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Benefits of Integrating the Library Reserve Function With Blackboard
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Background
When the University of Vermont College of Medicine moved their curriculum to the Blackboard Course Management System, no provisions were made to integrate electronic reserve materials with Blackboard. Knowing intuitively that, “students vowed to have access to everything they use... from a single page, and not have to travel to different university sites to accomplish different tasks.”

College of Medicine faculty found a variety of ways to link from Blackboard to documents that they wanted students to read, resulting in declining use of the Library’s Reserve function. The UVM Dana Medical Library reassigned the roles of the library in providing course-related readings. Since readings are online and students no longer go to the library to obtain a paper copy, why involve the library at all?

Goals
College of Medicine faculty requested help from Office of Medical Education (OME) staff in adding materials to Blackboard, work that involved obtaining copyright permission. OME staff turned to the library for advice in navigating copyright laws and practices. As OME displayed existing Blackboard links and described the help they needed, library staff concluded that they could be more helpful than they had realized. Library and OME staff developed six major objectives for library staff to accomplish different tasks, “simply change the readings often enough that fair use still serves a significant amount of money.”

Results
Control copyright costs
• Make reserve readings “actually direct links to online journal articles.
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Remove barriers for students
• Make electronic reserves and books appear within the course on the day the reading is due, in line with lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations, and learning modules for that day.
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Encourage use of the collection
• Make library-owned electronically accessible. Electronic links to those books were added to Blackboard.
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Model the citation of references
• Model the citation of references

Discussion
Many of these goals were met through the use of direct linking to articles, removing off-campus articles and storing them on local servers. Direct links to articles on the publishers’ servers don’t require copyright permission. On the other hand, since some of the library’s electronic journals are accessed through aggregators, it wasn’t always obvious to faculty that an article was available online. In addition, creation of permanent links is sometimes more complicated than copying and pasting a URL.

The decision by the College of Medical Office of Medical Education (OME) to give the Library responsibility, access, and authority for linking from courses to electronic journals, books, and databases (while continuing to pay copyright fees out of the OME budget) was important to the success of the project. As course management systems allow for, and sometimes force, more centralization, libraries and universities can benefit from the opportunity to offer this service.

Centralization allows one group of people to serve as experts in creating stable direct links, communicating with publishers, negotiating fair use, and citing references. Since library staff already possess much of this capability, it’s relatively easy for the library to continue to provide course-related readings.

Future plans include a survey of faculty satisfaction with the program, development of easier linking methods, and scaling up the service to meet the needs of other colleges on campus.

Bibliography

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