Point of Need: Ask A Librarian in the UIC Blackboard Environment

Managing an Integrated Future: Library Content, Library Services and the Campus Course Management System

Abstract:
Of the many desirable functions that public services librarians would like to see available to our users through a course management system, providing access to an online reference service would rank near the top. Not only are these services often already extant and reliably staffed, but they also provide a “stopgap” measure in that they give reference and instruction librarians a chance to intervene in the information seeking behavior of our patrons.

At UIC, we initiated a project in coordination with a group of incoming freshman classes – the so-called LINKS program – to provide immediate access from each class’ Blackboard site to the library’s email- and chat-reference service, Ask A Librarian. In its initial inception, this access was simply an external link to the appropriate library page. In its second iteration, however, we worked in partnership with our digital reference system provider, OCLC/QuestionPoint, to provide a more Blackboard-integrated solution. Librarians and OCLC developers collaborated to create submission forms that mimicked the Blackboard interface, with each LINKS class having its own set of forms that identified the class and the method of submission. This integrated model allows users to interact with our digital reference service without appearing to leave the Blackboard environment; and allows librarians to collect use statistics on this submission method, question level, and type of information most required by these users.

We have since moved into the third semester of the project, and the data that we have been gathering through statistics, as well as faculty and librarian surveys, will help UIC move towards a fully integrated solution in the future. This integration will first be brought about through the use of generic “mimicked” forms installed by default at the campus level, and later through OCLC providing a fully integrated “building block” addition for Blackboard.

See examples of “mimicked” forms at:
http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/digital/bb/chat_libref.html

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