manager</strong></td>
<td>Manage overall project, work with subcommittees and steering committee to address project level risks/issues, manager project wide milestones. Own the planning and execution of the master workplan.</td>
<td>Part-time throughout the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject Matter Experts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>As Needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Assistant</strong></td>
<td>Provide administrative support including records management and maintaining centralized database and provide support for the campus visit.</td>
<td>Part-time throughout project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommended Readings


Figa, E., Bone, T., & MacPherson, J. (2009). Faculty-librarian collaboration for library services in the online classroom: student evaluation results and recommended practices for implementation. *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning, 3*(2), 67-102. doi: 10.1080/15332900902979119


