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Using Gimlet and Libraryh3lp to Improve Services at the Butler Community College Libraries

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Abstract

Librarians from Butler Community College will speak about two tools, Gimlet and Libraryh3lp, which they use to improve service and track statistics at the circulation desk and online. The combination of the two software products enables them to track statistics and issues from reference inquiries, along with circulation, college, directional, and technical help questions. Gimlet is an easy and inexpensive desk statistics tracker and knowledge base that allows libraries to staff their desks wisely.

Keywords

reference, circulation, knowledge base, statistics tracker, software platform

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Using Gimlet and Libraryh3lp to Improve Services at the Butler Community College Libraries

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Librarians from Butler Community College will speak about two tools, Gimlet and Libraryh3lp, which they use to improve service and track statistics at the circulation desk and online. The combination of the two software products enables them to track statistics and issues from reference inquiries, along with circulation, college, directional, and technical help questions. Gimlet is an easy and inexpensive desk statistics tracker and knowledge base that allows libraries to staff their desks wisely.

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History of Chat Reference at the Butler Community College Libraries

Beginning in August, 2008, Butler Libraries (BL) used Meebo, an online chat reference service, to record and process 1107 questions. Following Meebo's deprecation in July, 2012, BL began a search for an application equivalent in functionality and not prohibitive in cost. Butler's Technology Librarian, Ronda Holt, first turned to Zoho, a non-proprietary chat reference service, but she soon found it lacked some of the features Meebo had afforded. Therefore, in October of 2012, BL turned to LibraryH3lp for its chat reference needs. Holt received ample guidance from the support staff at LibraryH3lp to aid in BL's transition, and quickly found an additional benefit to using LibraryH3lp in the form of text messaging. Up to that time, BL had kept a cellular phone to receive reference questions by text, a service costing the library \$30 per month, or \$360 per year (the same cost as BL has had to pay for the basic service of LibraryH3lp). This phone could only be monitored by one librarian at a time and was rarely utilized by the patrons. Holt learned that LibraryH3lp provided a text reference service for only an additional \$50 per year which by being web-based further enabled any librarian at a workstation to answer text questions. LibraryH3lp also allowed BL to transfer its knowledge base to other applications such as Gimlet.

Gimlet—Not Just a Martini

During the same semester as BL began using LibraryH3lp, Holt learned about a web-based statistics tracker and knowledge base called Gimlet, and began a trial with it almost immediately. At only \$120 per annum (\$10 a month), BL found Gimlet to be very reasonably priced for the services it provides. Gimlet allows library staff to use it at multiple workstations at once, availing searching to find answers to similar reference questions, tagging to further organize the data, and running reports for statistical analysis. Storing and tracking these questions and statistics has improved accuracy for reports to ACRL, as well as on the college, system, and federal levels. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Gimlet as a Statistics Tracker

BL moved from tallying up the number of reference questions received in a week to being able to record the actual questions and answers for future reference, which has been an excellent enhancement to reference services. This has proven helpful for student workers and professional staff, as one quick search reveals similar questions and corresponding answers. For particularly difficult or frequently asked questions, BL has begun to star the best answers, a feature in Gimlet that makes the starred question appear at the top of a related search. The accessibility of over 1900 questions in BL's knowledge base, including those imported from LibraryH3lp, has been a tremendous aid in a variety of ways: from tracking what times or days are most likely for patrons to have reference questions, to helping student workers be able to answer a higher percent of reference questions, to storing and organizing the questions toward the creation of an updated FAQ.

Figure 2: Comparison of BL Tally Sheet and Gimlet

Using and Optimizing the Collected Data

Samuel Willis, an intern at BL from Emporia State University, began working on forming a new FAQ for BL using the questions stored in Gimlet in February, 2014. To this end, Willis examined Gimlet and analyzed its tags and searchability. Willis found there to be approximately 200 tags – far more than he felt would be necessary for a knowledge base of this size. When examining the tags, Willis discovered a multitude of rarely or even accidentally used tags. For example, when specifying a tag on a question in Gimlet, the user must type an underscore between each word because spaces in the tag entry field are used as a separator between tags. Therefore, when users forgot to use the underscore, any multi-word tags they used were logged into the system as several tags. “Films on Demand” became three tags: “Films,” “on,” and “Demand,” each applying to only one question. There was also a tag, “Fims_on_Demand.” These tagging errors were easily corrected and the tag count significantly reduced, but there were also many tags that applied to only one or two questions and were therefore of little or no use in organizing the questions. Many of these Willis consolidated or changed to include a broader scope. By the end of the semester, the tag list was reduced to less than half its original size.

Also of concern was the number of questions in Gimlet that were untagged. Willis estimated that approximately 45% of the nearly 1900 (less than 850) questions had no tags, and worked extensively to tag these. A significant problem with the way Gimlet was being used was that new untagged questions were being added to the system on an almost daily basis. This was because the persons inputting the questions into the system either forgot to tag them, or were unsure which tag(s) would be appropriate. During the course of this project, BL identified ways to improve this situation by creating an approved tag list (editable only by professional staff), and training the student workers using a research guide. This is expected to

reduce the number of untagged questions being created, but also to empower the student workers to enter the knowledge base and tag archived questions as part of their work routine.

In the meantime, Willis worked to tag several hundred questions in order to better determine the most prominent questions for the FAQ project. It was difficult, however, to access all the untagged questions. Gimlet has two search options: keyword search, and search by tag. The keyword search takes the input string and finds all matches in the question number, the question itself, the answer, or the tags. An asterisk can also be placed at the end of a string. For example, “boo*” would return all records containing any of the words “book,” “books,” “booth,” or even “Boolean.” It would not return “eBook” or any word not starting with “boo.” This feature was useful when the user knew what to look for, but would return only a sample of questions (some tagged, others not) and was not helpful in narrowing the results to only untagged questions. The tag search took only exact matches with existing tags, complete with underscores, and was unable to accept an empty field. Thus, the tag search would return only tagged questions. To access the untagged questions, since neither search option was ample for this, Willis and the Butler librarians found a workaround that functions very well. Every day when Willis would come to work on tagging questions in Gimlet, he would export the data to a CSV file, organize it in alphabetical order by tag, then scroll down to the end of the tags. (See Figure 3.) Every question below this point in the file was untagged and the question number (accessible by keyword search) was in the neighboring cell. Willis would then return to Gimlet, and refer to the question numbers for a quick search to find a particular question and tag it. This was so efficient that it much alleviated the need for a direct way to access the untagged questions.

Question	Tags	Question	Answer		
1041	Reserves	Call-student looking for reserve book	not all books are on reserve.		
98	Reserves	Called to ask if we had a copy of Body by D	Yes, and explained that it could		
1139	student id	Do you need a current student ID to check	Yes		
194	textbooks	Asked about textbooks	He found some he needed for c		
203	textbooks	Student asked about a reserve textbook.	book not on reserve currently b		
250	textbooks	Do you have the chemistry textbook in An	No, but we have in El Dorado.		
1642	textbooks	Somebody told a student we have the Calculus book here in 5000 library.			
231	videos	Student asked for American history videos	Suggested American History in		
592	videos	Looking for video for her class	found correct video		
556	wifi	Do you guys have a generic password for	only if you are a butler student,		
32	Word	Student wanted to know how to find the h	I showed her where to click on t		
33	Word	Student wanted to know where to find the	I had him click on the insert tab		
37		Where do I find this book I found on the c	The book was checked out so I		
100		Butler Admissions asked about the cost of	Judy & I told them the cost is \$3		
104		What should i do if you do not own a book	It was answered by sdunbar		
207		Student asked how to access auto repair	Advised student to log into Pip		
209		Do you need your student ID to check out	No, add to system using name.		
214		Do you have the dvd "Religion in small soc	No ater searching the catalog.		
255		Student asked me about DVDs. He was m	I showed him our collection of D		
269		Student wanted to know if he needed a lib	Told him/her student ID was lib		

Figure 3: Sample CSV File (Organized by Tag)

Looking to the Future

There is always uncertainty in the future, and the plans we make today will have to be adapted. When Holt introduced Gimlet to BL, she selected five question types, but in the nearly two years that Gimlet has been in use at BL, we have found ambiguity between the Directional and College types. Some questions are labeled as a College type by one staff member, when another had labeled a nearly identical question as

Directional. The Butler librarians planned to address this ambiguity by combining these question types until they learned from the director that the distinction was necessary for statistical purposes. How will the line be drawn between these question types? This and other concerns will have to be addressed as we move forward.

We are also certain that the system will require continuous improvement. Only one week after refining the Gimlet tag list in May, 2014, Willis found two tags, “log” and “in,” had been created. (See Figure 4.) It is important not to allow such occurrences to disturb our outlook on the future, but rather to embrace them – to keep in mind that we are all human. Human beings make mistakes, but they also have the capacity for great ingenuity.

in [Promote](#)
 Interlibrary_loan [Promote](#)
 Internet [Promote](#)
 Issues_and_Controversies [Promote](#)
 Journal_Finder [Promote](#)
 Junior [Promote](#)
 Kansas_Library [Promote](#)
 Laminare [Promote](#)
 Learning_Express [Promote](#)
 Lexis_Nexis [Promote](#)
 libguide [Promote](#)
 library [Promote](#)
 LibraryH3lp [Promote](#)
 library_classes [Promote](#)
 library_services [Promote](#)
 log [Promote](#)
 login [Promote](#)

Figure 4: Recent Sample of Tag List

Overall, BL has been very pleased with LibraryH3lp and Gimlet and how well they function complementarily. Records from either of these knowledge bases can be transferred to the other with little difficulty. Already BL has begun creating a research guide within LibraryH3lp to assist staff in reference interviews, having transferred questions from Gimlet to do so. We encourage interested persons to view it and other related sites to gain a deeper understanding of how these applications work. The research guide is available at http://butler_faqs.ask.libraryh3lp.com. There is also an excellent research guide which BL used to learn more about Gimlet, available through Loyola Marymount University's William H. Hannon Library at <http://libguides.lmu.edu/gimlet>.

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