

RETHINKING LIBRARY SERVICE TO DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS: ANALYZING THE EMBEDDED LIBRARIAN MODEL

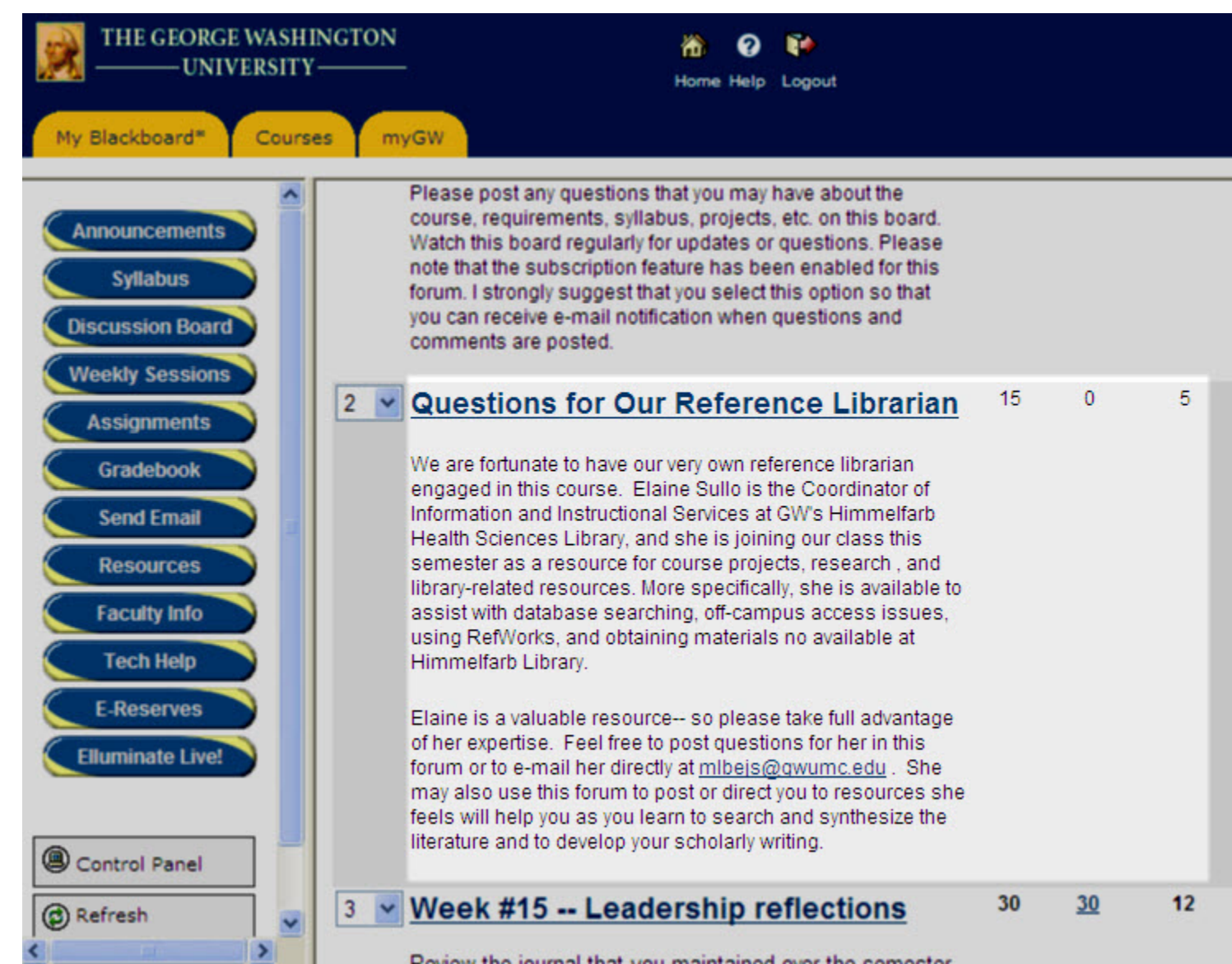
ELAINE SULLO, MLS, MAEd, AHIP, CERTIFICATE OF ADVANCED STUDY IN HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANSHIP, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH;
ALEXANDRA GOMES, MSLS, MT, AHIP; TOM HARROD, MS, MS; GISELA BUTERA, MLIS
HIMMELFARB HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARY; THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC

OBJECTIVE

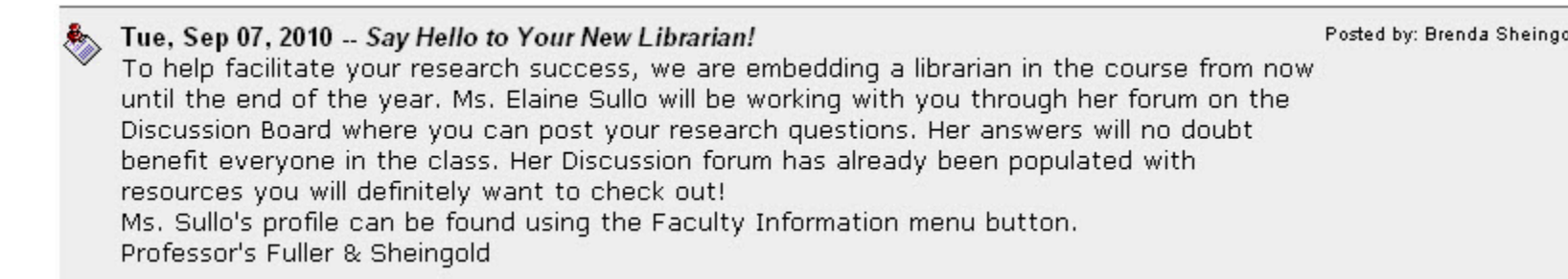
Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library has embedded librarians into Blackboard classes in the School of Nursing and School of Medicine and Health Sciences. We sought to determine the types of questions that students ask the embedded librarian, with the goal of informing future interactions with distance education classes to help develop a standard “protocol” for working with this particular population of students.

METHODOLOGY

- Reviewed 16 online classes, in which there was an embedded librarian, taught from August 2009 through December 2010.



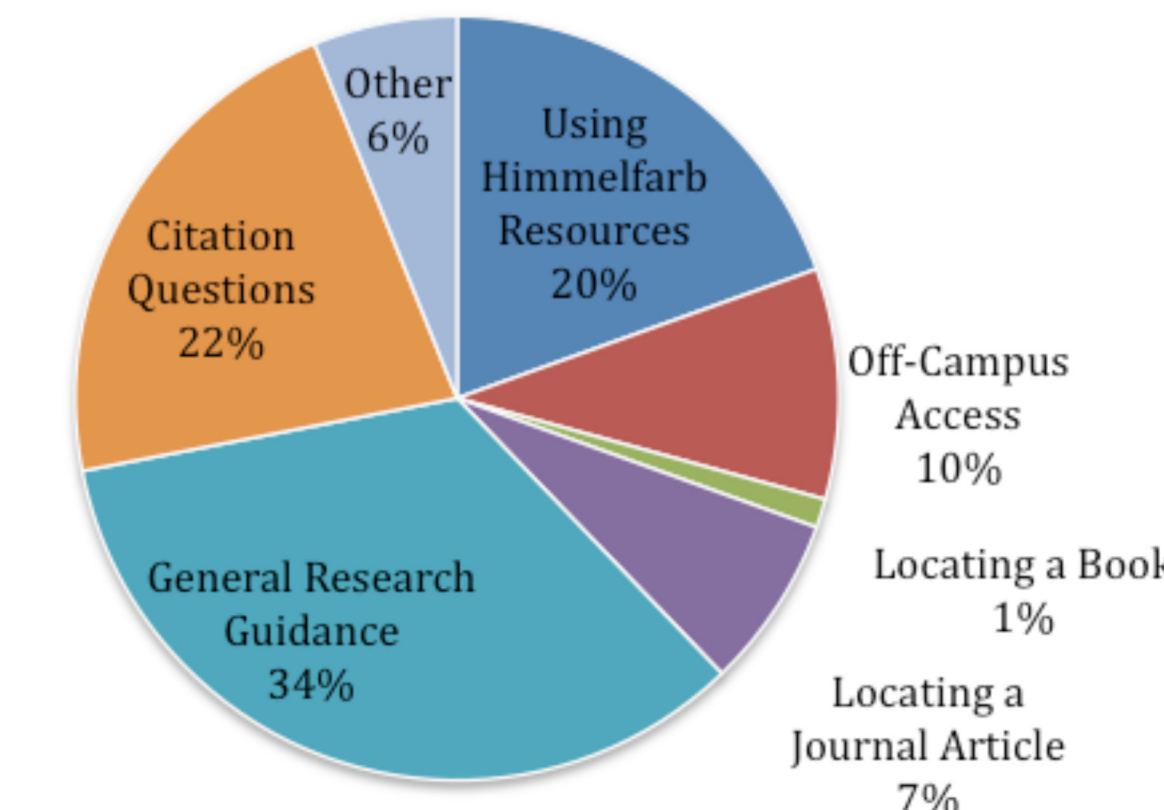
- Conducted qualitative analysis of classroom discussion board transcripts as well as email messages to determine the types of questions asked of the embedded librarian.
- Categorized questions to identify common patterns. The questions were grouped into 7 categories: using Himmelfarb resources, off-campus access to Himmelfarb resources, locating a book, locating a journal article, general research guidance, citation questions, and other.



RESULTS

- We reviewed 82 individual questions. The category of general research guidance had the most questions (28), with citation questions (18) and using Himmelfarb resources (16) close behind.

Question Categorization



WHAT DOES “GENERAL RESEARCH GUIDANCE” REALLY MEAN?

Questions categorized under this heading dealt with

- Using Boolean Operators.
- Finding peer-reviewed articles on specific topics.
- Uncertainty regarding which databases to search for an assigned topic.
- Identifying relevant search terms.
- Determining the quality of websites and databases.

CONCLUSIONS:

We’ve thought about how we can best serve distance education students in the future, and hence, have documented several best practices:

- Plan with Instructor:** Before the class begins, the librarian and faculty member should discuss how the librarian will interact with students, which assignments might be troublesome for students and might require librarian assistance, and if the faculty member would like the librarian to participate in other ways, or simply be available to answer questions.
- Introductions:** In classes where the faculty member introduces the librarian in the announcements section at the beginning of the semester, more students seem to take advantage of the librarian’s expertise. The librarian should encourage the faculty member to post this introduction, and also list the

librarian’s contact information in the “Faculty Info” section in Blackboard.

- Leverage Technology:** Librarians must be open to providing assistance to students beyond the discussion board or email. Explaining how to search a database or use bibliographic management software is more easily done via telephone, Skype, or Elluminate Live (a virtual space within Blackboard that allows for live communication and collaboration).
- Incorporate Web-Based Support Tools:** Librarians should consider adding links within the Blackboard class to tutorials regarding database searching, using RefWorks, citation format, and finding full-text peer-reviewed journal articles, as these seemed to be the topics of many of the student questions.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE:

- Use of the synchronous virtual environment:** One of our librarians has used Elluminate Live to hold office hours for first-year medical students and to teach an Excel class to online nursing students. We would like to continue this practice, but also expand the use of this technology to other types of teaching, such as library orientations, specific database or search strategy instruction, and RefWorks training.
- Connect with additional faculty members:** We would like to expand the number of faculty with whom we work to support distance education students.
- Translate in-person classes to the online classroom:** We hope to take classes that are taught in the library and move them to the online environment. For example, two of our librarians currently teach a class

called “Delving into Digital Dirt: Social Networking for Individuals in Health Care”; they hope to make this class available for distance education students by offering it online via Elluminate Live.

