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Sense of Direction: Virtual Tour Orients Students at Academic Library

Introduction

At the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP), the University Library boasts a robust instruction program. Nearly 90 percent of the student body visits the library annually for bibliographic instruction (Schmetzke 3). As part of the instruction program, librarians offer guided walking tours and a scavenger hunt. However, both activities require an entire 50-minute class period, which some professors hesitate to sacrifice. To offer a time-saving alternative, the University Library created a four-minute virtual tour in summer 2015. Posted on the library's YouTube channel, the tour (youtu.be/W1VcwPYrqj0) attracted few viewers initially. In fall 2015, the tour was embedded as a quiz in the course management system D2L. That semester, professors assigned the D2L quiz to English classes, causing the tour's YouTube statistics to skyrocket (fig. 2). Eighty-eight students completed the D2L quiz, averaging 9.18 correct answers out of ten questions (fig. 1).

Background

UWSP is a four-year comprehensive institution, which had an enrollment of 9,255 students in fall 2015 (Office). It is one of twenty-six campuses in the University of Wisconsin System and one of thirteen institutions that grant bachelor's degrees ("Campuses"). The University Library, which occupies seven floors of Alberton Hall, has a permanent collection of approximately 600,000 items. The library provides access to 100,000 print and online periodicals while subscribing to 200 databases (U.S. Natl. Center for Education Statistics). As tenure-track

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faculty members, ten librarians primarily serve traditional undergraduates but also assist graduate students and faculty members. All librarians participate in instruction, including one-shot sessions, credit courses, internships, and workshops.

Literature Review

Academic libraries have offered online tours since at least the mid-1990s. Evans Library at Texas A&M University released a virtual library tour in January 1996 (Mosley and Xiao 14). The tour gave users the choice of an interactive map or a list of 64 links (Mosely and Xiao 10). Mosley and Xiao said of the project, “The intent of the tour is to provide an alternative library orientation mechanism targeted specifically to students that [sic] are more comfortable with a computer learning environment” (30). Three years later, Evans Library created another online tour to showcase a new annex. Harnessing virtual-reality technology, this tour featured 360-degree realistic views (Xiao 177). When the tour was unveiled at the annex’s opening ceremony, Xiao wrote, “The audience responded enthusiastically; they were amazed that they were able to view every detail of the new building without walking through the site. A branch library and several library departments expressed immediate interest in creating a similar program for their own Web presence or online instructions” (183).

Also in 1999, the Albert R. Mann Library at Cornell University launched a virtual tour as part of a \$4 million endowment campaign (Morris-Knower 83). Supplementing in-person tours for potential donors, the virtual tour highlighted the building, collections, and projects (Morris-Knower 83). Morris-Knower noted, “Unveiled in April 1999, the virtual tour was designed to replicate on the Web the experience of donors visiting the library” (84). The virtual tour received more than 211,000 hits within eleven months, and the endowment raised \$4.1 million by January 2000 (Morris-Knower 85).

To save time and expand outreach, academic libraries continued to rely on virtual tours in the new millennium. In 2000, Tolppanen et al., examined library websites from 133 medium-size universities, finding that 18 percent offered virtual tours (15). In a 2002 study, Mach and Oling discovered that 54 percent of 123 Association of Research Libraries institutions posted virtual tours on their websites (3).

In fall 2000, Dacus Library at Winthrop University created a virtual tour that featured the school mascot, an eagle (Wells and Walker 29). The eagle, nicknamed Little Stuff, was photographed in various library locations “targeting where students often had problems or points of confusion” (Wells and Walker 30). Writing 101 instructors assigned the virtual library tour to more than 1,000 freshmen who were required to complete a quiz (Wells and Walker 32). The virtual tour replaced a physical tour, freeing up time for librarians and Writing 101 instructors. Wells and Walker observed:

All in all, the virtual tour was deemed a success by the library faculty, who were able to halve the number of Writing 101 classes they taught. The English department believed the tour worked well for their students and had the added benefit of giving the faculty back one class session to devote to writing issues. Reference desk staff reported fielding fewer location questions from freshmen (34).

Similarly, the University of Otago Science Library in New Zealand launched a virtual tour that featured a toy penguin (Kittelson and Jones 43). Upon completing the tour, 83 first-year students submitted evaluations. Kittelson and Jones discovered, “When the virtual is used as a teaching tool it provides students with a self-directed, flexible and enjoyable introduction to the science library resources and services” (47).

The William & Anita Newman Library of Baruch College added a new wrinkle to virtual tours in fall 2000. Aimed at the college's large population of international students, the library recorded a virtual tour in nine languages including English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Polish, Greek, and Turkish (Downing and Klein 501). Within four months of release, the multilingual tour was visited more than 2,500 times (Downing and Klein 502).

In recent years, academic libraries have incorporated multimedia into virtual tours. At Appalachian State University, the Justice-Query Instructional Materials Center embedded panoramic images, a jigsaw puzzle, movies, and a quiz into its online tour (Rice and Gregor 583). In the tour's quiz section, students answered 13 of 14 questions correctly at least 80 percent of the time (Rice and Gregor 587). In Australia, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology library morphed its virtual tour into a videogame titled "Library Amazing Race: Zombie Edition ONLINE" (Ingalls 82).

Methodology

According to internal statistics, UWSP librarians taught 8,284 students during bibliographic instruction sessions in the 2015-16 academic year (Schmetzke 3). Although some students attended multiple sessions, this figure represents nearly a 90 percent saturation of the student body based on fall 2015 enrollment of 9,255 students (Office). Nevertheless, students' familiarity with the library varied prior to attending instruction sessions. Some had attended several sessions previously while others never had entered the building.

To familiarize students with the physical layout of the building, librarians developed a popular scavenger hunt called "Where's Stevie?" based on the school mascot, Stevie Pointer. By following clues, students collected letters of the alphabet throughout the library. After visiting eight areas, students unscrambled the letters to spell A-R-C-H-I-V-E-S. Students then visited the

University Archives to pose for a photograph with a vintage Stevie Pointer mascot head. The scavenger hunt required an entire class period to complete, which some professors were unwilling to yield.

To offer a shorter alternative to the scavenger hunt, the author created a virtual library tour in summer 2015. He based the virtual tour on the “Where’s Stevie?” scavenger hunt. The virtual tour followed mascot Stevie Pointer as he explored six floors of the library, discovering a service or collection on each floor. For example, Stevie occupied a group study room on the fourth floor with the university chancellor. The lighthearted video sought to introduce students to the building while reducing library anxiety.

The virtual tour was created with digital photographs, Adobe Photoshop, Microsoft PowerPoint, and Camtasia Relay. For images of Stevie Pointer, a campus photographer had uploaded 318 snapshots of the mascot on the university’s public SmugMug photo-sharing site. Using Photoshop, the author created cutouts of Stevie in several poses. The campus photographer also had uploaded dozens of images of the library, including scenes from every floor. In PowerPoint, the author transposed mascot cutouts over library scenes. After writing a script (appendix 1), the author recorded the tour using Camtasia Relay. He uploaded the Camtasia Relay video to the library’s YouTube channel and added closed captioning using YouTube’s video manager. Although the final product measured four minutes and three seconds, the project took days to complete.

Results

Uploaded on July 1, 2015, the virtual tour received twenty-nine views in the first two months, according to YouTube analytics (fig. 2). Viewership was understandably low considering the video was launched during summer break. With the fall 2015 semester

approaching, the author sought to increase the tour's visibility by marketing it to professors. To accomplish this goal, the video was embedded in a quiz within the course management system D2L, used across campus. The quiz instructed students to watch the video and then answer ten questions (appendix 2). D2L automatically graded the quizzes, further reducing professors' time commitment.

In the fall 2015 semester, two English professors agreed to incorporate the virtual library tour into their courses. The D2L quiz was assigned to one section of English 150: Advanced Freshman English and to four sections of English 101: Freshman English. The professors agreed to share anonymized quiz scores with the author. In all, eighty-eight students completed the quiz. Students averaged 9.18 correct answers out of a possible ten (fig. 1). Also, overall viewership of the video increased with 637 views during the fall 2015 semester (fig. 2), according to YouTube analytics.

D2L Quiz Results		
Course	Students	Average Score
English 150	13	9.85
English 101	75	9.07
Total	88	9.18

Fig. 1. This table shows the number of students who completed the virtual library tour quiz in fall 2015 in English 150 and English 101. The average score surpassed 90 percent on the ten-question quiz.

Virtual Library Tour Views		
Months	Views	Monthly Average
July–August 2015	29	14.5
September–December 2015	637	159.25
Total	666	111

Fig. 2. The four-minute video “UWSP Library Tour” was posted July 1, 2015, on YouTube.

Although light initially, viewership increased substantially in fall 2015 after professors assigned the video to English courses.

Discussion

Although time-intensive to create, the virtual library tour accomplished the goal of providing an online option for students to familiarize themselves with the building, collections, and services. As YouTube statistics indicated, students did not seek out the virtual tour unprompted. However, after the tour was assigned as a D2L quiz, views increased substantially. The virtual tour provided an online option for professors as well. Instead of committing an entire class period to a scavenger hunt or guided in-person tour, professors could assign the virtual tour as a quiz, which D2L graded automatically upon completion. This allowed professors and librarians to practice flipped-classroom concepts.

Limitations

Judging by scores, students comprehended the virtual library tour well, posting better than a 91 percent average on the D2L quiz. However, students’ prior knowledge of the library is unknown. No data exist whether students preferred the virtual tour over a scavenger hunt or an in-person guided tour.

The virtual tour required proficiency in several software programs, which might prevent tech-challenged librarians from attempting. The video’s quality benefitted from professional photographs, but some libraries might not have access to campus photographers. Considering these factors, cost could be prohibitive because software and professional photos would be expensive to purchase. Although the author did not track hours, a virtual tour also requires substantial staff time, which carries a significant dollar value.

Despite being labor intensive to create, the UWSP Library Tour became outdated within months of its release. For example, the library stopped circulating iPads, rendering a portion of the video as incorrect. The following year, the library building changed its name to Albertson Hall, creating a glaring inaccuracy in the video. To reflect these developments, the virtual tour was revamped in fall 2017 using the PowerPoint addon Mix. With Mix's editing functions, the video now can be updated relatively quickly.

Conclusion

Despite limitations, the results of this study indicate the benefits of a virtual library tour from a time-management perspective for both librarians and professors. With these benefits in mind, the UWSP Library has continued to implement the virtual library tour. It has been embedded in the videogame QuizSmith developed by Polk Library at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Compatible with D2L, the videogame invites students to compete against classmates by answering timed questions based on the virtual tour. Professors have assigned the videogame in multiple courses. UWSP Library also has published a link to the virtual tour on promotional bookmarks, which have been distributed during first-year student vendor fairs and a campus family day.

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Appendix 1

This is a transcript of the “UWSP Library Tour” video (youtu.be/W1VcwPYrqj0) published July 1, 2015, on YouTube:

Meet Stevie. Stevie is a new student at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. For good grades, Stevie will spend a lot of time at the UWSP Library. Let’s go there now.

The UWSP Library is located in the Learning Resources Center. The library contains 600,000 items throughout sixth floors. The building also features computer labs, a museum, a coffee shop, a tutoring center, disabilities services, the IT Help Desk, and much more. Let’s follow Stevie on a tour of the UWSP Library, shall we?

On the first floor, Stevie visits the Access Services Desk. At the Access Services Desk, Stevie can check out books, periodicals, course reserves, laptops, iPads, and many other items.

Around the corner, Stevie stops by the reference desk, also located on the first floor. At the reference desk, Stevie can ask UWSP librarians for help with his research assignments.

On the second floor, Stevie explores the periodicals collection. In periodicals, Stevie can find journals, magazines, and newspapers.

The third floor hosts the Instructional Materials Center, better known as the IMC. In the IMC, Stevie can find videos, children’s books, school textbooks, CDs, and other items. Stevie especially enjoys creating objects on the library’s 3-D printer, which also is located in the IMC.

UWSP Library’s main book collection begins on the fourth floor and continues to the fifth floor.

The fourth floor also offers 16 group study rooms. Group study rooms can be reserved at the Access Services Desk on first floor. However, two IDs are required. Make sure to bring a friend.

Along with the library's main book collection, the fifth floor houses the University Archives. The Archives preserves historical documents from the university, county, and state. The University Archives is a wonderful place to research the campus, important events, and Central Wisconsin genealogy. Stevie even bumped into a few ancestors.

The sixth floor contains government documents. The collection features thousands of documents from the federal government and the state of Wisconsin.

That concludes our tour of the UWSP Library. To learn more about the library, visit www.uwsp.edu/library. Thank you for tagging along.

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Appendix 2

Based on the “UWSP Library Tour” video (youtu.be/W1VcwPYrqj0), these questions were embedded into a quiz in the course management system D2L at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point:

1. Where is the UWSP Library located?

- Learning Resources Center
- George Stien Building
- Dreyfus University Center
- Schmeeckle Reserve

Correct answer: Learning Resources Center

2. How many items does the UWSP Library contain?

- 400,000
- 1 million
- 150,000
- 600,000

Correct answer: 600,000

3. What types of items can you check out at the Access Services Desk on first floor?

- laptops
- books
- course reserves
- all of the above

Correct answer: all of the above

4. Where can you ask a librarian for help with research assignments?

- Access Services Desk
- Reference Desk
- Instructional Materials Center (IMC)
- Government Documents

Correct answer: Reference Desk

5. Where are government documents located?

- fifth floor
- first floor
- third floor
- sixth floor

Correct answer: sixth floor

6. Where can you reserve a group study room?

- Access Services Desk
- University Archives
- Periodicals
- Reference Desk

Correct answer: Access Service Desk

7. The main book collection begins on which floor?

- fifth floor
- fourth floor
- second floor
- first floor

Correct answer: fourth floor

8. Where are newspapers located?

- Reference Desk
- Instructional Materials Center (IMC)
- Government Documents
- Periodicals

Correct answer: Periodicals

9. Where is the library's 3-D printer?

- Instructional Materials Center (IMC)
- Periodicals
- Reference Desk
- University Archives

Correct answer: Instructional Materials Center (IMC)

10. Where is the best place to research UWSP historical events?

- Government Documents
- Access Services Desk
- Periodicals
- University Archives

Correct answer: University Archives