Use of Library Tools in a Learning Management System

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**Introduction**

There has been little empirical research into the involvement of librarians in university Learning Management Systems (LMS).

This study examined how library-specific tools in a university-wide LMS are used in order to assess usage and effectiveness.

The University of Michigan’s LMS called CTools is based on the Sakai community-source architecture ([http://sakaiproject.org](http://sakaiproject.org)).

Approximately 80% of faculty and 98% of students report that they use the LMS for their courses.

**CTOOLS LIBRARY TOOLS:**

1) **Library Help**: allows students to chat via Instant Message with a librarian while still in the LMS

2) **Library Materials**: displays course materials on reserve in the university library for each course

3) **Librarian role**: allows assigned individual to view the syllabus, post announcements, add resources to the course site, and answer students’ questions via email.*

*The embedded Librarian role was created in 2007 as the result of librarian request. Few other institutions have this unique feature.

**Methods**

Based on CTools usage data for Fall 2009, Winter 2010 and Fall 2010, the top 100 highest-use departments were selected as the survey population. Both users and non-users were surveyed regarding their experience with and attitudes towards the library tools, as well as their demographic data.

**Population Surveys Sent Responses % of total**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>User</th>
<th>1025</th>
<th>187</th>
<th>18.2%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-user</td>
<td>1686</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>404</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Instructors reported they had not received enough training on the library tools. Both users and non-users agreed that they would like to receive more information about how to effectively use the library tools.

**Findings**

**Top 10 departments** by usage of library tools:

1. English
2. Social Work
3. American Culture
4. Psychology
5. History
6. Cultural Anthropology
7. Education
8. Sociology
9. Afroamerican & African Studies
10. Political Science

Few demographic differences were found between users and non-users in:

- number of years as an instructor
- level of expertise with computers
- level of expertise with library research

Overall, survey respondents exhibited low awareness of the library tools and little understanding of their use.

Both users and non-users expect librarians to answer student questions online, but are often not aware that the “Ask A Librarian” tool already exists in their course sites.

However, respondents also showed high levels of positive perceptions of librarians and their involvement in courses.

The potential for greater usage of the LMS library tools exists, but lack of awareness and inadequate training are challenges.

**Next steps:**

Rename tools to clarify purpose; increase outreach and education, targeted to departments that are most likely to use the tools; add tutorials and in-person trainings.