

## **DO Get Technical! Using Technology in Library Instruction WILU 2011, Regina, SK**

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### ***Abstract***

Today's post-secondary students are digital natives. Much has been said and written about how to reach this generation, and the consensus seems to be that we need to meet them on their turf. In this session, presented at WILU 2011 in Regina, SK, two librarians from the University of Lethbridge shared their experiences with using technology to engage students in library instruction. The hands-on session introduced some simple tools librarians can learn quickly and apply to spice up their instruction with technology. These include creating online animated videos using Xtranormal, a low-cost way to create polished and humorous videos to introduce or summarize key information literacy concepts; and adding interactive polling to PowerPoint presentations using a tool called Poll Everywhere, which is an effective way to instantly engage students in instruction using the web or web-enabled devices. Interactive polling eliminates many of the challenges of using clickers which are prevalent in many post-secondary library instruction environments. The presenters also discussed how they have experimented with wikis to encourage active learning and student collaboration in a series of library instruction sessions. Wikis allow for free and paperless student participation in knowledge creation in an online forum. Finally, they demonstrated how they have used Skype to deliver library instruction at a distance, including the use of the screen sharing feature. The presenters stressed the ease of use of these free or low-cost tools to improve classroom engagement and add interest to sessions.

### ***Keywords***

information literacy; bibliographic instruction; technology; active learning; student engagement

### ***Introduction***

Library instruction is viewed by many students as being less than enthralling. Students may not understand how important the library can be for their academic endeavours, or

they may think that they already know all they need to know. As a result, librarians often seek new and innovative ways to engage classes, trying different techniques to gain their attention and make them see the relevance of library use to their studies. It was this desire to engage the students in new ways and to make library instruction more interesting and relevant to the students that encouraged the authors to try some new technology in the classroom. The results of their adventures over the past year are shared here.

One way to gain the attention of today's 'digital natives' is by using technology in new and innovative ways. While there is little value in promoting the use of technology just for the sake of using technology, technology can be used to enhance instruction. As West states, "... the technology is not really the star in this show; not surprisingly, it is the pedagogy that takes center stage" (Academic Commons). Technology can be a good way to connect with today's students – it is the world they are familiar and comfortable with – and, as such, may make them more open to receiving the message being taught. Technology can make library instruction more engaging, more entertaining and more interactive.

In this paper the authors introduce four tools with which they have experimented and had some success. Many librarians – including the authors themselves – experience anxiety when the notion of using new technology in the classroom is introduced. The tools outlined in this paper, however, are all very simple for both instructors and students to use, and require limited technological expertise to implement. The authors stress that they do not possess a great deal of technical expertise, so if they can use these tools, anyone can. In addition, these applications are all either free or very low-cost, so adopting them won't cut into a library's budget.

### ***Xtranormal*** (<http://www.xtranormal.com/>)

Xtranormal is an online tool that allows users to create their own animated cartoons using preset scenes and characters. Those characters "speak" what is typed in the script for the movie or recorded by the creator's own voice. Certain expressions, animations and camera angles can also be added to animate the video.

This online tool requires the user to create an account; no downloads are required. You can make one Xtranormal video for free; after that you must buy points. The more points you buy the less expensive they are, but generally it costs only two to three dollars for a basic movie. Once you pay for a set or a character you can use them as often as you like. It is very easy to learn this tool, but, depending upon your level of involvement, you can spend a lot of time refining and editing your videos.

Xtranormal is an entertaining and inexpensive way to present information. One of the authors used it in online library tutorials she produced for an academic writing program, creating a scenario in which two student characters meet on campus and discuss common research challenges. In one video, one student tells the other about a 'very confusing topic' he has been assigned, and his friend advises him to ask a librarian for

help to teach him about databases (see Figure 1). Although the students' reactions to these videos were not specifically measured, in the evaluation of the overall tutorial program these videos were mentioned by several students as being engaging, entertaining and humorous. The format in which they were presented simulated peer-to-peer teaching or collaborative learning, which has been shown as an effective pedagogical technique (Wang). If not over-used, amusing and interesting cartoons can help students remember key information.

In addition to their application for online tutorials, Xtranormal videos could be used in live classroom situations to introduce a topic or summarize a lesson in a humorous and engaging manner. They could also be used to create responses for frequently asked questions about library research, with characters asking and answering each other's questions. Students could also create their own videos in order to demonstrate their understanding of a topic.

Xtranormal videos are generally very easy to produce. One challenge is that the producer sometimes has to misspell words to get characters to pronounce them properly, and occasionally find synonyms when the program does not allow the characters to cooperate in their pronunciation. You can preview just the speech or the whole video as often as you want before 'producing' it and going live; you can save it and return to it later. Once it is produced it is published on your Xtranormal page – created with your account – and you can then link to it or use the code provided to embed it elsewhere, similar to having a YouTube channel.

Xtranormal is a fun, low-cost way to add some humour and interest to your class or tutorial. It is still relatively unknown, so students are often amused and impressed by it.



Figure 1: Screen capture of one of the presenter's Xtranormal videos created for an online tutorial.

## **Poll Everywhere (<http://www.polleverywhere.com/>)**

Poll Everywhere is an online polling feature which allows a class of students to provide anonymous answers to user-created questions which can be embedded into PowerPoint. Users create an account with no software downloads required; a basic account allows up to 30 responses per question and unlimited questions for free, and upgrades range from \$15 to \$1,400 per month. Poll Everywhere is very intuitive to learn and use, and the slides containing the questions are easily downloaded and incorporated into your existing PowerPoint presentation.

Poll Everywhere works in much the same way as classroom clickers, except students use either computers or mobile phones to submit responses (and, as such, it is necessary to ensure that students have either texting abilities or computers available in the instruction room). As we have seen with classroom clickers (among others, see Bartsch and Murphy 25; Stagg and Lane 197; Williamson, Sprague, and Dahl 93; Deleo, Eichenholtz, and Sosin 438), this is a great way to encourage class participation, especially among those students who might otherwise hesitate to contribute. All answers are anonymous; no cell phone or computer information is collected by Poll Everywhere.

Once an account is set up, you can create an unlimited number of different questions. Question types include 'multiple choice' (which can also accommodate true/false questions); 'free text', which allows participants to enter a short answer; or 'goal poll', which can be used to track pledges, donations or sales goals. The authors have used mainly the multiple choice format, although they plan to use the free text format in the future to assist with brainstorming sessions.

Each poll is created by simply typing in the question and its associated answer(s), as applicable, on the screen (see Figure 2). Polls can be downloaded in bulk or one at a time to PowerPoint slides, which can then be cut and pasted into any PowerPoint template to be seamlessly integrated into a lesson. Each download includes several automatically generated instructional slides which explain to the audience how to use the tool. A code is provided for each answer choice, and a number is given to which students may text their chosen answer. For those without texting abilities, answers can also be entered online at [www.poll4.com](http://www.poll4.com). The polls are updated instantly, and the PowerPoint slide changes dynamically as students enter their answers. This usually elicits a few 'oohs' and 'aahs' from students as they see the bars/percentages grow and change as the answers are submitted. An alternate view allows the presenter to hide the answers until the students have stopped submitting, eliminating the chance that slower students will change their vote after seeing how the majority have been answering.

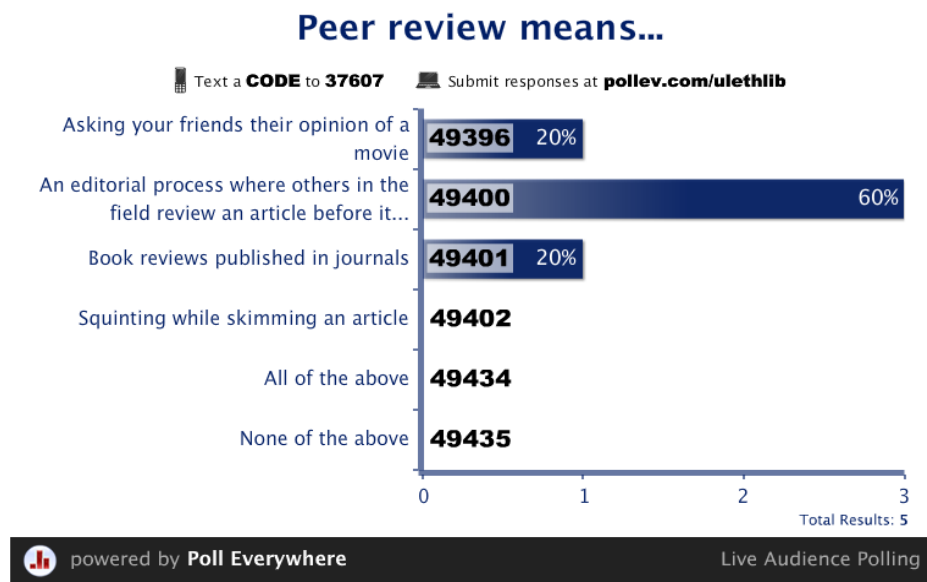


Figure 2: Example of a Poll Everywhere poll.

These polls can be used as quick pre- or post-tests in any classroom situation, or to do fast mid-session checks of student understanding. It has been the authors' experience that students almost always participate, possibly because the anonymity of their answers means they don't have to worry about giving the incorrect response. Using the free-text poll to collect brainstorming answers can help with gathering all of the students' input as well as allowing all students to answer, even those who would normally be too insecure to shout out their answers in class. The authors used the multiple choice feature in a new student orientation session to gauge incoming students' knowledge of the library (and show them that they might not already know everything!) and as a wrap-up of lessons learned over a series of library labs. In both cases, it proved to be a popular and fun way to engage the students.

### **Wikis (<http://pbworks.com/>)**

Due to the prevalence of Wikipedia, most web users are familiar with the concept of wikis. What many instructors may not realize is that wikis can also be an effective tool for classroom collaboration. Wikis can be established which permit different levels of participation, ranging from completely open sites such as Wikipedia to those restricted to a particular group of users (such as a class). By definition, wikis exist in 'the cloud' with no downloads required. The authors used the free version of PBworks for our instruction classes. Various account levels can be created; the free version allows for contributions by up to 100 students; a classroom edition can be purchased for \$99 per year which allows for more flexibility and restricted access to outside users, and a campus-wide version is available for \$799 per year. PBworks is fairly easy to learn and

to incorporate into lessons; the cost is mainly in the time needed to monitor student contributions.

The premise behind wikis is that they are collaborative; all users can edit or create new entries. Student participation in a wiki is an effective way to promote active learning. This can help students create meaning as they make associations between their topic and other pages and participate in the collaborative creation of knowledge. The authors created a PBworks wiki for use during the course of a six-week Liberal Education library lab series (see Figure 3). There are many different wikis on the market to choose from, ranging from free to high-cost. The authors chose PBworks because they were already familiar with it, it was free and the features included (basically the ability for fifty students to contribute to multiple pages) were sufficient for our limited needs.

The goals of the lab were to make students familiar with the information cycle (how knowledge is created over time) and to provide them with practice searching for information from a variety of sources. As a vehicle to explore this, we looked at the “Montreal Massacre”, a school shooting at the École Polytechnique in 1989. Each week, students looked at the different types of information available after the incident, moving further away in time from the initial event, and added annotated citations to the class wiki for the different sources they found. Collaboration was encouraged by disallowing duplication of citations already submitted by other students and by encouraging comments and discussion about the sources found by their classmates. This was an effective exercise in allowing the students to realize their role in the creation of information, as well as the importance of evaluating sources and learning about the information cycle.

Other possible uses of a wiki in library instruction may include, but are not limited to, course discussion boards, collaboratively created and maintained subject guides, or to collect group project documents. In addition to the specific lesson at hand, wikis may also serve to reinforce to students that online sources are only as good as their creators. It is also good for students to engage with a technology that is becoming more prevalent, and that they are likely to encounter at some point in the future, either personally or professionally (Reilly).

For the conference session, the presenters had participants create pages of their own favourite classroom technologies and comment on pages created by others to demonstrate some of the different wiki functionalities. This page can be viewed at <https://wilu2011.pbworks.com/>.



**Liberal Education 1000**

last edited by [nicole.eva@uleth.ca](mailto:nicole.eva@uleth.ca) 8 months, 4 weeks ago Page history

### Welcome to Liberal Education 1000 - Library Labs

This is the site where you will be able to add the resources you find as we work our way through the information cycle in class. **Use the menu on the right to select your class section.**

**Goals of the Labs:**

**After your 6 sessions in these labs you will be able to:**

- describe the information cycle
- identify when you need information
- identify several information sources
- conduct a basic search of the library databases
- identify primary, secondary, and tertiary information
- evaluate information using the CRAAP method
- identify the characteristics of research in different academic disciplines

**Course Grade**

These library labs are worth 15% of your overall grade for Liberal Education 1000. You will be graded as follows:

- Attendance - 1 mark per day = 6%
- Wiki postings - 3 x 1% = 3%
- Class Presentation = 6%

**Instructors:** Nicole Eva and Heather Nicholson  
You can contact us by email: [nicole.eva@uleth.ca](mailto:nicole.eva@uleth.ca) OR [heather.nicholson@uleth.ca](mailto:heather.nicholson@uleth.ca)

**Right Sidebar:**

To join this workspace, [request access](#).

Already have an account? [Log in!](#)

**Navigator**

- Help and Links
- **Liberal Education 1000**
- SideBar
- Tuesday Lab - 6 months until today
- Tuesday Lab - One week to Six months
- Tuesday Lab - the first week

Pages: No Files options

**SideBar**

**Questions????**

Contact Nikki at [nicole.eva@uleth.ca](mailto:nicole.eva@uleth.ca) OR Heather at [heather.nicholson@uleth.ca](mailto:heather.nicholson@uleth.ca)

**Need Help with Citing Your Source(s)?**

Check out this link: <http://www.uleth.ca/lib/guides/research/display.asp?PageID=1>

Figure 3: Screen shot of course wiki used by the presenters.

## Skype (<http://www.skype.com/>)

Another well-known application, Skype, is essentially an online videoconferencing tool. Used by friends and families worldwide to stay in touch, it is also useful for classroom and business applications as it allows screen sharing. The basic application, which the presenters used, is free. This allows computer-to-computer video calling. Subscriptions of up to nine dollars per month can also be purchased to allow for multi-user conference calls, advertising-free screens and other 'premium' features such as calls to land lines and mobile phones, but the presenters have never seen a need for any of these additional features. Skype does require both 'ends' of the call (i.e., instructor and classroom) to download the software to their computers and create an account to make and receive calls; they will also need to have a video camera, microphone and speakers (which can be obtained fairly inexpensively) at both ends. It is extremely easy to download and install this software and to use it effectively.

The authors used Skype to teach information literacy sessions to students located at their university's two satellite campuses. There were many technical considerations when choosing how to connect with these students. It was desirable to have a 'live' presence for students during class time (as opposed to having a pre-recorded online tutorial) in order to maintain a personal connection with the students and their instructors, who already feel disconnected from the library as they are physically distant from the main campus. This suggested a videoconference format. However, it was also desirable to have the classes in a computer lab setting so students could do practice exercises during the session, and it was not possible to connect with the labs

using the university's usual videoconference technology. It was also necessary to use a technology that was easy to use as the instructors of these courses have varying levels of comfort using technology, and, as most satellite campus classes are conducted during the evening or on weekends, there is limited technical support available to them. As a result, the presenters decided to go with a 'webinar'-type session, and it was suggested to them by their teaching and learning centre that Skype would fulfill all of their needs.

While the librarian-instructor was connected to the satellite campus via Skype, the instructors at the distant campuses projected the video call onto a screen in the lab. The session began as a videoconference, with the librarian introducing herself to students, and then switched to a screen-sharing view which allowed the presenter to show both PowerPoint slides as well as live demonstrations of the library catalogue and databases (see Figure 4). They had both audio and video at the lab end as well, allowing students to ask questions at any time during the class. In two of the sessions the video link was lost on the classroom side, but fortunately a work-around was created by having the instructor project his/her copy of the slides (e-mailed ahead of time) and simply talking as they progressed through the slides and demonstrations on his/her end. Overall, this was an effective way to engage with students at a distance which helped to maintain the 'live', in-person atmosphere desired. Despite the technical challenges, the presenters received positive feedback from both students and instructors about this approach to library instruction. Another application for Skype which the authors hope to use in the future is one-on-one reference with distance students.

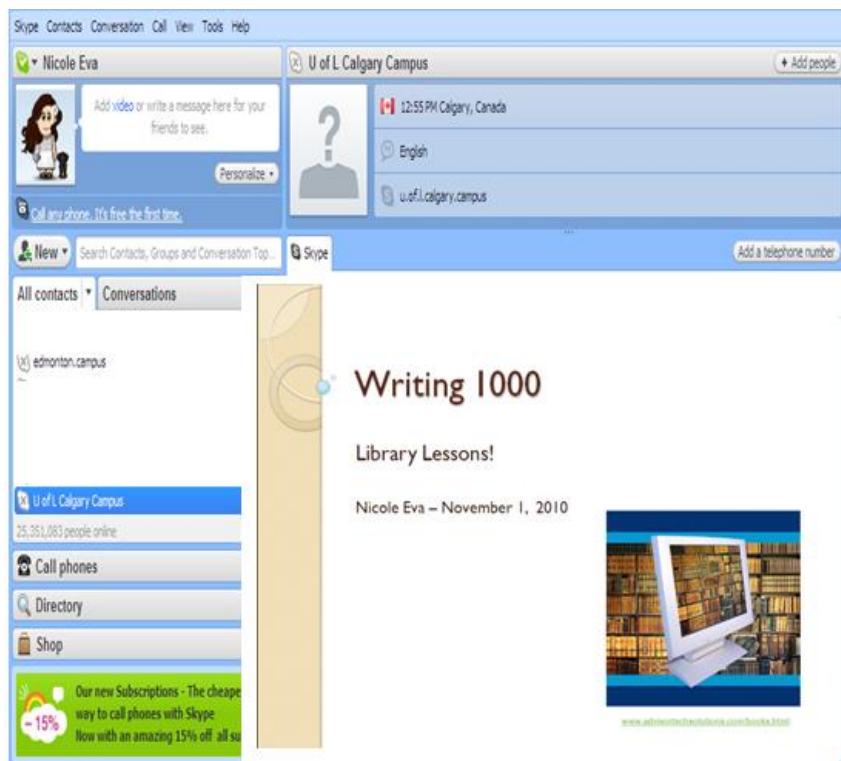


Figure 4: Screen shot of a Skype call with screen sharing.



## **Conclusion**

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of tools that can or are being used in library classes, it is a sample of the ones that the authors think are unique, effective, EASY, and low or no-cost. When used correctly and where warranted, these applications can be useful in engaging students in sessions in which they might otherwise tune out. The authors, not being very technologically-savvy themselves, are living proof that technology can be easily integrated into the classroom with very little expertise, and the positive reaction from students is proof enough that it is worthwhile to use these tools in classroom instruction.

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