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Adding Website Flair with Buttons

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Have you Googled yourself? What about a faculty member at your academic institution or a library colleague? Did you find a ton of results to a variety of professional, personal and everything-in-between? Most likely, you said "yes" to at least one of these questions; we live in a day and an age when everything (good, bad and ugly) is available online. At the University of Nebraska College of Law and Schmid Law Library, we've developed a plan of action to corral a specific number of resources for faculty pages.

This project started after a faculty retreat in May 2011, and stemmed from conversation on how to better promote faculty scholarship and the law college to a broader audience. The Law College Associate Dean for Academic Affairs approached the library faculty for assistance in promoting SSRN and the UNL Digital Commons to faculty. At the same time, a professor wanted to add buttons to her email signature line, both for visual appeal and to promote NU Law College. After a few brainstorming sessions, we decided to better publicize faculty scholarship and the law college in two ways: first by adding buttons to individual faculty pages (see, for example, http://law.unl.edu/facstaff/faculty/resident/cmedill.shtml) linking to a variety of resources and second, by adding "flair" to email signatures line with the same buttons for interested faculty.

This past academic year, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's content management system migrated to Drupal. This change is beneficial to the law college because it allows individuals within departments better access to the law college website. Now the people within a specific area (law library, Career Services or Dean's office) can update their section of the law college website on a regular basis. In addition to handling the law library's social media presence, I was asked to also manage the law library's webpages.

The law college faculty and librarian webpages are fairly static, typically updated when annual reports are due or before the academic year begins. Most people Google faculty members to find contact information, publications, areas of expertise or research, and/or courses taught, so current content on these pages should be a priority. Since we don't have a dedicated web person, buttons linking to our faculty's most current information are a great option for our law college. We decided to start with the following buttons: the UNL Digital Commons, SSRN, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, a good mix of scholarly links, professional networking, and social media. The above order is also how we try to place the buttons on a faculty page, and for consistency we've also sized the buttons the same for a clean look.

The UNL Digital Commons (http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/) may be unknown to many people outside the library world, but is a wonderful resource for archiving and finding faculty publications online. The professional staff at the UNL Digital Commons has created an uncomplicated workflow to accomplish this task. First, the librarians meet and talk with faculty about adding their scholarship to the depository. When a professor says "yes," a one-time approval publications list is emailed to a librarian who forwards the list to the depository director. The digital commons staff does the rest of the work by locating articles, determining copyright status, uploading scholarship, and emailing notices when articles are "live" in the system. This user-friendly process is a great selling point for the librarians when promoting the UNL Digital Commons to faculty. Once faculty members are emailed their monthly usage statistics report, they are often happy to talk about the service with other people. Never underestimate the power of word-of-mouth sales!

SSRN (http://www.ssrn.com/) was initially utilized by half of the law college faculty. This number has increased since the project began. The primary difference between the UNL Digital Commons and SSRN is that faculty members are responsible for uploading their publications to SSRN. While clear how-to instructions for authors are available, it is awkward to ask faculty to locate and upload content during the semester. Hopefully more articles will be uploaded during the academic year downtime or as working documents are ready for review.

The Schmid Law Library librarians met individually or as a small group with the law college faculty to explain the UNL Digital Commons and SSRN features as well as how the buttons on faculty pages would work. We had two faculty "guinea pig" pages to demo and buttons had already been added to the law librarian's pages (for example, http://law.unl.edu/facstaff/faculty/library/mdoritybaker.shtml). We also mentioned other button options for faculty pages: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. The librarians quickly clarified that the Facebook button was not for a professor's personal FB page, but links to the law college and the library. In a cool twist, a few faculty members wanted their personal/professional Twitter accounts linked to the Twitter button on their page, instead of using the law college or law library's feed.

The newest addition to the button collection is a CALI button. After discussing how the project was progressing, we decided that promotion of CALI exercises by NU Law faculty and librarians was necessary. After a few phone calls between our CALI liaison and Deb Quentel at CALI (thanks Deb!), voilà—now people could link directly to the author's CALI page with a bio and list of CALI exercises. There are currently just two CALI authors at the law college, but we hope to better promote CALI by adding the button to faculty pages and encouraging more faculty members to create lessons and more students to use the lessons.

As students review faculty pages to see who is teaching what subject area or classes, the buttons show other professional activities in which NU law faculty are involved. For instance, two professors have links to WILE (Women in Legal Education,) to both promote and support this mentoring program. Like the old saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words" – in this case, the buttons are another quick and free promotional tool.

Please steal this idea for your library or institution! It's been great to talk to faculty about their scholarship and discuss how the UNL Digital Commons can preserve and promote their work. Meeting face-to-face with faculty has opened new conversations on social media usage and how professors could connect with colleagues and students. It's been a rewarding opportunity to expand my knowledge on social media presence and management, work with other UNL departments and make cool connections. The buttons project is worth the time and energy, especially when it meets the goal to better promote the law college, faculty and their scholarship.