

Developing and Sustaining a Web-Based Library Newsletter



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ABSTRACT

Before the rising popularity of the Internet in the mid 1990's, Scott Library, like most others, used printed newsletters to inform users about new resources and services. The JEFFLINE Forum, our attempt to resuscitate the Library's newsletter by employing the technical advantages—and increasing presence—of the web, debuted in October of 1999. The fifth anniversary of the Forum seemed like a good time to look back at its evolution and to examine some of the challenges inherent in developing and sustaining a library newsletter.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In 1999, Scott Library's Director appointed a working group to develop an online newsletter with the following objectives:

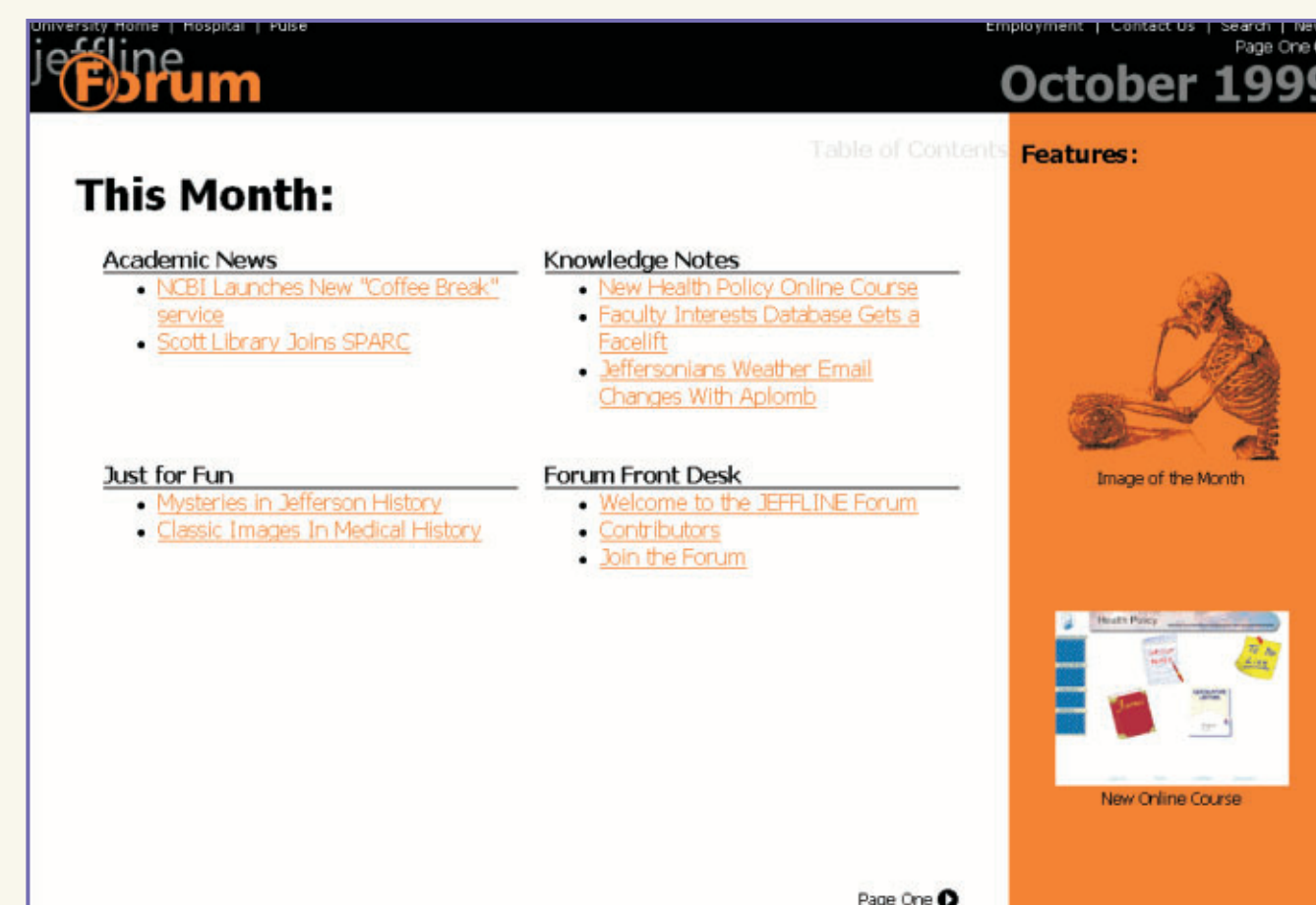
Develop content to highlight and support:

- Library news and information (primary focus)
- Educational initiatives and activities involving the participation of Library and AISR staff members (secondary focus)
- Faculty and student projects related to medical informatics and other healthcare literature. Encourage and recruit University and Hospital faculty and staff to contribute relevant articles (tertiary focus)

Implement these features for the site:

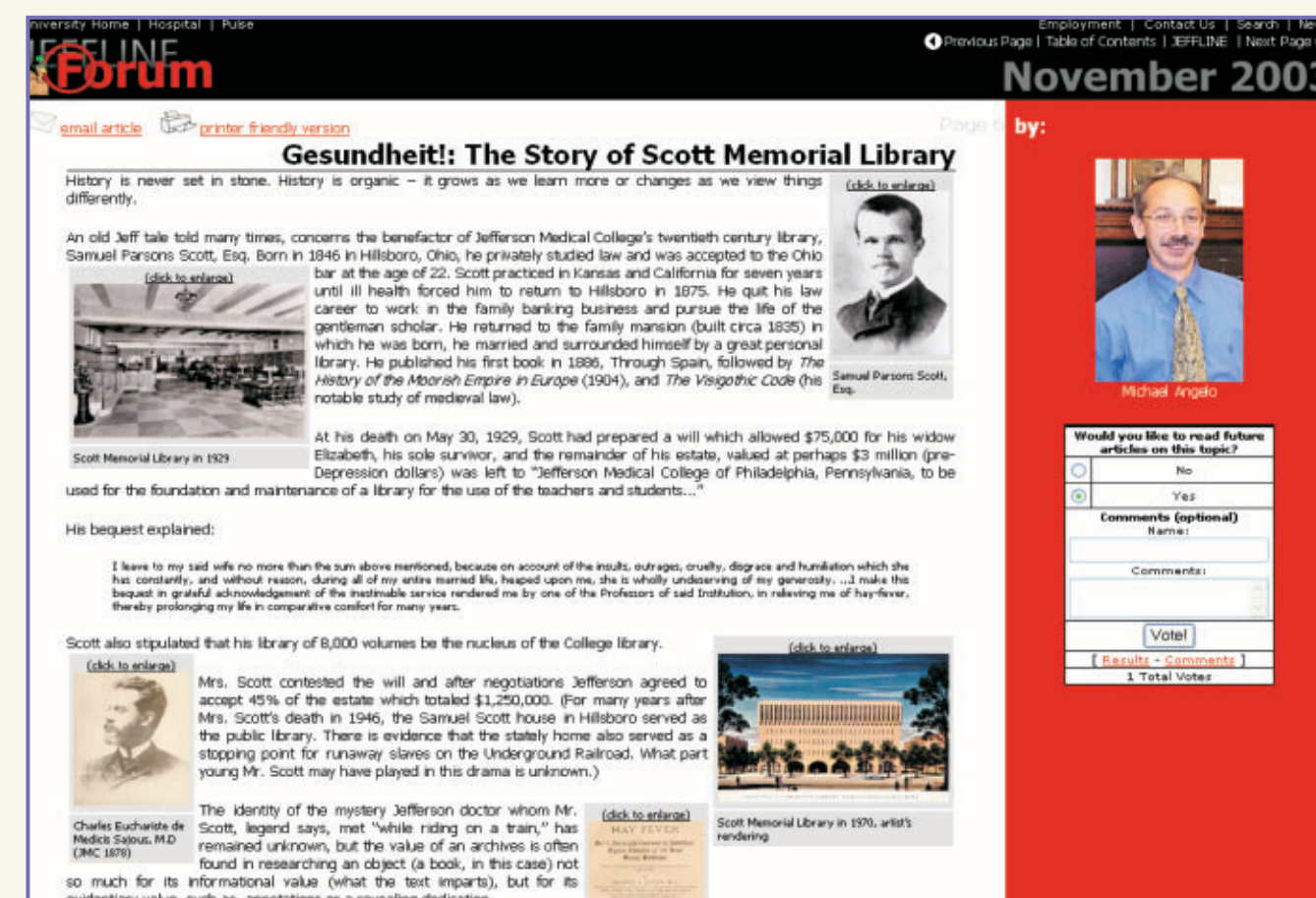
- Archive of previous issues
- Ability to search content (including current issue and all archived issues)
- Interactivity to allow readers to communicate with authors, and to discuss and rate topics.
- Email announcements of a new "newsletter" release to all patron's in the Library's security system and to all others who "opt" in

In addition, the name **JEFFLINE Forum** was chosen for the site to help associate Scott Library and its parent—Academic Information Services and Research (AISR)—with JEFFLINE, the campus academic information system.



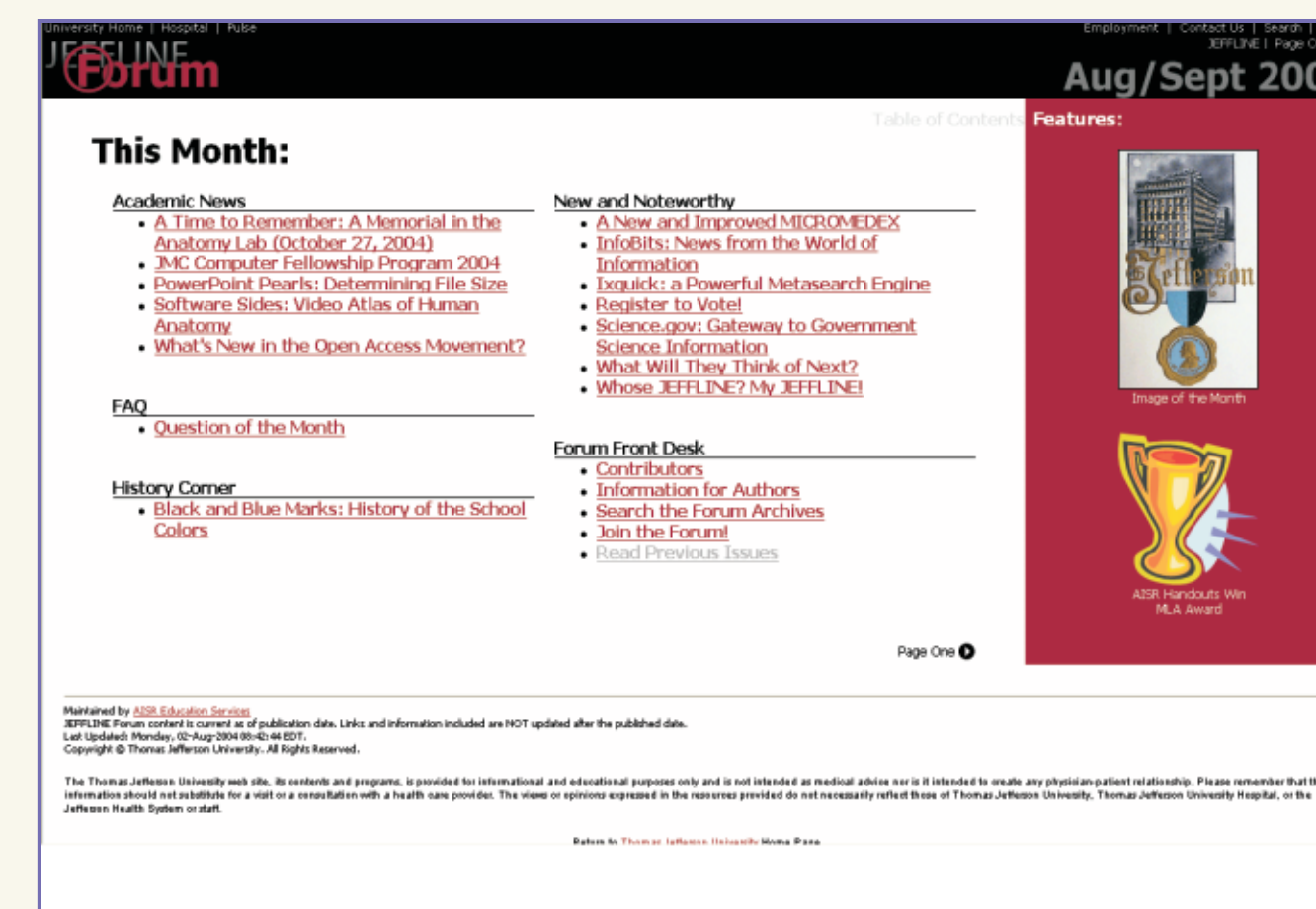
The first issue of the JEFFLINE Forum, October 1999.

A contents page containing links to articles and at least one "image of the month" gave the Forum its distinctive look.



From the beginning the Forum has highlighted the rich collection of objects and images in our University Archives.

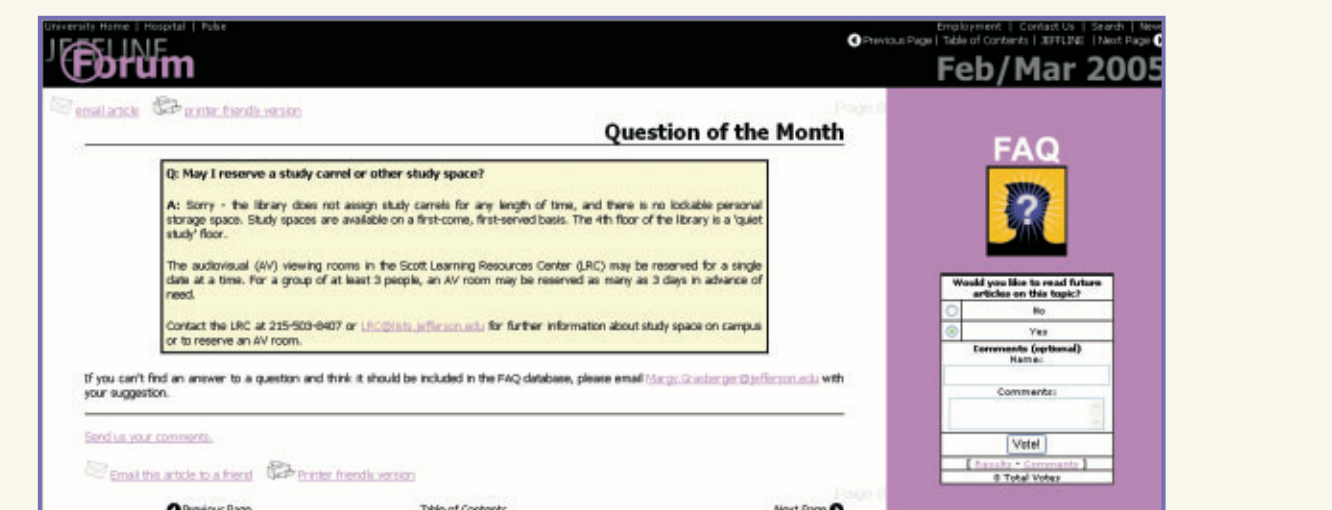
These have been among the most frequently read articles according to our analysis of "hits."



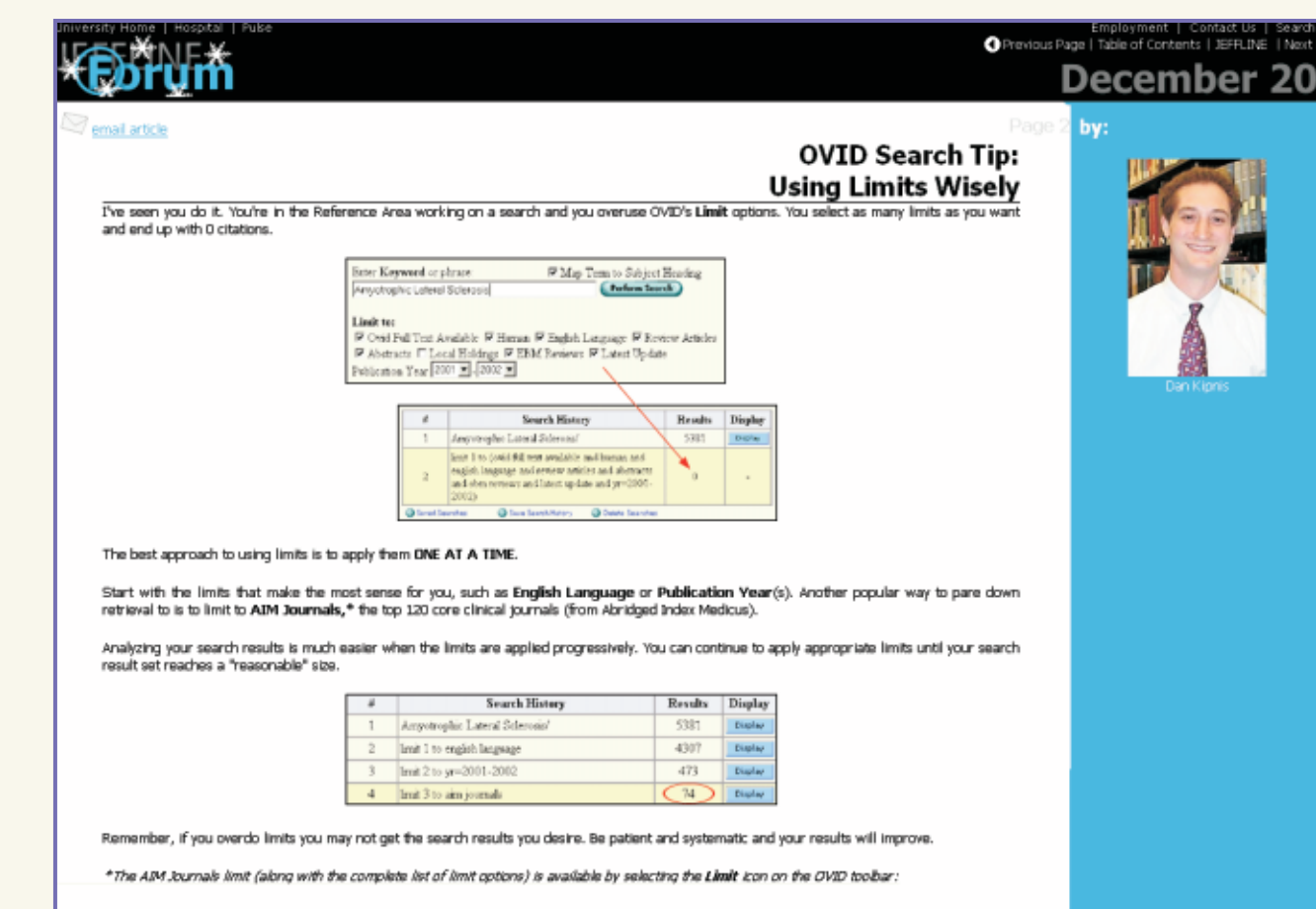
The same basic design is still used today, but The Forum is now published 6 times a year

The current issue is available at:

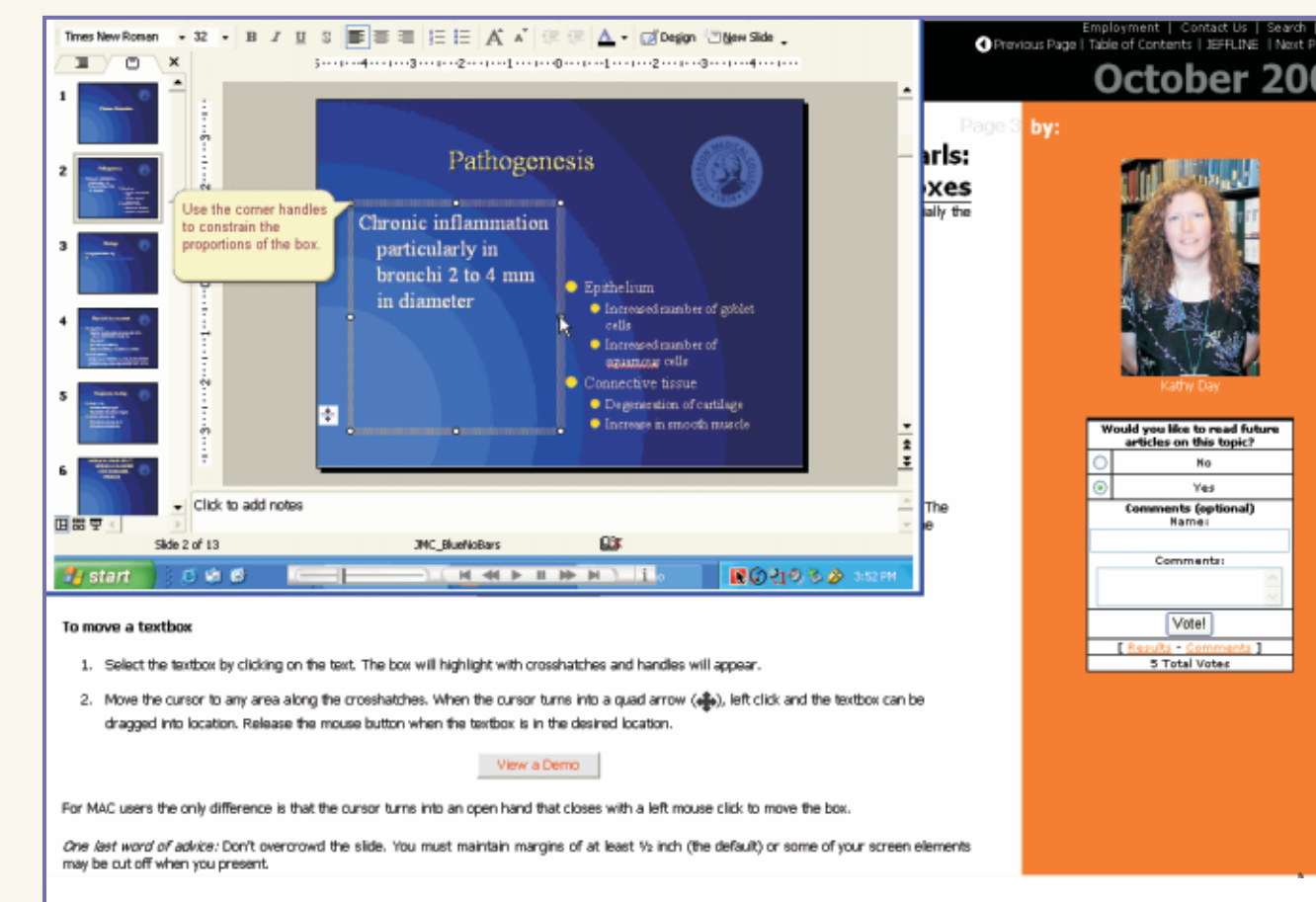
<http://jeffline.jefferson.edu/Education/forum/>



Regular features like Question of the Month (above) and InfoBits (below) have been added over time.



The Forum regularly offers searching tips focusing on a specific feature of a resource such as Ovid, PubMed, or Google.



Clicking View a Demo launches a separate window containing an automated demonstration of the tip or technique discussed in the article. (Flash movie)

ABSTRACT

Challenges:

- Building and tracking readership
- Soliciting feedback
- Maintaining staff interest in participation
- Recruiting "outside" authors
- Incorporating technology
- Increasing efficiency

Successful Strategies:

- Making contribution guidelines simple and easy to follow
- Establishing ties with library staff to contribute recurring series of articles (e.g., History Corner, New Books, PowerPoint Tips, Search Tips, InfoBits, Photoshop Phanatic)
- Recruiting non-library staff to contribute articles
- Using PageSpinner as HTML editor
- Creating automated demos to accompany "how to" articles and "tips."
- Adding a printer-friendly link and email article features to each article

Experience and Lessons Learned:

- It can be difficult to recruit new authors. Tap campus connections and workshop attendees as potential contributors.
- Tracking reader's interests is tricky. We use IMDpoll (freeware for online poll), but receive relatively few responses.
- Readers like the flash demos created using Camtasia and Robodemo which are incorporated into some articles.
- We recognize that the Forum is time consuming to edit and assemble—approximately 25 hours per issue (not including writing time)—even with increased experience and efficiency.
- As of February 2005, over 1,500 Jeffersonians and non-Jeffersonians subscribe to the JEFFLINE Forum listserv.

