Course Support Internship Report
Lisa Page
May 2008

The main purpose of the course support internship was to implement an e-reserves system, using ReservesDirect, creating procedures and providing training in the process. I was also to support faculty in creating Inforum-related content for Sakai and Blackboard learning management systems (LMS).

Implementation of E-Reserves:

Assessment of ReservesDirect:

When I began my internship, Niloufar Soekhai had been researching e-reserve systems that could potentially be used for the implementation of e-reserves at the Inforum. The most promising of these was the ReservesDirect system developed by Emory University. In May of 2007, I created several demo courses in the Inforum’s demo system. While the system held much promise, it still contained several nasty bugs which kept us from making it available for faculty use. Further development of the system had also stalled, discouraging us from becoming reliant upon ReservesDirect. We decided not to use RD because Ab had limited time to work on the back end of it, I had very little faith in it given the silence within the RD community, and much of the literature I was reading indicated that a different solution might be more advantageous for the Inforum in the long run. We were further dissuaded by the challenges of copyright compliance and the potential amount of staff time that would be spent preparing e-reserves. With the emergence of an alternative to e-reserves, ReservesDirect has been shelved indefinitely.

Enhancing electronic reading lists:

At the May 2007 UTL Circulation Services meeting, Lari Langford announced the upcoming implementation of a new e-reserves policy for the UTL central libraries. Beginning in the fall 2007 semester, instructors would be invited to submit their reading lists in Word document format. Once received, their list would be “enhanced” through the addition of durable links to e-books, e-articles, and UTL catalogue records. This alternative to e-reserves served to eradicate copyright issues and to create a one-stop place for students to access course materials. If the instructor was using Blackboard, UTL would upload the list to an E-Reserves folder. If they were using a different method of posting course content online then the list would be returned to them for their use.
This process of uploading an enhanced reading list to a learning management system (LMS) would work with Sakai as well, which led to a rethinking of the ReservesDirect endeavour on my part. I invited FIS instructors to submit their fall 2007 reading lists to me for enhancement; fourteen courses took advantage of the service. Due to the success of this service in the fall semester, it was offered again in the winter semester; eleven courses benefited from enhanced reading lists. The feedback from instructors has been very positive on the whole, although there are several weaknesses with this method.

The main weakness of enhancing lists is that electronic access can only be provided to items which are currently available electronically to UTL users. The Inforum cannot provide access to items to which there is not already electronic access. This is problematic for some subject areas taught at FIS, but has not been a problem on the whole.

There has also been difficulty with specific databases and journals (e.g. Archivaria) in providing the best possible link to an article. Sometimes with certain databases and e-journals, it is impossible to link directly to the article through normal means, as Article Finder cannot locate the particular article required. I contacted Richard Hydal about this and he provided some advice.

I have received mostly positive feedback regarding this new initiative. Those who have commented on the enhanced lists expressed their gratitude and commented upon the ease of use. It is my belief that this method of providing electronic access to course-related materials is far better for the Inforum than to introduce a new system like ReservesDirect, which would require everyone to learn a new system, and would likely have involved more work than I could have handled alone, especially when working part time from September to April.

**Learning Management Systems (LMS):**

*Initial survey of faculty:*

In May 2007, we distributed a questionnaire to all faculty members and adjunct lecturers via email. The questionnaire was an attempt to gauge learning management system use within the faculty. We had only fifteen respondents in total, and many of the answers given were somewhat ambiguous, but we did learn that BSCW was on the way out, and that instructors were interested in Sakai.

Although there was an interest shown in Sakai, some people had already given up on it. Seven instructors indicated that they would be using Blackboard for the fall 2007 semester, while only 4 would be using Sakai, and between 4 and 6 would still be using BSCW after they had been encouraged to explore other, more suitable options.
By conducting this survey of faculty and adjuncts, I not only got a sense of what was happening in online course material, but I also got my name out there and gave them a point of contact for related inquiries.

**Blackboard:**

I attended a “Blackboard Getting Started” training session in July 2007 which was provided by RCAT. It provided me with a sound base of knowledge regarding the general functions of the Blackboard LMS as it is used at the University of Toronto. I attended the same workshop that faculty members would attend to get started in Blackboard, so it helped me to get an idea of their level of knowledge. While it provided me with a good base of knowledge, I found that it did not provide me with adequate information to be a course builder for an instructor. Thankfully, this duty was not requested of me, and through discussion with Joe it was established that this role is not necessary at the Inforum. Since Sakai is the LMS that the Inforum is trying to promote, instructors have generally been directed to RCAT for training and support, with my focus remaining on the training and support of Sakai users.

While I have had very limited involvement with Blackboard, I have kept myself aware of the developments being made by the librarians’ Blackboard Library Interest Group. I attended their meetings from June 2007 to April 2008. These meetings have kept me apprised of what the central library system is doing with reading lists and how they are integrating the library with the learning management system. Only a handful of our FIS instructors are using Blackboard, so I have only sent two linked reading lists to Sian Meikle for uploading to the E-Reserves area in Blackboard. The group also discussed the integration of a Library area within Blackboard, and the tools librarians can use to modify this content, but I did not become involved in this as there are so few FIS instructors using Blackboard. I might have liked to investigate whether we could do something similar with Sakai, but there simply was no time, and there were other major problems with Sakai’s basic tools that obviously needed to be addressed first.

**Sakai:**

One of the biggest challenges in this internship has been working with Sakai. Through reading the help files and creating demo courses with which to experiment, I have taught myself to use it, and effective ways in which to provide instruction to faculty and adjunct instructors. I prepared an hour long workshop for faculty which I modelled after the introductory Blackboard session provided by RCAT. I performed a trial of it in front of the Inforum staff, but upon re-examination, it seemed that faculty members would be easiest to entice to attend training if they were targeted one-on-one. Therefore, the workshop was never offered, but it provided a sound basis for my individual training sessions.
The lack of communication between the Sakai developers and myself has proven to be somewhat detrimental to constructive progress at times. The major problems with communication seem to have centred on the implementation of UTORauth in Sakai. As the tech team have been manoeuvring through university politics in an attempt to implement this at the beginning of each semester, I (the faculty liaison) have often been kept in the dark about recent developments. I have repeatedly kept faculty members waiting on information about Sakai’s technical capabilities for the coming semester, and have often been unable to create course shells for them in a reasonable amount of time. While I have voiced my frustrations to several of the people involved in Sakai’s development, I often received little assistance in the past. Thankfully, the situation seems to have improved drastically of late, with increased communication and assurance that UTORauth will be implemented by fall 2008.

The informality of the training sessions I provided to instructors has proven to be beneficial. Sakai is a fairly complex LMS, and each instructor seemed to have different preferences and needs. Taking a one-on-one approach allowed me to schedule sessions when they were most convenient for the instructor, and instructors were able to ask questions freely, allowing me to tailor each session to their specific needs. This helped me to ensure that they had a good understanding of the functions of Sakai and how they might like to use them in their course sites. Instructors also have widely various background experience in learning management systems, so the ability to adjust to each instructor’s level of knowledge helped to put them at ease and perhaps made them more receptive to the training.

I started with no documentation on Sakai and no training as well, which was a challenge. Sherri Vokey had created an online tutorial for students to help them create user accounts and sign up for course sites which provided me with a good starting point. I wrote up a handout of the instructions, with a link to the tutorial, for instructors to distribute to their students. I also made a training package for instructors, which contains basic information on using several of the main tools in Sakai. I send this package by email to all instructors prior to the semester start each semester, and bring a copy to each training session.

I have recently created a document outlining the procedure for creating course shells manually, although this document should not be necessary for the fall 2008 semester. It is still useful for creation of project sites once the course sites are created through importing ROSI information. I created very little documentation for Sakai, since the online help files are so extensive and will be kept up to date.

My general support of Sakai use within the faculty has been fairly steady work. It is a very intuitive system for the most part, but whenever there was a technical glitch, instructors would contact me and I would take a look at the problem, then send it along to Nakul Hoelz and Danny Lee with as much detail as possible. If it was a question
related to Sakai’s use, this sometimes required further investigation as faculty members often wished to push beyond the basic functionality of the LMS. I received a lot of questions by email, by phone, and from faculty members who stopped into the Inforum.

Towards the beginning of each semester I often had students email me about Sakai. Usually they were unsure of how to create a user account, had forgotten their password, or they had joined the wrong course site. I spoke in a few classes to show them the basics of navigating their course site. This was fantastic experience, providing instruction to a large class and fielding their questions on the spot. Some students also had me create project sites for them so that they could collaborate in groups.

**Short Term Loan Collection:**

I found that maintaining the short term loan collection was the most time consuming of all of my assigned duties. I spent a great deal of time cleaning up the collection, so it is my hope that it will be kept organized and updated. When I began reviewing the items on STL, I found that there were many items which had been placed on STL for a course offered years ago, and had never been removed. It became a goal of mine to return these items to the general collection, where they would be more accessible to Inforum users.

**Review of 2 day loan collection:**

In summer 2007, I undertook a review of the items on 2 day STL. This was done through a hands-on approach of checking the last date written on the due date sticker in the front cover of the book, and if it appeared that the item had not been charged out to a user within the past year, it was to be removed from the short term loan collection. If it had been charged out in the past year, it was left in the collection.

In hindsight, there were several problems with this method and it was likely not the most efficient method of reviewing the collection. Some items that instructors assumed would be on short term loan for core and required courses in the fall semester were removed, creating confusion regarding their location at the time of preparation for the new semester. At this time, a method of retaining the course reserve record within SIRSI was also unknown to me, so all items removed from the 2 day loan collection no longer possessed course reserve records in SIRSI. This caused a great deal more work for me when I needed to place some of the items back on STL in the fall. Yet some items were left on 2 day loan that likely should have been removed. Simply because they had circulated within the past year did not justify their being on STL. Obviously, if someone was willing to sign an item out for two days, it was popular enough to give them two weeks with the item if it was not needed for a course.
Review of 2 hour loan collection:

In the fall 2007 semester, I systematically reviewed all 2 hour loan items. I had discovered a method of making the SIRSI course reserve records dormant, retaining all course information within the system when an item was removed from short term loan. I likely removed approximately one third of the short term loan collection kept behind the desk.

Reference materials on short term loan were carefully reviewed individually to determine if their inclusion in short term loan was necessary. In most instances, the item was removed from the STL collection, but some high demand items have remained. Additional reference items are to be placed on short term loan only if they will be in high demand, or of high risk of theft or damage. Several resources, such as Carswell Records Retention items, cataloguing reference materials, etc. will remain in the STL collection indefinitely. All periodicals that are available electronically were pulled from STL. The A.V. materials were also removed and sent to the A.V. section in the stacks.

Following the review of all short term loan items, Joe and I determined that it was both feasible and desirable to move the 2 day loan collection from its location by the reference section to the area behind the desk where the 2 hour loan collection was already kept. Consolidating the STL collections has reduced users’ confusion over where to locate items of different lending periods.

In the winter 2008 semester, I also created a list of course-specific items to be kept at the circulation desk. Staff can consult the list to see which non-Inforum items are kept on short term loan. If a student asks for a binder that is not on the shelf, it is sometimes difficult to discern if the binder is signed out, or has not been placed on reserve. The list should help to clear up confusion and should minimize questions directed to the course support person throughout the day. It remains to be seen if this is a sustainable approach, since so many items are added during the semester, but a list has been placed at the desk for the summer 2008 semester as well.

Course Documentation:

Examination of the course documentation file revealed it to be riddled with misfiling. I determined that with the re-use of course codes, something needed to be done about the one-shot courses. I wanted to create new file folders for each of them, including the name of the course as well as the course code, for the purpose of clarification, and to ensure that the syllabi will (hopefully) not be misfiled when used. There has been frequent re-use of old course codes in the past as well, which creates complications. Since I was unable to find the time to devote to this project, Tasha Caswell has agreed to take it on during the summer 2008 semester.
Course Support Documentation:

Documentation was severely lacking, and almost non-existent, when I began. I was able to unearth several training documents from the UTL website, and have recently composed several documents outlining course support procedures. Since I was working with limited knowledge and experience, I had Nadia Moro review these documents and provide input. They have now been uploaded to the Inforum wiki. Writing these documents was an interesting experience, requiring collaboration between myself and another staff member, and a great deal of meticulous writing on my part.

Experience as member of Inforum team:

I have very much enjoyed being a part of such a small and sometimes close-knit staff. It was an environment where I could ask questions and learn a bit more every day. That said, I feel that more could have been done to help me settle in to my position at the Inforum. Over time, I got a good sense of everyone’s responsibilities and areas of expertise, but an overview of this at the start would have been beneficial. More orientation regarding “who’s who” at FIS would also have been of immense help. That said, I was able to orient myself over time, and my co-workers were a great help along the way.

The level of supervision provided was ideally suited to my work style. While Joe would always make himself available to speak with me and we met weekly for the first four months of my internship, he was very hands-off and let me take care of course support with very limited supervision. He gave me a lot of freedom to take initiative, which provided me with a great deal of self-confidence. He listened to my ideas, let me explore alternatives, and made me feel like a valuable member of the Inforum staff.

Suitability of Duties for Intern:

After spending a year in this position, I am doubtful if the course support position should be filled by a student in future. Working as a faculty liaison was often quite rewarding, and an excellent experience for a student interested in pursuing a career in academic libraries, but it could sometimes be a very frustrating, nerve-wracking, and infuriating experience with some instructors.

There were also some difficulties in interacting with other students. Several first year students became confused about my role in their course, thinking that I was a TA since they knew that I was a student, yet held an ‘Instructor’ status within their Sakai course site and, for some, visited their class to provide instruction. I had several students request my assistance in clarifying assignment guidelines, granting extensions,
etc. If these Sakai-related duties were performed by a regular staff member at the Inforum, it is possible that there would be much less confusion.

Future of Course Support at Inforum:

It is my hope that the work I have done over the past year will be carried on in future. Since the introduction of enhanced reading lists was so warmly received, I feel it necessary to continue with this service. Directions for linking are included in the course support procedures binder, and all of the linked reading lists completed to date are available on the common (H) drive. I also hope that periodic reviews are conducted of the items on short term loan. If they are not, then the STL collection will outgrow the area behind the circulation desk quite rapidly. The new policy we discussed, of placing only required readings on short term loan may be difficult to enforce, but I believe that it will drastically cut back on wasted time placing items on short term loan which will not be signed out, and will help to keep the area clear of unnecessary items.

Fulfillment of Internship Expectations:

My initial job description does not begin to describe the things that I have done over the past year and the duties that I acquired. While there was no mention of the short term loan collection in my job description, it consumed a great deal of my time. I also did not implement a traditional e-reserves system, as was the original goal, so the required training and documentation were never undertaken. The work I did with Sakai was also slightly different than outlined in the description, but largely dealt with providing an alternative to e-reserves.

The job that I ended up doing was not the job for which I was hired, with the exception of the job title, and I think this is one of the most valuable lessons to be taken from this experience. When a manager sees a gap in service and intends to fill it, they do not necessarily have a firm idea of what a new hire will be doing, but it is an opportunity for the staff member to make a position their own. It is with this knowledge that I am now applying for other positions, always considering that the job may not be exactly as advertised in the end. At the Inforum, I had the opportunity to provide input, and with Joe’s mentorship and trust, I was able to change the face of course support at the Inforum.

What I Have Gained:

The experience that I have gained over the past year has been immense. I had the opportunity to attend and participate in meetings of several kinds. I learned to liaise effectively with faculty members and adjunct instructors. I was also responsible for the entire area of Course Support at the Inforum, which was overwhelming at first, but extremely rewarding in the end, as I looked back and saw all that I had
accomplished. The lessons I learned were not something I could have learned in a classroom and the relationships I built with faculty and staff have provided me with confidence to go forward and find my dream job. I will be forever grateful for this opportunity and hope that the internships will continue to be offered in future.