

SLIS703 LibGuide Creation Project, Reflective Report

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<https://sclis.libguides.com/slis703-barnett-libguide/home>

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This shook out as an interesting project. I spent far too much time concerned with the framing mechanic; I lack regular experience with patrons asking questions, so I took the hypothetical “you are a reference librarian and a professor approached about a special topics course looking for a guide,” quite seriously. Too seriously, in fact, as I discarded topic after topic for being “unlikely to be a real class,” “too broad a subject,” and multiple other concerns. It helped having classmates who could get me out of my head and just accepting a scenario. If you’re curious, other than the “Decisive Battles of History” fictitious course I ended up going with, other options included:

- Filmmaking Trends of the New Millennium: A shift to franchises, sequels and remakes.
- Socio-economic ramifications of the Battle of Endor
- Rock Me, Amadeus: A comprehensive look into the life and music of Mozart.

...one of those was less serious than the others. To be clear, however, the scenario was chosen because it was something I didn’t have an enormous amount of familiarity with, but seemed like a very feasible task for working reference at an academic institution. I came into the SLIS program with the idea that I enjoyed hunting and organizing information for people, and it was time to test that theory.

Process and Choices

I started by looking over already published guides through both general internet searches as well as the USC portal, and making notes over what things I appreciated being included. If I assume the target audience is an underclassman that may be lacking in research experience, then focusing on making assistance available (without reinventing the wheel and writing up lengthy

pieces myself) seemed the way to go. I worry that I trod too close to “syllabus” with this, recognizing that the required course texts would probably be included there, but they seemed like an appropriate addition here, especially considering one was available through the USC digital reserves. (As this is a fictional course, the required textbooks were chosen by me as things that looked like they fit the bill pretty squarely and had good reviews; it’s likely a professor with experience in the subject would have chosen different works, but second-guessing that would have led to another loop of reality-versus-hypothetical concerns.) Including purchasing information as a sidebar was a nice touch I copied – in spirit – from another guide as a useful point of reference.

From there, it was a matter of choosing databases with relevant material for the course topic and noting them. Again, assuming a user with limited research experience, offering search tips where possible for getting the most out of each database was one way to help replicate the tutorial experience reference libraries sometimes do. Again, you’ll see a sidebar with supplemental material related to databases – I tried to use the sidebars consistently for “additional ancillary information,” while directing user focus to the main information in the center of the page. Likewise, including hours and contact information on every page was a deliberate choice to ensure that a user *never* felt lost, if possible. Help is always just a link away.

Finally, while it doesn’t directly touch on the course topic, I felt that having a citation reference page was important for several reasons. Of course it is a significant concern for universities, but it’s also a known area where students may struggle. History departments tend to – in my experience – be more exacting than many others on the topic, as well, which meant that offering resources for not just doing research, but *presenting it*, seemed appropriate.

A Learning Opportunity

My background is in web development, so I'd initially intended to quickly knock this out in a format I was familiar with: Wordpress. However, not only was I impressed by the output of the LibGuide tool, I thought that it was an opportunity I shouldn't pass up to work with something new... and I'm glad I did. It's a very nice editing system with a surprising amount of flexibility, and beyond that, I think consistency in guide style goes a long way towards student familiarity and ability to utilize it well. I think I'll be disappointed if I need to go back to a more generalized tool to do this in the future.

I think LibGuide creation – like a lot of things – would get easier with experience, not least because I now already have a small stable of usable snippets. Rewriting a citation resource page isn't necessary (though updating it for APA or MLA may be), and I've already made many of the inclusion choices. Feedback on actual use might suggest things to change, but as-is, a lot of the structural decisions are in the bag for another project of this type, leaving “only” content to fill in. I appreciated spending a few hours doing general research on the topic in order to get a better sense of what should be included, even though in this case, I'd chosen it myself. Really, the most challenging part of this *was* the hypothetical; not being able to ask an instructor what their goals were, or what they intended students to do and learn, made it difficult to get too specific. But that means I'm left with something where, as noted, much can be reused. And that's useful to me all by itself.