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The Library Starter Kit: using new technologies for training and instruction

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Author

Murphy, Deborah A.

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THE LIBRARY STARTER KIT: USING NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

Deborah A. Murphy
Instruction Coordinator and Reference Librarian
McHenry Library
University of California, Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, CA 95064
damurphy@cats.ucsc.edu
Tel: (408) 459-3253

classes and workshops.

The Starter Kit is being used in a variety of instructional settings by Librarians and Faculty as well as an outreach tool for local schools, colleges and community members who wish to learn more about library services and resources. New additions in development include WWW tutorials on using the Library's local catalog and the Melvyl Library System.

ABSTRACT

Each Fall thousands of new students arrive at the University of California at Santa Cruz and the Library's goal is to ensure that each new user has the basic skills to enable them to find, evaluate and use information resources from print, online and Internet-based sources. But the reality is that the orientation programs, online classes and printed documentation the library provides may not be available when and where students need them. Our Bibliographic Instruction program had to evolve to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse user population with varying learning styles.

The World Wide Web (WWW) offered a new medium to address this need, with the potential for providing a self-directed approach to learning available all hours from any WWW station on or off campus. A combination of grants, student developers and lots of sweat equity were used to initially create a WWW Virtual Tour of the McHenry Library. This was expanded to become the "Library Starter Kit" (<http://bob.ucsc.edu/library/ref/instruction/skit>), a WWW resource that provides new users with the basics for getting started with library research. The Starter Kit includes:

- *An enhanced Virtual Tour of the library with visual images, maps and links to additional information*
- *A guide to "Constructing the Research Paper" covering the basics of research methods*
- *A growing list of specialized Subject Guides for detailed information on researching specific topics*
- *A schedule of current online library research*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of a Library Starter Kit was based on the premise that the World Wide Web (WWW) would provide an innovative approach to introducing new Library users to the varied resources available for research and instruction. With library users increasingly interested in using the WWW, the time seemed right to develop such a resource. The goal of the Starter Kit is to provide new students an alternative method for accessing existing online information. It would expand the educational program we currently offer and provide a teaching tool that is potentially more flexible, more available, and more easily updated than those currently offered.

What follows is a description of the initial project, its growth and expanded development, the guidelines used in its creation, discussions of usage, and a preview of future additions.

BACKGROUND

The University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) is a medium-sized campus with a student population of 10,500, the majority of whom are undergraduates. McHenry Library, the largest library on campus, strongly supports the needs of the undergraduate student. Knowing how to utilize the library effectively is one of the single most important skills that undergraduates must have in order to succeed in completing their degrees, so the Library has an active

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instruction and outreach program. This instructional program reached over 5,000 individuals during the 94/95 academic year.

Instructional sessions cover a wide spectrum of topics and are offered in many formats. These can range in size from one on one to large groups of several hundred. A key starting point is the overview we provide new users to the library and its resources. At the start of the academic year we offer library-led orientations and numerous online presentations on library resources. Regularly scheduled classes covering diverse aspects of online research are available throughout the year. We also offer more specialized instructional sessions to classes in all disciplines at locations around campus, with a special emphasis on the increasingly numerous online resources available within and beyond the library.

The Library provides assistance at a Reference Desk available 60 hours a week where users can get help and instruction. There is an extensive collection of print-based online search aids and subject-specific research guides as well as a "Quickstart" program utilizing student database assistants who provide brief one on one online search instruction for users.

PROBLEM

Though the Library has made substantial inroads connecting with and orienting new users to all of the services outlined above, there is still a steady stream of students who miss all of these opportunities and face the often painful prospect of trying to learn online search basics with the pressure of a research paper deadline looming. In addition to the undergraduate population, there is a growing number of new users who are staff, faculty, junior transfer students, members of the local community, and students from other schools. Trying to address the varied searching skills of all of these individuals while meeting their research needs can create a very stressful environment for them as well as Reference Desk staff.

WHAT TO DO?

The Library is constantly looking for new teaching approaches to better meet the needs of our users, and the WWW offered possibilities in that area. There has been a natural progression in the formats (print, video, computer-based) available for our instructional program that follows the evolution of new technologies. By the Fall of 1997, UCSC students will have approximately 2,000 Ethernet connections available in dormitory rooms throughout the campus. With access to the

Internet becoming more ubiquitous, the time seemed right to develop a WWW site that would provide a virtual introduction to library resources along with an overview of Reference Services. Such a resource had the potential to supplement our current teaching formats and provide a new medium for disseminating information.

The WWW offered several interesting instructional advantages. The capability of using text, graphics,

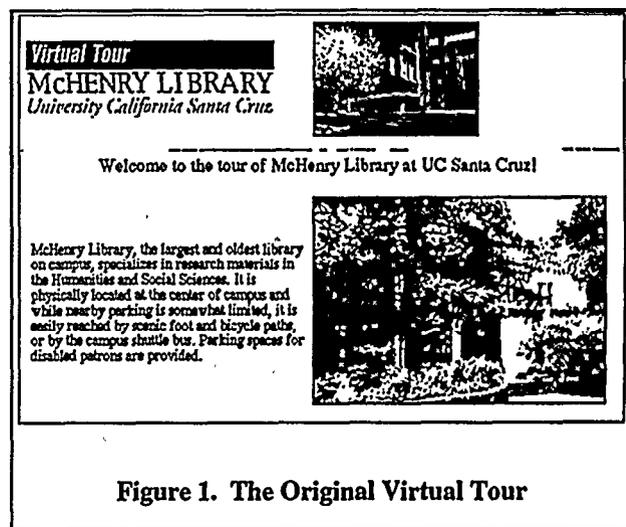


Figure 1. The Original Virtual Tour

animation, and sound expanded the reach of our current online resources. These features gave us additional tools to address the varied learning styles of our diverse user community. WWW access could provide users with library basics regardless of their location, library hours, or staff availability as well as potentially providing better access under Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. Given that instructional demand continues to exceed the supply of librarians available to teach, a WWW based resource would allow us to increase support for new undergraduate and junior transfer students. The WWW availability to off-campus users could also increase support of community outreach, allowing us to reach future undergraduates in local elementary, high schools and community colleges.

PILOT PROJECT: THE VIRTUAL TOUR

My initial proposal in early 1996 was to develop a virtual tour of the McHenry Library (Figure 1) which would provide a coordinated overview of the many resources available to users. A virtual tour would fill a pressing need for users unable to attend the orientations

offered at the start of Fall Quarter. It would provide a service we were unable to offer students most of the year and would be an immediately useful pilot project. Deciding to develop a WWW instructional resource was the easy part, actually accomplishing it was more challenging.

Given my limited web development skills at that time, I decided early on that I would need technical assistance in developing such a site. Given also that there was no additional library funding or staffing available, I would have to look elsewhere on campus for support. The UCSC Teaching Support Office had been selectively funding creative projects in support of undergraduate education. Competing for a limited amount of annual funds, I submitted a proposal and was awarded a grant to support a student WWW developer for approximately 100 hours.

I began the project by developing a checklist of development issues. Clearly it was essential for the continued usefulness of this site that I be able to keep it accurate and current. This meant I had to not just create the content, but learn enough about web publishing to be able to edit and change files. I hired a student developer with a strong instructional background, since he would need to work with me in my roles as both as project coordinator and novice web developer. Armed with a script, a camera, a scanner, and a general layout and design, work progressed smoothly and August 1996

saw the unveiling of McHenry Library's first virtual tour.

THE NEXT STEP

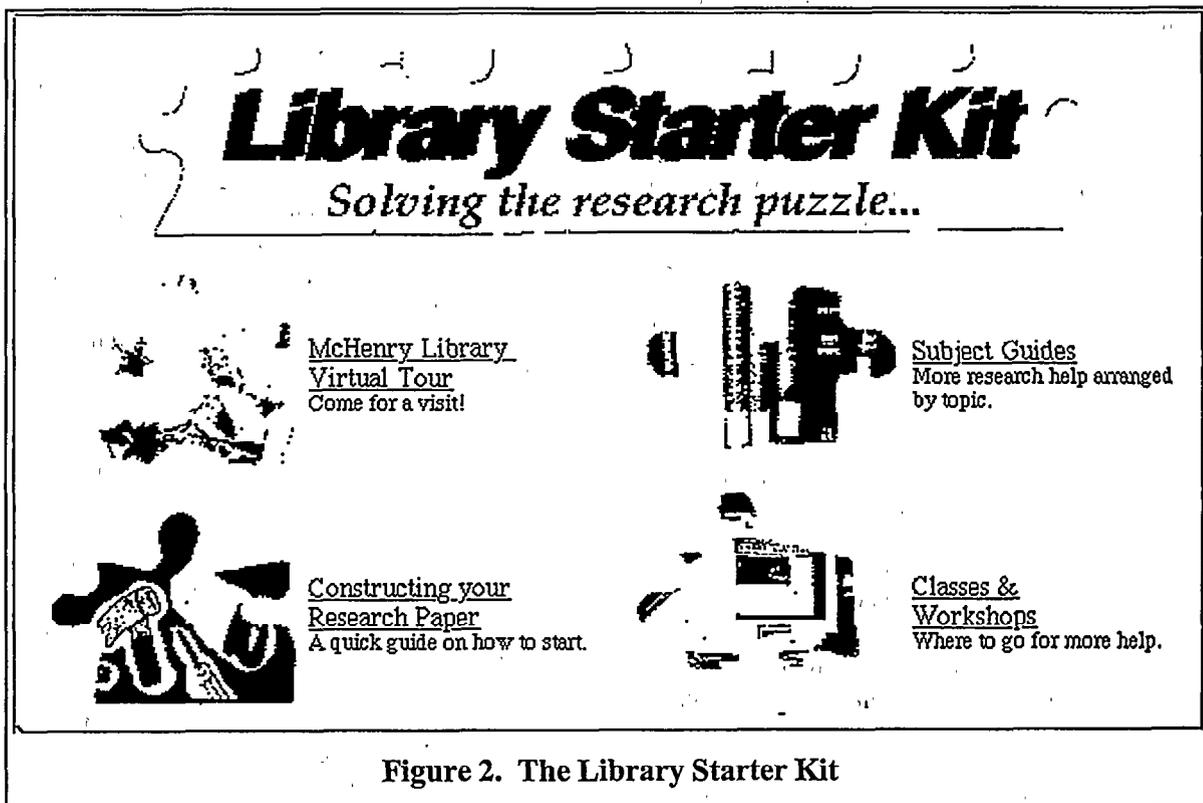
I had consulted with a number of colleagues around campus as I worked on this initial version of the tour, and these discussions led to an invitation to develop a project for an upper division Computer Science course on Multimedia Publishing. This class selected 5-6 projects per year from around the San Francisco Bay Area. The project I proposed was the Library Starter Kit (Figure 2), an expanded WWW based resource to provide new users with the basics for getting started with library research. The offer to develop a library site would mean not just one but a team of students would work on developing these pages.

The contents would be a variety of tools and resources consisting of:

- *The McHenry Library Virtual Tour* - A revised and enhanced version of the original Virtual Tour. Changes would focus on creating a new visual appearance and placing the Tour in the context of a real-world experience. There would also be changes to provide easier navigation, a better integration of images and text, links to additional information and inclusion of multimedia components.

- *Constructing the Research Paper* - This new section would provide a sequential overview covering the basics of the research process. Broken down into discreet steps, it would contain text

just the project client, but a member of the actual development team. This unique role meant that I could learn and work closely with four talented students and give detailed content, development guidelines, and



instructions as well as links to resources and other useful sources of information.

- *Subject Guides* - These new guides have their origins in a large collection of hard copy guides created by UCSC Librarians and available in the Reference Area. Converting these to a WWW format meant I could enhance the materials considerably. They would be interactive resources and contain not only listings of print and online research resources on a particular topic, but links to related databases and WWW sites.
- *Classes and Workshops* - This is an updated listing of currently available hands-on library classes focusing on online research.

As this project grew in size and complexity, it was even more essential that I continue to be able to edit and update the content. This meant making a larger commitment to learning the necessary software and tools needed for development. I decided to enroll in the Multimedia Publishing course myself and become not

immediate feedback on design and layout.

THE LIBRARY STARTER KIT

Though the scale of the project had grown, the basic intent remained the same: to provide new students another way to access resources and information orienting them to the basics of library usage and research. The primary audience was first and second year UCSC students and, secondarily, junior transfer students, non-UCSC researchers, prospective students and the general public. In addition to following general layout and design guidelines for web publishing, I emphasized the following criteria:

- Work must meet UCSC Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. The University Library is committed to ADA compliance, and all materials placed on the library website are required to meet the campus guidelines.
- Client must be able to make basic revisions. The library is subject to constant change, so it is a given

that whatever this team created would need to be revised subsequently - design, programming language, and organization had to be clearly and logically laid out. It also meant providing documentation to the client with enough information on site layout, construction, and any special features sufficient to enable the client to make basic changes.

STARTER KIT DEVELOPMENT

The project continued development over the course of two academic quarters, about six months. The first quarter was devoted to laying out the overall structure of the Kit, developing the new resources and creating a "look and feel" for the site. The Kit is based on modules that can function independently of one another, but with an integrated navigation system. Having an identical "look" shared by all modules was not essential and in fact has worked to our advantage. It means that we can create new modules using a format that works best for that topic rather than trying to make all the topics we wish to include fit one template or format.

I supplied all content (text, images, etc.) to the development team and we each began work on a separate module. Each of us brought different skills

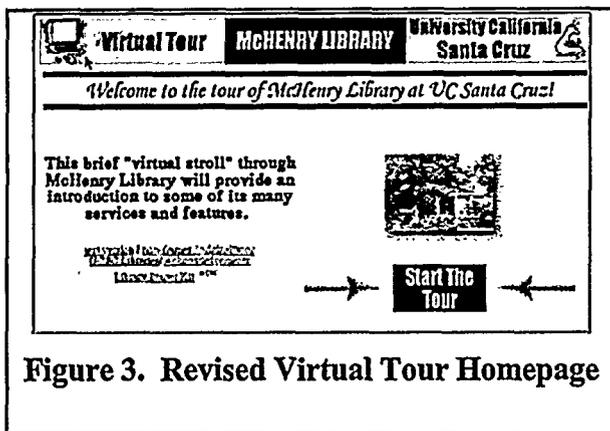


Figure 3. Revised Virtual Tour Homepage

and expertise which led to a far more interesting and creative result than I might have produced working alone. As we worked, we met regularly to consult and comment on each others work with the result that at the end of this first quarter I had a working version of each resource for the site.

The second quarter was devoted to exploring multimedia applications and focused on revising the look and feel of the McHenry Library Virtual Tour (Figure 3). The aim was to move away from the long,

text-driven pages of the original tour toward a more dynamic environment with navigation modeled on real world experiences. Incorporating frames, animated GIFs and Shockwave movies (made using Macromedia's Director), the resulting tour offers a very different experience from the original version.

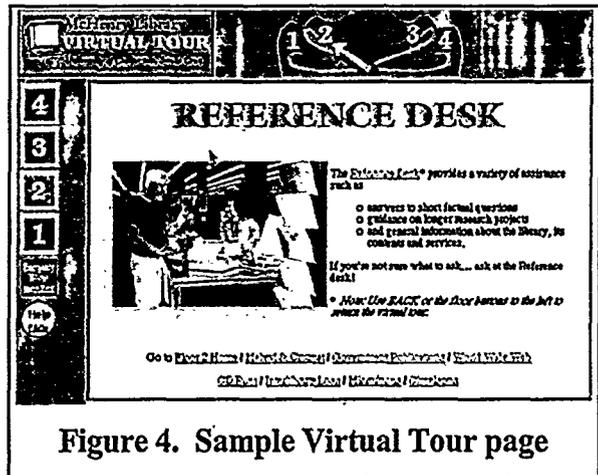


Figure 4. Sample Virtual Tour page

The most difficult decision by far was deciding on the metaphor to use for the tour. We decided finally to use the real world experience of an elevator (Figure 4), with navigation tools masked as buttons and dials in frames surrounding doors that opened on the chosen location. Coordinating the project proved somewhat challenging with five team members each trying different approaches within their individual sections, but by the end of the quarter we had integrated these various pieces into a cohesive library visit.

FOLLOW-UP WORK

After two quarters of student/client teamwork, the Starter Kit was well under way. However, there was still a substantial amount of work left to be done before making these pages available to the public. The bulk of this final work was a detailed look at the Virtual Tour to ensure a uniform use of images, text, and links and, of course, fixing the inevitable bugs. Though tedious, this was not difficult and the first public release of the Library Starter Kit was in April 1997. Subsequent work has focused on adding and enhancing the existing sites, primarily adding new additions to the Subject Guides. This site will eventually grow to include the entire collection of hardcopy subject guides available in the library.

INSTRUCTIONAL APPLICATIONS

The Library Starter Kit can be used in a number of instructional environments:

- *A resource available on demand to users browsing the library home page* - The individual components of the Starter Kit are available in several places on the Library web site. Links back to the Starter Kit home page give users an overview of additional resources. Though initially developed for just the McHenry Library, continued expansion has made it useful for new users at both McHenry and Science Libraries. A prominent position on the McHenry home page and campus wide electronic mail announcements have also helped users locate the Starter Kit.
- *A link for instructors to add to their own WWW pages* - UCSC faculty are beginning to create WWW based resources for their classes and can now include a link to the Library Starter Kit for students to use as a starting point in the research process.
- *A lecture tool for library instruction* - All of our library instruction sessions, whether in the library or elsewhere on campus, include an online component. The Starter Kit has links to many of the key introductory resources that are presented during these sessions. This simplifies the preparation for library instructors and gives students a single starting point to remember when they search on their own. The Virtual Tour in particular allows us to vividly bring the McHenry Library into the classroom, presenting maps and images of materials as we lecture.
- *A resource for a library related course assignments* - Several library based instructional sessions will include assignments that incorporate usage of the Starter Kit. These courses are primarily first year Core and lower division Writing classes, which provide students an introduction to critical writing and research skills.

USAGE ISSUES

Integrating the resources from the Starter Kit into our instructional program has been a steady but slow process for a number of reasons. The Library is still transitioning to a more WWW based environment. The

key online resources for the library are being searched at this time primarily via telnet and the majority of our online search stations are not WWW capable, though a WWW interface for Cruzcat, the UCSC local catalog, is available and a WWW version of the MELVYL Library System is under development.

The University of California's MELVYL Library System is probably the single most important online resource in the Library. It is a centralized information system that can be reached from terminals in libraries at all nine campuses of the University of California. Network access to the system is available to all users on the Internet. The MELVYL system includes a library catalog database, a periodicals database, article citation databases, and other files. All these databases are searched using the same basic commands. A WWW version of this system is under development, but many key search capabilities and databases are as yet unavailable. Researchers currently still need to use the original line mode version to obtain complete access to all resources and features. Users are expected to move toward the WWW version of MELVYL as new resources and features are added.

Teaching styles and Reference Desk assistance will need to evolve to keep pace with technology. Since so much of what librarians do in these areas is already heavily technologically oriented, keeping abreast of WWW-based resources, hardware and software changes, and user demand is a constant challenge.

There are other barriers that librarians and users face when relying on WWW resources. Increased traffic on the Internet means that accessing the sites on the WWW can often be problematic, especially for afternoon based instruction sessions when Internet usage is highest. In addition, the UC Libraries systemwide have had problems with the reliability of our network provider. These issues mean that researchers may not be able to access information when they require it. These are far

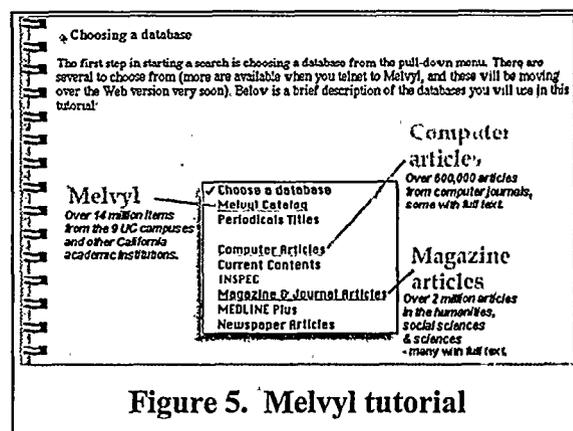


Figure 5. Melvyl tutorial

more difficult issues to resolve.

FUTURE ADDITIONS

The Library Starter Kit is a dynamic site, and new additions are being developed. A self-paced WWW tutorial, part of a campuswide Computer Literacy Project, is close to completion (Figure 5). Its focus is teaching users how to use the Library's two primary online WWW resources: CruzCat and the MELVYL Library System. The tutorial is a text- and graphics-based lesson with embedded online exercises. The Computer Literacy Project will be used for approximately 600 incoming freshmen in a Fall 1997 pilot training program.

The library tutorial will be added to the Library Starter Kit with additional tutorials forthcoming on searching the Internet, Netscape, and the telnet version of the Melvyl System. Additional materials related to the Science Library will also be added to centralize basic library information regardless of subject focus. Exploration of multimedia enhancements will continue.

CONCLUSION

Library users, primarily undergraduates, have in the Library Starter Kit a new starting point to learn the basics of online research. Containing a Virtual Tour of McHenry Library, a Guide to Constructing the Research Paper, a collection of Subject Guides, and a schedule of Library Classes, the Starter Kit is available 24 hours a day from wherever users can access the Internet. It supplements and, in some instances, expands upon the Library's collection of hard copy search aids and subject specific research guides, orientation tours offered at the start of each academic year, and classes on online research methods.

The Library Starter Kit also provides the Reference Desk with a self-paced collection of resources to offer users who prefer to explore the Library independently. Librarians and faculty can integrate the Starter Kit into their online instruction and provide links to it on their own WWW class resources. Instructors of introductory classes for lower-division undergraduates will be able to incorporate a library research component more easily into their syllabus.

No one would ever start an "interesting" project if they knew how much work it would ultimately end up being. Creating the original Library Virtual Tour and, subsequently, the Library Starter Kit required the

investment of an incredible amount of time and sweat equity. Though the Starter Kit is currently available as a WWW site, it is not a static resource and is very much a work in progress. It will require a continuing commitment to maintain and expand existing components, add new WWW search and multimedia features, and develop additional resources. But in spite of the workload issues, it has been an exhilarating experiment in exploring innovative approaches to instruction and has expanded the horizons of the Library's instructional programs.

WWW RESOURCES

UCSC McHenry Library Home Page
<http://bob.ucsc.edu/library/mchenry>

McHenry Library Virtual Tour
<http://bob.ucsc.edu/tour>

The Library Starter Kit
<http://bob.ucsc.edu/ref/instruction/skit>

SUGGESTED READINGS

The following were useful sources for ideas and guidelines used in the development of this project:

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