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E-JASL: The Electronic Journal of Academic
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Spring 2009

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Kingsley, Ilana and Jensen, Karen, "Learning 2.0: A Tool for Staff Training at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library" (2009). *E-JASL 1999-2009 (volumes 1-10)*. 125.
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Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship



v. 10 no. 1 (Spring 2009)

Learning 2.0: A Tool for Staff Training at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library

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Abstract

This paper describes a Learning 2.0 library staff training project completed in September 2007 at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library. The project planning process, curriculum creation, implementation, incentives, and outcomes are included, along with a summary of survey results from program participants. Recommendations for implementing this free and useful staff training tool by other academic libraries are included, as well as a link to the Library's Learning 2.0 blog.

Introduction

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Rasmuson Library is located in Fairbanks, Alaska, which has an area population of 82,000 and is located in the Interior region of Alaska. The University of Alaska Fairbanks is the flagship campus in the Alaska University system, with an enrollment of more than 5,630 students and 311 faculty members at the main location in Fairbanks; there are many more faculty and students at the other 6 branches of the UAF system. UAF is a land, space, and sea grant university offering a variety of doctoral, master's and bachelor's degrees, as well as a number of associate's degrees and certificate programs. As the main library for the UAF campus serving all of these programs, the Rasmuson Library is also the largest library in the state of Alaska, with 1.1 million volumes; the library also serves many distance students and faculty as well as the general public.

As is true for most academic libraries, the increased availability of Internet-based information, as well as the rapid development of Web 2.0 tools in recent years, has changed the nature of patron demands and their need for library services. In order to meet this changing demand, library employees need to be well-versed with the online information world and its new technologies. For a variety of reasons, our library faculty and staff have not always been able to keep up with technological changes. In an effort to bring all our employees “up-to-speed” on new technologies, and to aid in our on-going strategic planning efforts, we recently instituted a Learning 2.0 program to encourage all employees to learn about new Web technologies. Our staff training program is based on the one created by Helene Blowers at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County (PLCMC), a program now emulated by public, academic, and school libraries around the country. Since PLCMC offers its program freely on the Web through Creative Commons, we eagerly adapted much of its curriculum for our own training needs, as well as adding our own unique online resources. This paper describes the process of creating and implementing such a program in an academic library working environment where there is some significant resistance to technological change.

History of Web 2.0 at UAF Rasmuson Library and Rationale for Learning 2.0 Training Program

As academic library staff grows older, the age of our central patron base remains the same. Young adults tend to be well-versed with using emerging Web technologies while older generations may not be as adept. It is important for library staff to keep up-to-date with emerging technologies so that we can effectively communicate with our patrons and find better ways to meet their changing information needs. As Shih and Allen (2007) mention in *Working with Generation-D*, library employees should not only become familiar with emerging technologies, but also become adept at using them. To accomplish employee familiarity and adeptness with emerging technologies “the organizational culture of librarians and educators needs to change.”¹ Vie’s (2008) article in “Computers and Composition” focuses on the digital divide between “Generation-M” and instructors, where “students are often more technologically adept than their instructors.”² The audience of Vie’s article is composition instructors; however, this can clearly be translated to library staff and librarians who “must catch up with Generation-M students who have left them behind.”³

With the realization that the library must embrace new technologies in order to keep up with patrons’ needs, in 2005 Rasmuson library began experimenting with Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, bulletin-board style forums, and RSS for internal communication among library staff. We wanted to slowly introduce these technologies to library employees so that they would begin to feel comfortable using these technologies and get a glimpse of how the majority of our undergraduate patrons

communicate. Response to these new tools was mixed, and it was apparent that Rogers' diffusion of innovations was occurring. For example several early adopters embraced the technology while the rest of the staff fell within the late majority and laggards group.⁴ Lack of widespread use of the technologies resulted in a discussion at a library management meeting, where it was suggested that we implement a Learning 2.0 program, such as the one developed at Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. This type of training program would encourage employees to learn about emerging Web technologies, see their potential for use in the library either among staff or with patrons, and gain confidence in using them. During the same management meeting, the Library Dean expressed interest in having library employees participate in the creation of a new library strategic plan. He believed that the collaborative technologies available through Learning 2.0 would enable library staff to contribute to strategic planning asynchronously, and with relative anonymity, thereby gaining the input of some who might not contribute their ideas in a face-to-face format.

The Learning 2.0 program as developed by PLCMC has a number of advantageous features that we believed would help our somewhat reluctant staff feel more comfortable learning to use emerging Web technologies. It is designed as a "self-learning" program, in which participants can work at their own pace, in small groups of their own choosing or individually, and select the learning "items" of most interest to them. While PLCMC's focus was on making the learning program fun, we tried to put some emphasis on the utility of these technological developments for library programs and services. The program can be accomplished all at once or in small portions, as each employee's schedule permits. Each lesson requires the participant spend hands-on-time with a specific technology. A chief feature of the Learning 2.0 program is to offer staff the opportunity to play and explore technologies with which they may not be familiar. Our library employees are not accustomed to the interactive nature of Web 2.0. For example, while they are quite familiar with searching for information in an OPAC or on the Web, they are less adept at using Web 2.0 technologies to create, edit, contribute to, and track content. Our Learning 2.0 implementation was set up so that library staff could complete the program on work time and get the support of coworkers during the learning process, two factors we believe to be important in getting library employees to participate.

Literature Review

Technology training programs incorporate many aspects of organizational change and acceptance. Although the scope of this paper is the implementation of a Learning 2.0 program at a small academic library, we felt it important for the literature review to include information about other Learning 2.0 programs, as well as information on the topic of technology acceptance. In addition, since one of the reasons for implementing

our Learning 2.0 program was for staff to use a wiki for strategic planning, we include a brief section on wikis and strategic planning. Consequently, this literature review is divided into three sections: Learning 2.0, Strategic Planning & Wikis, and Technology Acceptance & Resistance to Change.

Learning 2.0

Learning 2.0 is a program created by Helene Blowers, the technology director for the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County (N.C.). The program was created in order “to find a training approach to help them keep up with new and emerging technology.”⁵ This innovative program of self-directed online learning, using Web 2.0 technology such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts, has been eagerly adopted by all types of libraries, as well as private enterprises, to meet the same goal, i.e., to bring employees up to speed on “new” interactive Web technologies. While Blowers may not have anticipated the enthusiasm, she graciously allowed her materials and ideas to be copied through a Creative Commons license, and many libraries have done so.

Standard academic library journals turn up almost nothing published on academic library use of Learning 2.0-style training programs. Recent library-oriented publications focus on uses of the Learning 2.0 program in school and public libraries⁶. Expanding our search outside of traditional library journals, we found many Web sites and blogs which reveal that all types of libraries, including academic, private, and state libraries are using the Learning 2.0 model. The program has been adapted by libraries worldwide. According to PLCMC’s Learning 2.0 blog there are more than 250 libraries developing programs of their own.⁷ There are a variety of ways to find these programs outside the peer-reviewed literature, starting with PLCMC’s lengthy list. Some of the links provided on PLCMC’s website are no longer valid, and many do not clearly identify the institution with which they are affiliated; a few are password-protected. Quality of the blog presentations, both in style and content, varies substantially. As libraries find success or non-success with the Learning 2.0 model, it is likely the published literature on the outcome of these training programs will vastly increase. Most academic library Learning 2.0 websites we visited were clearly adapted from the original PLCMC program, with only minor changes in content and style.

Strategic Planning & Wikis

Besides Kendall’s (2008) forthcoming article on the use of wikis for strategic planning, the lack of published material on combining institutional strategic planning efforts and the learning of wiki technology through Learning 2.0 programs suggests that this use is fairly new, although not unique, as evidenced by a number of Web pages indicating such on-going activities.⁸ As Kendall and colleagues point out, there

are numerous publications regarding the strategic planning process and there are many articles that discuss what wikis are, how to configure them, and how they are different from other Web 2.0 technologies.⁹ However, few studies address using wikis as collaborative tools for intra-organizational communication within a library setting.

Literature about wikis used for collaboration, though sparse, exists in a number of disciplines: Hester's (2008) preliminary research examines corporate organizational knowledge management and adoption of wiki technology.¹⁰ Majchrzak and colleagues (2006) also examine wiki usage in a corporate setting. The focus of their research is on sustainability of wiki use, the benefits of wikis, and factors influencing contribution to wikis.¹¹ Bejune's (2007) article examines the types of collaboration wikis are being used for in libraries; pertinent to this article is his section on collaboration among library staff.¹²

Technology Acceptance & Resistance to Change

A large amount of research exists on technology and organizational change within libraries. Pan and colleagues (2008) examine acculturation of RFID in Singapore libraries. RFID is quite different than Web 2.0 technologies; however the process of accepting new technologies is consistent with much of the literature on technological change: "When users perceive the new system to be effective and believe that the system would enhance their job performance, it is likely that they will adopt a positive attitude toward its subsequent use."¹³ Spacy et al (2004) used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to measure attitudes of public library staff and use of the Internet. Her team concluded that perceived usefulness of the Internet at work had a significant impact on actual use.¹⁴ Weiner (2003) provides a nice overview of communication theory and resistance to change within libraries.¹⁵ For libraries attempting to modernize service methods through programs such as Learning 2.0, understanding the concerns of those employees resistant to change will affect program planning.

Implementation

In April 2007, the UAF Library Dean assigned a committee chair to put together a Learning 2.0 training program for all library employees. Subsequently, the Chair selected a team of employees to work together to design and implement the Rasmuson Library Learning 2.0 staff development program. Team members were selected from each library department, and represented varying levels of technical knowledge and aptitude, but no luddites were permitted; members had to be interested in using and promoting use of the new technology, and committee enthusiasm was important to the success of the program. At least two members of the six-member group were at a high level of sophistication in using computers, one had minimal Web 2.0 experience, and


the rest were at varying middle levels of experience and knowledge. Having at least a few committee members proficient with Web 2.0 technology was critical to the successful implementation of the program.

The team had a short window in which to put together and implement the program, because the library strategic planning process would begin in Fall, 2007, and the committee's first meeting was April 2007. The group had to complete the entire original Learning 2.0 program in order to learn which lessons would be most relevant to the library staff, put together a curriculum, plan an incentive program to encourage participation, and plan the timeline for implementation and completion, including communication and technical assistance strategies.

In order to meet our timeline, the committee divided up the original Learning 2.0 curriculum topics, and then made recommendations to the group as to which items might be meaningful and workable for our library staff. The group met weekly to discuss the curriculum, and added a number of unique features specific to UAF libraries; see the addendum for learning items. The final curriculum featured 30 learning "items," more than the original PLCMC program, but some were less time-intensive than the PLCMC lessons. Once the curriculum was decided upon, the group had to assess which blogging software to use as a platform for the program and how to best track participation with the least amount of effort for the team. Since we had prior experience working with the open source blogging software WordPress, we created a Learning 2.0 blog on our locally hosted server. The WordPress Learning 2.0 blog was used only for disseminating information and for some basic commenting. We chose not to use our locally hosted instance for the "Set Up & Register a Blog" assignment because we did not want our staff to set up personal blogs that were being used for "test & play" purposes on a production server. For this particular assignment we referred participants to Blogger.com. For tracking purposes we used the course management software Blackboard™. Our University has a site license to Blackboard™ so it was easy for us to create a Learning 2.0 classroom. Another reason for using Blackboard was for library staff to gain familiarity with a mainstream application used on our campus. Inside of our classroom, we created a quiz that participants used to track their progress (see Figure 1). Blackboard allowed our team to quickly "grade" whether or not a user had completed a task without having to check multiple user blogs.

Figure 1.

[COURSES](#) > [RASMUSON LEARNING 2.0](#) > [ASSIGNMENTS](#) > TAKE ASSESSMENT TRACK YOUR LEARNING 2.0 PROGRESS HERE!

 **Take Assessment Track Your Learning 2.0 Progress Here!**

Name: Track Your Learning 2.0 Progress Here!

Instructions: As you complete the Learning 2.0 activities, periodically return to Blackboard and add a BRIEF comment about your experience, such as if it was useful, fun, or boring. Alternately, if you know how, you may add the permalink to your blog post about each specific Learning 2.0 item. Either way, be sure to register your blog by adding a thread to the Blackboard Discussion Board.

You do not have to complete this all at once; scroll to the bottom of the page to "save" your progress or "submit" this "test" when you have completed the entire Learning 2.0 program.


Multiple Attempts: Not allowed. This Test can only be taken once.

Force Completion: This Test can be saved and resumed later.

▼ **Question Completion Status:**

Question 1 1 points [Save](#)

#01 Blackboard

☒ Smart Text ☐ Plain Text ☐ HTML \sqrt{x} \leftrightarrow π  Preview

Question 2 1 points [Save](#)

#02 Lifelong Learners

The group also had to consider how to encourage staff to participate. Tax restrictions of the university limited us to using less than \$25 per person for a prize. PLCMC offered MP3 players as incentive awards to their finishing participants; however, due our monetary restriction we opted for Amazon.com gift certificates for all program finishers. We also obtained \$100 for a “grand prize” drawing, in which all program finishers would be entered automatically at the “end” of the program, Sept. 30th.

Most importantly the group obtained endorsement from the Library Dean and from Department Heads for employees to complete the entire program on work time. Without the authorization of supervisors, employees would be much less likely to complete the program outside of work hours. We wanted to make sure too, that our

program was open to all our employees, including support staff, student workers, and degreed librarians at all levels, on the premise that all employees will need to apply their knowledge of Internet technology to their library work. The management team agreed with this goal.

The timeline was planned to give employees ample time to complete the program over a 16-week period from June-September, allowing for four hours spent on the program per week, and assuming 2-4 week vacation times for most employees during the summer months. We wanted to have employees complete the program before the onset of the strategic planning process, and we also believed that the summer months would be more conducive to allowing staff to work on the program, with fewer service demands. We began the program with a social event at our Library's monthly "coffee hour" potluck; the Library Dean discussed his goal for the program and the need for updating our library strategic plan, and a short training session was provided, along with encouragement for staff to contact any of the program team members for technical assistance. A follow-up email was sent to all staff, with details and links for accessing the program online. Regular emails were sent monthly throughout the program, and we conducted a participation survey at the half-way point to see how staff was progressing with the program. The final prize drawing was conducted on Sept. 30th at a group social function.

Observations

Staff Participation

Staff were more likely to participate in Learning 2.0 if they had managerial support. This was also true of an earlier implementation of internal library blogs that were set up to help foster communication among library staff and specific library departments.¹⁶ One manager sent email messages to her staff throughout the program, the first to explain the program and offer personal assistance with the learning tasks, and follow-up messages to emphasize that the program could be completed at work, and that other work could be set aside so that participants could complete the program. She followed up with noting completion or only partial participation on her employees' annual performance evaluations. She felt that the open floor plan in that area of the library fostered participation and cooperation, because those not doing the program could hear others discussing the various Web 2.0 tools and what they had discovered. Of her 17 employees, 10 completed the program, 4 started and didn't finish, and 3 didn't even look at it, a completion rate of 58%.

Another department manager also encouraged staff participation in the program, but did not provide on-going communication to reinforce it, nor did she complete the

program herself. In this department, of 12 employees, 4 started and did not finish the program, and another 4 completed the program, for a completion rate of 33%.

The third library department manager encouraged participation but did not reinforce the program with additional communication to department employees, but did finish the program herself. Of 26 employees, 8 started and did not finish, and 9 completed the program, for a completion rate of 34.6%.

Staff Perception of the Program

Of the participants who completed the Rasmuson Library Learning 2.0 program, most were glad they had the opportunity to learn about new technologies while on “library time.” This is consistent with Buchanan’s article on barriers to library staff training. Buchanan (2005) found that library staff was more inclined to attend training if release time is offered.^{[17](#)}

A number of participants thought that many of the Web 2.0 technologies did not relate to their work and felt that they would use the technologies for personal use but not work-related use. This reaction is quite different than those documented in Leslie & Gross’ (2007) news brief about their staffs’ response to a Learning 2.0 program at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Australia. Staff reactions to the ECU Learning 2.0 program were positive and focused on how Web 2.0 could be used for library applications and work related tasks.^{[18](#)}

Participation Rates

- 123 people (library staff, faculty, and student workers) were automatically enrolled in the program.
- 25 people completed the program (20 staff, 3 faculty, 2 students).
- 31 people started the program, but didn’t finish (17 staff, 7 faculty, 7 students)
- 67 people didn’t start the program (23 staff, 3 faculty (including one emeritus), 41 students)

To find out the reasons for a small completion rate, two short post-implementation surveys were given to library staff and faculty. One survey was given to library faculty and staff who completed the program; the other survey was given to those who started the program but didn’t finish or those who didn’t start the program at all. Surveys were not given to student workers, or to employees who no longer work at the library.

Of those who didn’t finish or start the program 14 people out of 39 responded to the survey. 57% of the respondents indicated that they didn’t participate in the Learning

2.0 program because they didn't have the time; 28.6% thought it was too confusing to switch between the blog, wiki, and Blackboard; 28.6% thought the program was too long; 21.4% indicated it wasn't needed for their job. When asked if they would finish the program if offered again, 85% answered "yes."

Of those who finished the program 12 people out of the 23 responded to the survey. The top two reasons for completing the program were a) the incentive prize and b) the desire to learn new things.

Recommendations

Our 20% employee completion rate demonstrates moderate success, but the program might have seen greater participation by making some implementation changes. Based on responses to our post-program survey, the prize incentive was a significant motivator for at least 50% of finishers; providing an incentive with greater monetary value might have encouraged more to complete the program. When we first explored the idea of providing an incentive, we had hoped for a \$50-60 MP3 player for all participants; this dollar amount was quickly reduced not for lack of funds, but due to university restrictions and IRS requirements on providing such a large benefit to employees. The \$25 incentive might not have been sufficient for other employees to spend up to 40 hours to complete the program. We would recommend that other institutions explore thoroughly the options for incentives, and find rewards that their own employees would place at high value.

Many comments were provided, both during the program and in the post-program survey, indicating that our instructions were too wordy and insufficiently clear. A rewrite might enable those with less time to spare to work through the lessons more efficiently. Some comments also suggested that in-person assistance would have facilitated program completion, so a series of hands-on, group work sessions might have been beneficial for those reluctant to ask for assistance. We would encourage other institutions to provide as much instruction and technical support as possible.

Some staff commented that they didn't have time to work on or complete the program. Although we provided a four-month window for staff to finish the lessons in order to qualify for the larger prize drawing, we might have made the smaller incentive available through a "rolling program," without a specific end date.

Some of the survey comments also suggested that relevancy of the program to library work was not clear to library employees. A discussion or other way to provide information about the need for better communication with our young and technically adept patron base might have encouraged more library staff to explore these technologies. Many employees were concerned with work applicability, rather than

just “having fun” with the program lessons. Finding ways to highlight the relevance of Web 2.0 functions to library patrons and library services might reinforce employees’ need for learning more about Web 2.0 technologies.

Lastly, although managerial support was not something most participants cited as a significant motivation to complete the program, requiring participation and having all library managers complete the program as an example to employees might have spurred interest in the program. We would recommend getting “buy-in” from all library managers and supervisors, and make the program mandatory rather than optional. This finding is similar to Link Jones’ (2008) staff development program. Link Jones¹⁹ notes that getting “buy-in” from department heads and employees was challenging, and the one department that set an imposed deadline for the training program may have helped motivate employees to complete the program. She states, “For a project like this to have the greatest impact, completion of the training should be tied to employee goals or evaluation.”

Conclusion

Given the large number of survey respondents who indicated they believed the training provided them with worthwhile learning, we conclude that our implementation of Blowers’ Learning 2.0 program was moderately successful in our goal of exposing employees to emerging Web technologies. It is not sufficient to consider the program complete, as such training is on-going. Our Learning 2.0 modules will be modified to include new technologies that our younger patrons use, and we will offer the program to employees who didn’t complete the first training session, and to those who want to continue to learn as Web technologies change.

In the next iteration of the Learning 2.0 program, we will make the Web presentation more straightforward and professional, update the lessons to incorporate newer developments, and work to make it more library-function oriented.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the Learning 2.0 Committee members for their dedication, persistence, and creativity in putting together the Learning 2.0 program for the UAF Rasmuson Library, including James Hassel, Robert Forshaw, Robin Andrews, Bradley Krick, and Dee Daniels. Of course, credit must be paid to the creator of the Learning 2.0 training concept, Helene Blowers of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, Charlotte, North Carolina; without them our program would not have happened.

Addendum

Following are the lessons included in our Learning 2.0 program. For lesson “instructions,” and to see how the blog is set up, please see our Learning 2.0 Web page:

<http://library.uaf.edu/blogs/learning20/>

Some of these lesson topics will be familiar to anyone who has explored Web. 2.0, but some are information sources created by Alaskan libraries, or other Web sites or tools specifically for Alaskan libraries and their patrons. For example, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks we use Blackboard™ for our course management software and SunGuard/Luminus™ for our portal software. We included these applications in our Learning 2.0 curriculum so that our staff would be aware of their use on campus. The UAF Libraries produce the “Project Jukebox” – a Web-based, Alaskan oral history project, the “DVD browser” – a search tool created to help patrons find and browse our movie collection, our “media equipment” Web page for looking up and reserving equipment, our staff wiki and forum tools, and our “Alaska Digital Archives” statewide library project documenting Alaskan history through photos, text, videos and more.

Learning 2.0 Modules

- [Introduction](#)
- [Lesson List](#)
- [#01 Blackboard](#)
- [#02 Lifelong Learners](#)
- [#03 Set Up & Register a Blog](#)
- [#04 Flickr Photo Fun-Exploring Flickr](#)
- [#05 More Flickr Fun-Flickr Mashups](#)
- [#06 Technology Sites](#)
- [#07 RSS Feeds](#)
- [#08 MyUA Portal](#)
- [#09 Library-related Blogs](#)
- [#10 Image Generators](#)
- [#11 LibraryThing](#)
- [#12 Rollyo search tool](#)
- [#13 del.icio.us & tagging](#)
- [#14 Technorati](#)
- [#15 Web 2.0, Library 2.0](#)
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- [#18 Online Productivity Tools](#)
- [#19 Web 2.0 Awards List](#)
- [#20 You Tube, Etc.](#)
- [#21 Podcast Search Tools](#)
- [#22 ListenAlaska & Gutenberg](#)
- [#23 Library ELF](#)
- [#24 Google Maps/Google Earth](#)
- [#25 Google Labs/Google Base](#)
- [#26 MySpace](#)
- [#27 Grokker Search Engine](#)
- [#28 Try a New Web Browser](#)
- [#29 Rasmuson Web Resources](#)
- [#30 Summarize Your Thoughts](#)

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