Architecture library web pages: The instruction dimension

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Architecture Library Web Pages: The Instruction Dimension

Before getting into the “Instruction Dimension” let’s start with a brief timeline to provide some context. I have been working on my Internet Guide to Architecture and Building for many years now: since 1992 at least, since the time of gophers, and other arcane applications I can barely remember like archie and veronica. It wasn’t until 1995, five years ago, that I started an architecture library home page, with a guide to researching architects that included print and net sources and of course with the Internet Guide to Architecture and Building. It is difficult for me now to visualize those fledging web postings! And yet it wasn’t that long ago!! Now, every handout I create goes on the home page. Now, many “handouts” are available only on the web (for example, all the Las Vegas architecture material I and a couple of grad assistants are generating). Now, some material is only possible on the web (for example the virtual tour of the architecture library space).

At the time, in my annual reports, I labeled this type of material, this type of activity, as “reference.” I now see this as instruction. [I am basing this differentiation on these definitions: anticipating questions is instruction, whereas reference is answering questions.] Basically, from this perspective, if you have a web page up for your library, you are engaging in instruction. If you present your hours, your staff names, and a link to the online catalog, that too is instruction. It all falls into the category of anticipating our patrons’ information needs and questions.

Although I will be presenting material that goes past this basic beginning, I want to emphasize that building on the base -- no matter how abbreviated! -- can be as gradual or as dramatic as time, inclination and expertise allow. In fact, what I will be showing you of my own pages is a snapshot-in-time of building on the base. We don’t much see the “under construction” signs on web pages anymore, but these pages are definitely “under construction” “in progress” and -- hopefully -- “getting better all the time”!!

Where it all started

Although I maintain that most of our web pages can be considered part of the “Instruction Dimension”, I am going to focus today on one section of the ASL web page: “How to Find Resources in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Interior Design” http://library.nevada.edu/arch/instr/onlineinstruction.html. I will discuss the development of those pages, demonstrate how they are progressing, and highlight some areas I will be working on next.

I have taught a one-credit course for second-year architecture students for six years, since spring 1995. The syllabus for the last year it was taught (spring 2000) is online http://library.nevada.edu/arch/instr/aad283/aad283.html. Each year the syllabus has been substantially revised, although its basic components [objectives, week-by-week breakdown, bases for grading, etc.] stayed much the same. Eventually the syllabus was
added to the Architecture Studies Library web pages. Subsequently more and more was added to the online syllabus including:

- links to related UNLV Architecture Studies Library web material such as Library maps: http://library.nevada.edu/arch/archbran.html
- assignments and exercises (pdf files throughout the syllabus)

This year all School of Architecture one-credit classes were deleted. This was the catalyst that lead me to start work on turning the material gathered in the syllabus into a tool that could be used for instruction, whether in-person or virtually, whether it included just one component or a whole series of components.

Where it is going, who it is aimed at

The stated objective of the “How to find” section is “to teach and enhance information seeking and evaluation skills. Diverse electronic and print means of finding and accessing information, including reference books, Internet resources, journals and books, and associations are explored.”

An additional -- unstated but fairly obvious! -- objective is to gather all the tools needed for various functions into groups (e.g. to find articles, I gather the links to indexes, the online catalog, and the document delivery form).

The stated audience is UNLV School of Architecture students. The unstated audience is my own staff, which is comprised almost entirely of students.

On the one hand I am seeking to create a stand-alone product; at the same time I am most conscious that it cannot replace the face-to-face contact, at least for many students.

How to get there: at least here’s one way!

*The first step was to convert the 17-week syllabus into coherent modules. This meant rearranging the material (a hefty task in itself) but little adding, and resulted in eleven modules. You can compare the syllabus, still online, with the modules.

Module 1: Finding your way in the Architecture Studies Library
Module 2: email
Module 3: Web navigation, evaluation of web sites
Module 4: Searching: books, periodical titles
Module 5: Searching: periodical articles on a topic
Four of the seventeen weeks were eliminated because they were midterms, finals, or spring break! There were two weeks each on using the web and on search strategies, which I combined.

*The next step was to add standard elements to each module allowing for questions, comments and navigation back to the top.*

Questions? Ask the Architecture Studies Librarian online [http://library.nevada.edu/Arch/archquestions.html](http://library.nevada.edu/Arch/archquestions.html) or any of the staff in the Architecture Studies Library. The general phone number for the library is 702-895-1959.

If you have comments about the usefulness of this module and/or how it can be improved, please contact Jeanne Brown, Architecture Studies Librarian, at jbrown@ccmail.nevada.edu

Other standard elements that will eventually be in each module include objectives, concepts being taught, active exercises, time required to complete the module, prerequisites, and assessment (both of the module and of learning).

*The next component to be added is what I covered in class and had never put on the web syllabus. This has been done now for Modules 1 and 5. I started with Module 5, “Searching: periodical articles on a topic,” because I felt this area to be the one most needed. This module serves as an example of what I have done/plan to do with each of the modules.*

It is amazing how loose a lesson plan can be for an in-person session. This had to be re-worked with the web user in mind. Research by Jacob Nielsen shows that web users are scanners. They scan a page looking for what they need. Module 5 has gone through several revisions, both of text and of format, to accommodate this insight. According to Nielsen scannable text uses

- highlighted keywords (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting; typeface variations and color are others)
- meaningful sub-headings (not "clever" ones)
- bulleted lists
- one idea per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph)
- the inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion.
half the word count (or less) than conventional writing

Or, to put it another way, text is broken into bite-sized chunks. Chunks are highlighted with bold or with larger type size. Let’s look at Module 5 and see how well that works.

http://library.nevada.edu/arch/instr/onlineinstruction.html#mod5

Module 5 has three major sections: the “lecture” which is the material I had presented in class, the detailed instructions or exercises, and the related links. Both the lecture and the exercises are presented in chunks, using bold and text size to highlight the topic of the paragraph. The exercises, as you see, are additionally aided by using color to distinguish the three areas of the exercise sheets and by screens from the indexes. I also separated it into “how to” and “results” which I think is helpful, but will need to work with the students using it more before I really believe that!

Module 1 is even more clearly divided into chunks.

*Borrowing from other libraries, or NO POINT REINVENTING THE WHEEL!

Two other modules are currently well developed: Module 10 and Module 12. Module 10, Citation Formats, started out as links to style guides along with the standard solicitation of comments. Module 12, Ethics of Information, did not exist (you’ll remember I created 11 modules from the original syllabus). Then I found Humboldt State University Library’s online instruction modules, and asked if I could import one into the UNLV pages, modify it for my purposes, and use it -- with credit of course. Humboldt had modified pages from James Madison University, so both are actually credited. They were most gracious, and the results, as they say, are on the web! I actually got two modules out of it, splitting their component on citations out from the plagiarism module.

http://library.nevada.edu/arch/instr/cite.html
http://library.nevada.edu/arch/instr/mod12.html

The explication in these modules is excellent, but the aspect I liked best was the self-test at the end of the ethics module, Module 12. http://library.nevada.edu/arch/instr/test.html

Here’s the first question:

1. As you browse through a book dealing with your topic, you come across a sentence that states very clearly a point you would like to make in your term paper. You add the sentence to your paper exactly as you see it and reference the book. Later a friend tells you that you did not have to do that for one meager sentence. You need only reference material when you use a ”substantial amount” from a book or article. Is your friend correct?

You can answer yes or no. Whichever you answer, this is the text that results:
The answer is NO. You must document the source from which you took a sentence. It will serve to provide your reader with an accurate account of the material you used to develop your conclusion. To not provide information about your sources can invalidate your research. It is plagiarism -- using another person's words or ideas without giving them credit.

I found this inspired, since it cuts in half the number of pages that have to be coded, and does not require the programming to interact with the computer, while still being “interactive.”

*Borrowing from other libraries: what I did not incorporate

This tutorial from University of Albany [http://169.226.11.130/divs/usered/webeval/](http://169.226.11.130/divs/usered/webeval/) has lots of good information, nice graphics, and I liked it, BUT, it forces the user to go through screen by screen, which does not allow review of a section later after they have been through the whole thing, and does not allow faculty to use in part to emphasize particular points. The little bits of info on each page I at least find frustrating. It actually goes counter to the scanning behavior of most users we mentioned earlier. Not that there is never a time for that, but this module has too much of it!

NetTutor from Ohio State has very nice tutorials, and I used part of their “Evaluation of web sites” module as the model for my Module 11. However, another part, [http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les1/pg4.html](http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les1/pg4.html) I decided not to use, partly because the topic was too specialized, but mainly because I don’t buy the premise that recognition equals quality.

Where to next?

My immediate goals are to expand the content and incorporate assessment into every module, both quizzes and some way to evaluate effectiveness. I may even do different quizzes, one version appropriate to a student using the modules on their own (such as the one I have up for “finding articles”, and another version appropriate for use as part of a class (perhaps emailed to me for grading). Middle term, I plan to add more interactivity and graphics.

Formatting is an easy way of making the text graphically effective. **Interactivity is ultimately the goal.** It is a bit slow going at the moment. The process is that changes in web material are suggested by me, but implemented by the page editor in technical services. She knows more than I do about graphic enhancements, but her skills are still rudimentary. So at this point I’d like to show you some of the graphical features I’d like to add.

Techniques from [http://www.digitalthink.com](http://www.digitalthink.com) sampler course, [http://www.digitalthink.com/resources/orientation/interactivity.html](http://www.digitalthink.com/resources/orientation/interactivity.html) [or choose any sampler course at [www.digitalthink.com/catalogs/samplers.html](http://www.digitalthink.com/catalogs/samplers.html), click on Orientation on the left, then interactivity], including

- mouseover (which can be a tricky way to add text without having your page look text-heavy)
- flipbook (useful to review steps e.g. in finding an article)
- thumbnail (to show sample screens and what they illustrate)
- simulation (could simulate a search)
- applet exercises (e.g. for a matching test, or to put elements in order, like call numbers, or the steps of a process)

Assessment of online instruction module: example:
Net.TUTOR [http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les2/survey.html](http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les2/survey.html)

Assessment of learning:
NetTUTOR has a module with a “quick quiz” – perfect for the person working through these on their own: [http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les1/pg3.html](http://gateway.lib.ohio-state.edu/tutor/les1/pg3.html)

Navigational possibilities, like the Kentucky Virtual Library Expanding Table of Contents [click on Unit x contents to get to where it allows you to expand] [http://www.kcvu.org/cvl/infolit.nsf](http://www.kcvu.org/cvl/infolit.nsf)

The corollary to the question “Where to next?” is “Do we like where we are going?” I don’t know the answer to that yet. Several advantages to the online instruction approach have been identified by Nancy O’Hanlon at Ohio State in a BI-L message, including

- expanding our audience (potentially anyway)
- flexibility (as in all tutorial approaches, this allows the fabricator to create and the learner to take when convenient)
- consistency (I know that even with three sections of an in-person class I did not always manage to make the same brilliant points).

If online instruction is just one component of an instruction program, if face-to-face instruction opportunities continue, then there are additional advantages, including reinforcement and enrichment of what is covered in class.

However, it is too soon to have assessed the reception to these modules, much less the impact. What do we lose as we tip the scales to electronic rather than face-to-face? I have started to use them with my student staff and have promoted them to faculty for their students’ use, hopefully to be required or referred to in the context of individual assignments. Initial input has been positive but meaningless. Long term goals definitely include working with users to see how they respond to the modules, and what their specific needs are.
There are several constraints and potential disadvantages that are apparent with online instruction. First, many of those using the modules will ignore the reinforcement so carefully added (e.g. the exercises). Second, even with active learning components, this type of learning will only appeal to certain learning types. And lastly, the essential components of assessment and interactivity are more difficult to incorporate online than with in-person instruction [or at least I find them so at the moment].

On the other hand there are some obvious advantages, especially if they are combined with some face-to-face instruction, be it in a class or in person, be it with the librarian or with the architecture faculty member. The very existence of the modules have allowed us to give the students a place where they can go if [when!] they don’t absorb all our “how to use the Avery” spiel. Online modules also allow updating instruction to incorporate new databases or indexes, better net search engines or whatever. The structure can remain familiar while the content changes – which could be a very useful approach for the lifelong learner.

Another major advantage of the modules is their potential as a staff training tool. With staff I can mandate necessary follow-up. It will also be a good virtual locale to group appropriate search tools for staff to use with patrons in various circumstances.

Warning: online modules may be just an intermediary step between “tradition” instruction and the next dimension of e-learning. We may quickly move to handhelds, wireless, instant messaging, and Gates only knows what! Meanwhile, it’s a heck of a ride! No wonder they came up with the name Yahoo!!
Architecture Library Web Pages: The Instruction Dimension.
Presentation to the Association of Architecture School Librarians, Baltimore, MD
March 17, 2001, by Jeanne Brown

Sites Referred to in the Presentation


Additional Material I found helpful in developing the online modules:


bi online disk