

Staff Training, Onboarding, and Professional Development Using a Learning Management System

Sona Macnaughton, MLIS
Librarian/Learning Designer
Red Deer College Library

Mary Medinsky, MLIS
Public Services Coordinator
Red Deer College Library

Abstract

Looking for a fresh, interactive way to train your staff? A learning management system (LMS) can be used to support flexible learning opportunities for library staff. This article describes the benefits of using an LMS for staff onboarding, training, and professional development and overviews criteria for selecting an LMS appropriate for your public or academic library staff training needs.

Keywords

professional development, staff training, onboarding, learning management system, lms, online learning

Introduction

Red Deer College (RDC) Library is a constantly changing place; each year we introduce new approaches, services, resources, or technology to the mix. Effective onboarding and ongoing staff training and staff professional development are essential to ensure that the Library continues to provide responsive, learner-centred service. Over the years, we have tried various formats of staff training and encountered several challenges; the biggest of which was getting all staff into the same room at the same time due to varying schedules. A more flexible approach to providing library staff training was required.

In addition, RDC Library faced the challenge of training staff in using Blackboard, the College's Learning Management System (LMS). At RDC, each course on campus, whether face-to-face or online, has a Blackboard component. The Library provides Blackboard support to students, therefore staff need to be familiar with the features of that environment.

It became clear that using an LMS to train library staff would bridge the challenge of coordinating staff training with the requirement of training library staff to use Blackboard. Training with Blackboard affords staff the opportunity to learn how to use our institution's LMS in order to better support students, while at the same time providing a

flexible training platform for library staff. Using course design principles, we created a series of asynchronous training courses with learning outcomes, learning modules, rubrics, and quizzes for self-assessment.

Exploring a Learning Management System

LMS Defined

A learning management system is an online platform that facilitates “the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of e-learning education courses or training programs” (Boundless, 2015). Many MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are delivered via an LMS, such as the New Librarianship class offered by David Lankes, which was delivered via CourseSites in 2013 (Lankes, n.d.).

An LMS is used widely within educational environments to teach courses; many K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions use an LMS. Red Deer College uses Blackboard, and all instructors at RDC use at least some features of this teaching and learning tool. RDC Library was able to utilize the institutional tool, and therefore did not need to select a learning management system.

Selecting an LMS

For libraries that are not part of an institution with an established LMS, there are many options available. These range in functionality and pricing (see Fig.1). Some are free to use (e.g. CourseSites), but typically have limitations in number of courses, students, and/or functionality. Others have cost implications (e.g. Blackboard and Moodle), but provide more scalable functionality. Given that there are several free and low-cost options available, an LMS becomes an accessible system for providing e-training to library staff.

When comparing different learning management systems, the following common features can be considered:

- Authentication: Ability to create individual user accounts for private access.
- Learning Modules: Ability to organize the course structurally by breaking it down into learning modules or units.
- Communication: Ability to communicate with course participants through features such as messages, email, chat, announcements, and calendar.
- Collaboration: Ability to allow participants to interact with each other through discussions, groups, breakout rooms, peer assessment, or social media.
- Assessment: Ability to assess performance through assignments, assessments, and self-assessments.
- Accountability: Ability to track usage, login access, and completion of tasks.

(Fig. 1) Limited Survey of Learning Management Systems by Cost

Type of LMS by Cost	Details	Examples
Free Account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No license or subscription fees (may offer optional subscription fees for additional features) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CourseSites (by Blackboard) • Edmodo • Schoology
Open Source ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No License or subscription fees • Requires server (cost) • Requires installation/configuration (human capital) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moodle • Sakai
Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires license or subscription fees • Requires server or hosting (cost) • Requires installation and/or configuration (human capital) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackboard • Canvas • Desire2Learn • Hapara

The Learning Management System at Work

Training in Libraries

Ongoing staff training is an identified area of need in the oft-cited *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries* (Ingles et al., 2005) study. In an environmental scan of e-learning for public libraries, Wendy Newman highlights that “training should become more visible and its urgency highlighted...” (as cited in Renzetti, 2011, p. 3) and it was concluded that for “complex topics and big-picture learning, e-training can be an effective and efficient tool for management to engage staff in communication, but not a substitute for long-term leadership and support in this tumultuous area of librarianship” (Turner et al, as cited in Renzetti, 2011, p. 8).

An LMS is well suited for e-training in Libraries since they are designed to deliver and assess learning.

There are many examples of public libraries adopting e-learning methods to train staff and onboard new employees. An example of a public library using an LMS platform is the staff orientation program developed by the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL).

¹ For an extensive overview of an open source LMS, visit the White Paper [Open-Source Learning Management Systems: Sakai and Moodle](#) (PDF).

BCPL leverages the many features of an LMS to train staff across the 16 branches in a timely manner (Mantegna, Hepler, & Lombardo, 2010).

Onboarding & Training at RDC Library

New staff members starting at RDC Library work through a detailed checklist to ensure workplace success—the goal of all onboarding programs. RDC Library is constantly working on ways to make this process more seamless for both new staff and supervisors.

This issue is not unique to RDC Library. Long library hours and numerous part-time staff can create a challenging situation when it comes to onboarding, prompting supervisors to consider whether incoming staff are getting the information needed to be successful. To help navigate the training complexity of the single-service desk model, a set of Learning Commons Support rubrics were created. These rubrics outline the technology, reference, and circulation skills all staff need, which are categorized into three levels: Proficient, Competent, and Needs Training.

In support of these rubrics and the on-demand training model, an online course in Blackboard became the ideal format not only for presenting documents and tutorials, but also for encouraging self-assessment and discussion amongst staff who would not normally have the occasion to interact with one another. It also became a natural choice since the Library already had an existing course developed in Blackboard.

This first course, Blackboard 101, was created to orient Library staff on using Blackboard to support students. This course was developed by a Librarian who is also a Learning Designer, using backwards course design principles. Backwards design involves first creating course learning outcomes, then determining assessments that align with these outcomes. The course content is organized into learning modules, covering all aspects of using Blackboard. Evolving over time, and to help solve the challenge of coordinating staff training, this course expanded in scope to include additional library training topics. This eventually led to the development of a second course.

The second course, One Service Desk, was created to train Library staff on the single-service model, taking into consideration the Learning Commons Support rubrics. This course was developed by Library Supervisors, modelling the structure and design of the first course. Much of the course content existed in different forms, in different places; this content was collected and added, along with assessments, into learning modules.

The One Service Desk course was designed with a learning path that logically progresses through content to meet the identified learning outcomes. While supervisors are responsible for determining the course learning outcomes, and curating and adding the content, staff at all levels participated in creating and/or finding content relevant to the various course learning modules. For example, staff created tutorials about memberships and technology using Camtasia, searched for database tutorials from various vendors, and suggested different training assignment options based on

questions answered at the service desk. This approach distributed the workload of content creation, empowered staff to be involved in shaping their training, and made the development of the course a more manageable project. Nonetheless, there was a time investment required to develop the courses; the time commitment will vary depending on a number of factors, including the scope of the course content, familiarity with the selected LMS, experience with course design, and comfort level with technology.

Supervisors are responsible for training their staff, and as instructors of the course, can effectively employ course tools to provide meaningful learning opportunities to staff. The course integrates discussion boards, assignments, and quizzes for self-assessment. Supervisors have the ability to track which staff members have accessed the course, to view the assignments and quizzes, and to monitor discussions. Supervisors can then use the activity and performance in the course to assess problem areas; once identified, these problem areas can be addressed with additional training opportunities.

Lessons Learned

Evolution

RDC Library has been using an LMS for staff training for three years. During that time, our training course has evolved. What started as a course to teach library staff about how to use Blackboard has expanded into a course about providing service at the Library Desk, covering such topics as reference, circulation, and technology. Through this process, we gained a deeper understanding of adult learning, training, and course design.

Meta Learning

It is essential to demonstrate to library staff the value of on-demand training through an online course. The benefit for all staff is the flexibility to learn anytime, anywhere. This learning can take place at an individualized pace and can be self-regulated. More significantly, the Library course provides an opportunity for staff to learn in a format similar to RDC students, which can promote empathy and improve learner-centred service.

Meta Training

It is critical to train staff on how to use the training tool. Each LMS is different, and while most are fairly intuitive, there will be a learning curve. A staff quick start guide coupled with a learning module on using the LMS would be beneficial to help staff efficiently navigate the tool. Part of our impetus to start using Blackboard for staff training was to familiarize staff with its use to support students. This results in staff who are familiar with the LMS in order to support students and to further their own learning as staff.

Course Design

It is important to apply principles of course design when developing a course in an LMS. The RDC Library applied a backwards design approach, with developed learning

outcomes, learning activities, and assessments that measure the outcomes. Learning outcomes follow a specific format, using measurable verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy ("by the end of this course, library staff will be able to..."), which mirrors the curriculum design process used by the College for all credit programming.

It is also crucial to make the course dynamic with opportunities for interaction, rather than a static repository of information. Course designers should maximize LMS features by integrating interactivity, creating a learning path, adding assessments, and encouraging discussions. Course designers should also integrate a mix of text, images, and media through a mix of Open Education Resources, Creative Commons, and library resources. The benefit of an LMS course is that it provides authenticated access which is required to provide access to copyrighted and library licensed content that supports training.

Lastly, it is essential, in keeping with good course design, to keep the course fresh and current and to streamline content so that it is not duplicated; repeated content creates too many places to access information, causing staff frustration and miscommunication. The LMS course can work in conjunction with an intranet or document repository, but shouldn't in and of itself become a document repository. To take full advantage of any LMS, the training course should be developed with clear learning outcomes and aligned assessments.

Next Steps

Professional Development

The Library is committed to ensuring that at least 5% of staff time is spent on professional development (PD) activities. This PD expectation is identified in all full-time and part-time RDC Library job descriptions.

The challenge is to ensure we are providing a way for staff to participate in professional development activities even if they have no daytime availability for face-to-face opportunities. Through the Library LMS course, we share webinars, provide opportunities for peer coaching, access to discussion boards, provide training assignments, and access to training modules.

RDC Library is piloting library-wide membership to the Partnership's Continuing Education Certificate² which provides staff with the opportunity to document and track all professional development, including Blackboard modules, training and webinar attendance, and peer-to-peer learning.

Badges

The integration of digital badges is a natural progression of the library training course. Digital badges provide an online representation of learned skills. Mozilla offers a free,

² For more information about the Continuing Education Certificate, visit <http://www.cec.laa.ca>.

open source program (which is itself badged and levelled) to create badges that your staff can earn as a result of e-learning.

If your library decides to move in that direction, there is work involved in getting certified to create the badges. However, the benefit is that these badges contain data that verifies that a staff member has completed the course.

Conclusion

To address the challenge of coordinating training for a complement of full-time and part-time library staff, RDC Library has used a to provide a flexible alternative to face-to-face training.

What initially began as a simple course to orient library staff on how to use the College LMS to better support students has morphed into a multi-faceted onboarding and advanced training course. Over three years of usage, the course has evolved and remains a work in progress, with its design and outcomes being continuously assessed by supervisors through ongoing staff participation and feedback. This feedback has been generally positive, but there is always room for growth and development.

While staff have a preference for face-to-face training, they are receptive to online learning opportunities. For those staff without daytime availability, the library courses provide a viable training option to provide the knowledge and skills required to ensure workplace success.

From our experience as a college library, we have found that ongoing orientation and professional development activities are crucial to supporting our mission; this is true of all library contexts. Given the complexities of training a diverse staff group with conflicting schedules combined with the added responsibility of supporting students in the college's LMS, creating an online course to meet both needs was a natural fit. As a result, it is clear that a well-designed online course in a learning management system can provide a structured, asynchronous learning environment. This solution has successfully supported staff training, onboarding, and professional development at RDC Library.

References

- Boundless. (2015, July 21). [Using a learning management system](#).
- CypherWorx. (2015, June 4). [What to look for when choosing an LMS](#).
- Ingles, E., De Long, K., Humphrey, C., Sivak, A., Sorensen, M., & de Peuter, J. (2005). [The future of human resources in Canadian libraries](#). University of Alberta.
- Lankes, D. R. (n.d.). [New librarianship master class \(MOOC\)](#).
- Mantegna, J., Hepler, M., & Lombardo, S. (2010). [Virtual staff orientation reduces time to bring new staff up-to-speed](#). *OCLC Webjunction*.
- Renzetti, R. (2011). [Elearning for public libraries](#).