Mary K. O'Kelly and Colleen Lyon

Google like a librarian

Sharing skills for search success

The workshop announcement started simply enough: "Your students are using it. You are using it. Why not get the most out of Google tools?" The workshop, called "Using Google Like a Librarian," was for faculty and staff at Grand Valley State University. Over the past two years, librarians have been teaming up with instructional technology staff to create on-campus professional development opportunities, and this was going to be (we thought) just another workshop. And then it got popular.

Why we did it

When we ask students where they start research, most say Google. But we began to suspect that the really interesting and useful Google tools went largely unknown, and, since we started paying more attention to how people use Google, we have seen that others have noticed (and written about) the same thing.[1,2]

One day after a busy week of instruction, we started talking about some of the misunderstandings people have about Google searching. Both of us noticed in our classes an under-appreciation for Google's many functions, especially those that go beyond the simple search box. We also realized that librarians know a Google trick or two that other faculty and staff might find useful.

Google seemed at first like a rather frivolous topic for a faculty workshop. Yet, upon further thought, it made a lot of sense. We had been assuming that, sure, everyone knows how to use Google. But do they really know how to Google like a librarian?

How we did it

In May 2010 we advertised the "Using Google Like a Librarian" workshop for two of Grand Valley's campuses. We expected a half-dozen or so participants, figuring that it was new and, really, everyone already knows how to use Google, right? Both sessions were nearly filled. We repeated the sessions in September 2010, and this time they filled up, had waiting lists to get in, and generated several requests for more sessions. Based on the "sold-out" enrollment, these were among the most popular workshops the library has ever offered.

The notice for the workshop promised that participants:

• will know how to use many of the fun and interesting advanced search options in Google,

• will learn what Google Scholar and Google Books are, and how they and their students can use those tools for research, and

• will set up a Google account and know how to create, edit, share, and upload files.

The lesson plan included how to use the Google menu bar, some fun search tips (e.g., conversions, earthquakes, airline flight tracking, and public data, plus many more),[3] Google Scholar, Google Books, Google Translate, Google Finance, and Google Docs.

Mary K. O'Kelly is research and instruction librarian at Grand Valley State University, e-mail: okellym@gvsu.edu, and Colleen Lyon is digital repository librarian at the University of Texas-Austin, e-mail: c.lyon@austin.utexas.edu

The sessions were an hour-and-a-half long, so we split the presentation between two librarians to make it easier on the presenters and to make it more interesting for the audience. The lesson was grouped into four sections: advanced search, Books and Scholar, Translate and Finance, and finally Google Docs.

An hour-and-a-half is a long time to pay attention to a projection screen, even for the most focused student, so we felt it was important to hand out a fill-in-the-blank worksheet and to hold the sessions in a computer lab. Participants were free to follow along on the computers, to fill in the worksheet, to make notes, or simply to sit and listen, based on their own learning styles. We also hoped that the worksheet could be used as a reference tool after the workshop.

All workshop documents were loaded into the Blackboard course management system for ease of future use by participants and presenters.

Why it worked

Almost everyone we've spoken to uses Google on a daily or almost daily basis. Yet we suspected that many who use Google, even those who use it often, had either been frustrated by Google results in the past, were convinced there was more that Google could do but didn't know how, or didn't have time to figure it out. We suspect three reasons for high interest in our workshops:

• Google can be used for nearly any topic, the workshop appealed to a much wider audience than other workshops. It's relevant and realistic: people can strike up an easy conversation with colleagues about Google, it doesn't require special software, it's not limited to one discipline, and it's quick to get started.

• The sessions were in computer labs, so participants could follow along with the presenters. We gave them hands-on, in-the-moment practice. One particularly satisfying aspect of the session for the

librarians was the many "oohs and ahhs" from participants when we introduced short cuts or advanced features.

• When advertising it to faculty, we emphasized that "Your students are using it. You're using it. Why not get the most out of Google tools?" We pointed at the elephant in the room and said, "Let's take a ride!"

It seems like the timing was right, too. Our own discourse had moved from, "Do students use Google?" to "How do students use Google?" *Inside Higher Ed* recently reported on a presentation by Andrew Asher at the 2010 Ithaka Sustainable Scholarship Conference that looked at "what happens when students do not learn how to use Google properly."[4]

Then the *New York Times Upfront* magazine re-asked the question "Is Google making us stupid?" and aimed the debate squarely at teens.[5] We hope it's not too bold to claim that classroom faculty are at the front lines with students, that librarians support faculty, and that librarians know Google.

Why it's important

An observational study in Sweden found that most faculty use Google for all their research needs and weren't aware of the services the library and librarians offered.[6] This is one reason why it's so important for librarians to market all of their skills so that faculty associate us with the entire research process and not just the part that involves library resources. We noticed in conversations that students and faculty were using some Google resources incorrectly.

For instance, most faculty and students don't know how critical Scholar Preferences are to using Google Scholar from an off-campus location. This is also an opportunity to talk about Google Scholar as a back door into library resources and not completely separate from a library search.

It was this strong emphasis on using Google as a *supplement* to library resources that was most important. Workshops like

this are an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between librarians and the university community. Even the title of the workshop reinforced the librarians' expertise: "Using Google Like a Librarian." People turn to librarians as search experts; this was offered as an opportunity to learn how the experts do it.

With expertise can come remarkable efficiency. Yes, we asked our faculty and staff to share well over an hour of their busy work weeks learning how to use Google better. But we also wanted better use of Google to be accompanied by faster and smarter use. Knowing some of the search tips, knowing another way to get to scholarly articles, and knowing how to navigate Google Books all could save time and energy.

Project Information Literacy researchers found that students "consulted their instructors first when looking for research information from a person—before they consulted librarians, if they did, at all."[7]

The researchers also found that Google was the most popular source for students looking for "everyday life research" and second-most popular when completing course assignments.[8]

We agree with the researchers' recommendation that "librarians need to actively identify opportunities for training faculty,"[9] and, as an extension of that, we feel that it's important not to focus only on database and library skills training. If Google is as ubiquitous as we think, using it as a training topic is worth our focus, too.

What's next

We are thinking of creating videos in either Wimba Classroom or Camtasia that could be used as a refresher for those who attended the workshop or as an introduction to those who were unable to attend.

Most likely the workshop will be offered again. Based on feedback from past workshops, we may adjust the lesson plan to reflect new Google features and to incorporate more of the Google search capabilities.[10] There also seems to be considerable interest in using Google Docs, so a session just for that tool is possible.

The success of such a workshop raises several interesting questions: Are the skills retained? Are the elements of the lesson plan reflective of the greatest learning need? Is there a gap between what learners expect and what the instructors present? Is there a lasting efficiency effect? Future assessment could focus on any one of these questions.

Notes

1. Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson, "Beyond Googling: Applying Google Tools to inquiry-based learning," *Teacher Librarian* 37, no. 4 (April 2010), 83–86.

2. Steve Kolowich, "Searching for better research habits," *Inside Higher Ed,* September 2010, www.insidehighered.com /news/2010/09/29/search (accessed May 11, 2011).

3. See www.google.com/landing /searchtips/.

4. Kolowich.

5. Nicholas Carr and Peter Norvig, "Is Google making us stupid?," *New York Times Upfront* 143, no. 3, (2010): 22, http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront /debate/index.asp?article=d100410 (accessed May 11, 2011).

6. Lotta Haglund and Per Olsson, "The impact on university libraries of changes in information behavior among academic researchers: a multiple case study," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34, no. 1, (2001): 52–59.

7. Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, "Lessons learned: How college students seek information in the digital age" (Seattle, WA: Project Information Literacy, The Information School, University of Washington, 2009): 15, http://projectinfolit.org/pdfs/PIL_Fall2009 _Year1Report_12_2009.pdf (accessed May 11, 2011).

8. Ibid, 16.

9. Ibid, 35.

10. See www.google.com/help/features. html. ♫