Chapter III

Libraries, Information, and Course Management Systems

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Abstract

Content owned or licensed by academic libraries, such as electronic journals, art image databases, and digital videos, provides a means to enhance curricula and allow for deeper learning by students. Lack of interoperability between library systems and course management systems (CMS) limits the use of library content within CMS. Learning environments, CMS, and institutional repositories must all interoperate since content can be used in many ways in both research and learning. Librarians can also add value to CMS if their virtual services — such as reference and information literacy — are integrated into the CMS. The content of CMS raises many policy issues which must be addressed by institutions.

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For his Civil War history class, a professor at a university prepares his syllabus for the coming semester. He uses both the library’s online catalog and a Web browser to locate materials he wishes to include in his reading list for the semester and provides links to the materials so that all will be accessible by one “click.” For one week’s class, he pulls archival excerpts from the four newspapers (two from the North, two from the South) available in the University of Virginia’s “Valley of the Shadow” Civil War-era archive (http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/). He will use these in class to describe reaction to the advance of Sherman’s army in the South. For their homework assignment, students will be asked to find other sources, which may include newspapers from other cities, diaries, maps, or photos from the same period. The professor has always emphasized an end-of-semester project in which students must use primary and secondary sources to write a paper on some aspect of the Civil War, ranging from military to political to societal topics. Now that his university has a cutting-edge course management system (CMS), he is able to work with a librarian to develop a guide (structured bibliography) for his students that will be integrated into the CMS and lead students to some of the best resources on the Civil War. Since there are many amateur Civil War buffs, understanding what makes a Web site appropriate for academic research is something the professor wants to emphasize, and in collaboration with a reference librarian, he has developed a brief tutorial describing how to evaluate a Web site for use in historical research. In addition, he employs a standard button in the CMS that provides a link to an online chat with a reference librarian. For secondary sources, he wants to make sure that students use appropriate journals, and he and the library provide links to Historical Abstracts, a key service for locating refereed journal articles in the field, and to JSTOR, a collection of the major journals in humanities and social sciences disciplines. Both of these resources are accessible via licenses negotiated by the library. When the students develop their end-of-course projects, they will submit them via the CMS. After revision, they will have the opportunity to submit their work to their e-portfolio.

This scenario illustrates the outcome of an environment in which an institution’s CMS and its library information system (LS) interoperate in a seamless manner for both faculty course creators and student learners in a way that does not exist today. This scenario does not illustrate innovations in teaching and learning. It does describe typical use of information in courses. Since the electronic locus of many courses is increasingly in the CMS environment, what is needed is a