Library Learning Objects UX Study (2019) - Final Report

Rationale

The UX Team was approached by the Library’s Digital Projects & Media Studio Team to help explore students’ perceptions of library learning objects (videos, infographics, handouts, etc). Library learning objects primarily live on the Digital Learning Commons while some have been embedded on various Library Guides and within CourseLink. The UX Team conducted a case study on learning objects in 2017. In that study, we focused on first year students from CHEM 1050 because their professor had embedded a few learning objects onto CourseLink. We found striking similarities in the results from the 2017 and 2019 studies. You will find results from both sprinkled throughout this report. We hope our findings will be used to inform the creation of new learning objects and provide strategic direction for the Digital Learning Commons.

Methodology

1. The UX Team conducted in-person surveys with 28 participants in the Library on March 14-15, 2019. Participant responses were recorded by the researcher via Qualtrics, a survey software. We set up a table with a tablet/laptop and headphones, as well as signage advertising a small incentive in exchange for their participation. Participants were asked a few introductory questions and then they viewed one of four learning objects (See below) and answered a series of questions related to the object (See Appendix A).
   ● Reflecting on a Personal Experience Using the “What, So What, Now What” Model - Video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mQ_zDUX9nE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mQ_zDUX9nE)
   ● We Need to Talk: Tips for Participating in Class Discussions - Handout [https://learningcommons.lib.uoguelph.ca/item/we-need-talk-tips-participating-class-discussions](https://learningcommons.lib.uoguelph.ca/item/we-need-talk-tips-participating-class-discussions)
   ● #presentlikeapro - Video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW6MKBX0HEQ&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW6MKBX0HEQ&t=2s)

2. Following the in-person surveys, the UX Team conducted two 15 minute modified focus groups with first year students in a UNIV 1200 course (total of 14 participants) on March 26, 2019. The first year students were shown two learning objects (We Need to Talk handout and Present Like a Pro video) and then divided into two groups and asked to answer the same questions from the
in-person survey (See Appendix A). These learning objects were specifically chosen because they were relevant to the assignments outlined in the course syllabus provided by the instructor.

Findings

Note: Direct quotations from participants are denoted by the use of quotation marks. The remaining comments were recorded in Qualtrics by researchers who captured the original language of participants to the best of their ability.

Video Production

There were mixed reactions when it came to the audiovisual elements and pace of the videos. Most liked the animations and found the videos easy to follow, but some commented that the style was “overwhelming,” or not academic enough:

Reflecting on a Personal Experience

- Like the animation, easier to look at than real life
- I like the animations and the transitions between them
- I liked that it was clear and visually appealing
- Easy to watch, it was cheesy, but better than a person just talking right at you

#presentlikeapro

- I like Powtoon because it’s easy to stay engaged because it’s always moving around
- I like how they used animation to make the video seem friendly and easy to follow
- It didn’t feel like there was a consistent character, it seemed like the animation style was mixed up
- “I feel like when, as university students, when we YouTube stuff we’re looking for more of professors speaking to us. Not like an animation...So seeing animation, if you had animation here, a professor talking about it here, most university students will pick the professor talking”

Some students enjoyed more “calming” music to feel relaxed, while others wanted more “upbeat” music to feel energized. The most common comment about the music, was that it should exist in the background and not distract from the content.

Most students wanted the videos to be direct and to the point. They commented that the Reflecting on a Personal Experience video moved too slowly and had too much extraneous content. While the #presentlikeapro video content was paced well but at times the narrator was speaking too quickly.

Reflecting on a Personal Experience

- Took a long time
- The pace could have been a bit faster
• It was too long to explain what it was trying to explain

#Presentlikeapro

• Pace was okay, except where she speaks quicker
• I think beginners would think it was too quick, for me it’s fine because I’m comfortable presenting
• “Sometimes she was talking really fast though, and it felt like she was trying to cram in her words”
• It could be shorter and still be as productive

Handout Design

Most students enjoyed seeing some colour, and wanted a simple, easy to follow layout:

We Need to Talk

• I like it because it is colourful, keeps me interested in reading it
• I love the colours, without colours it wouldn't have same impact
• Like that its coloured, and well organized or blocked
• It was blocked so it was easy to read
• I like that it's broken up into chunks
• Clean, visually clean, easy to follow in terms of layout

Deep Reflection 101

• The iceberg was a good analogy
• Like the infographics, I would just clean up the arrows so you know the direction to read
• I would change the layout in a sense where, they could be confused where to start, they had arrows pointing in both directions and it could be confusing. I picked up on it, but I don't know about others.
• It’s just confusing about which one I read first

General Comments on Content and Tone

Stronger themes (and opinions) appeared when students were asked about content and tone. The students we spoke to commonly said that they want information, and the way it is presented, to be at an academically appropriate level.

The 2017 study found that students lacked interest in content that they felt was superfluous to their learning goals. They want content that is directly related to their course, rather than ancillary learning strategies:
Reflecting on a Personal Experience

- I think it was somewhat useful, but how to do reflections in courses would be more beneficial, more concrete example that relates to school directly

#presentlikeapro

- “It’s stuff you learn growing up such as making presentations. I don’t think you’d watch it in university because you already learned those basic skills”
- “I don’t think we would Google how to make a presentation at this point”
- The information is commonly known

We Need to Talk

- Common sense, so not useful for me
- Maybe if it was super in depth for a specific class, but not a general one like this

Deep Reflection 101

- It was not giving me useful information, I knew all of that already

Another theme that was uncovered in 2017, and repeated in this study, was concern about the tone of the videos. Although participants generally reacted positively to the “fun,” “happy,” or “friendly” nature of some of the objects, and they liked content that is “simple” and “easy to understand,” they reacted strongly to content that they felt was condescending and too childish:

Reflecting on a Personal Experience

- The graphics are cute, but is it for university students?
- It seemed childish and young. I couldn’t see a university student sitting through 3 minutes of that
- We are university students, the tone sounded like you were talking to children, the vocabulary was fine, but the tone is what you would use with children

#Presentlikeapro

- Annoying, felt like they were babying me
- The tone was putting me to sleep, I want something serious
- “It was like they were thinking we were younger”

We Need to Talk

- It’s fun, but maybe a little condescending. If you are coming in blank it is good information
Use of Learning Objects

Similar to 2017, most participants were not aware that the library produced digital learning objects. As such, most did not know where to find the objects:

- I know about the help in person, but not online video help
- I know of the handouts near the research desk, but not online
- “No, not really. I would imagine they had some sort of resources, but I didn’t know...no.”
- I didn’t. I was surprised at the end when it had the library url
- I knew they had some flyers and help, but I don’t know much about it
- I knew videos existed, but didn’t know what content they had. I didn’t know where to find it. I wasn’t aware there was YouTube channel

Several of the students we spoke to wanted clearer titles. For example, one student addressing the We Need to Talk handout remarked, “the title... it sounds like a mental health title. Like we ‘Need to Talk’ sounds like they are bridging it with a mental health initiative.” Having searchable content that can be found online is important as students frequently explained that they sought help for their courses on the internet by searching Google or Youtube. The students we spoke to did not show favour between digital learning resources produced by the University of Guelph, and those produced elsewhere. Students are seeking out online content to help them learn concepts and tackle problems in their courses, the creator doesn’t seem to matter:

- Probably ask my mom, that’s a good place to start. Or again I’d Google it, like how to write an assignment, how to write an essay
- That would be the first thing I do, ask a friend or classmate. Or Google, try to be resourceful
- I normally Google things, I also ask siblings
- Internet in general
- Normally I will refer to the textbook, or YouTube
- Checked online for more resources, used Primo to find papers, and Youtube videos.
- ‘Crash Courses’ on Youtube

Conclusion

As with the 2017, there were mixed reactions to the aesthetics of the learning objects. Students were most concerned with having content that was relevant to their learning goals, and having it presented in a manner that resonates with them.

We found that most students did not know about digital learning objects, and had never used them. However, they do frequently look for help online, and make use of similar resources such as YouTube tutorials. There is a market for digital learning objects produced by the library, but students are not finding them, and perhaps because of the general and broad nature of the objects, they aren’t seeking
them out. The library should continue to look for new strategies to connect users to content, and create more targeted content that relates to the specific needs of University of Guelph students.

Our main takeaways were:

- **Visuals and video production are fine, as is**
  - Keep using colour, animation, and background music and chunking text

- **Tone is an issue**
  - Be careful with “babying” and “talking down” to students
  - Students are not discerning about where the object is coming from, but they are looking for an authoritative / expert voice

- **Pacing**
  - Get to the point as quickly as possible (this does not mean making the videos shorter)
  - Make sure we aren’t speaking too quickly

- **Students cannot find the learning objects and they aren’t seeking them out**
  - The objects need to be explicitly tied to course content

Some questions we were left with...

- **Why would a student seek these objects out?**
  - What would motivate them to search out U of G content specifically?
  - What is the added value of U of G creators?
  - How do we make sure students understand the context?

- **How do we make sure content is specific enough (not too broad) to be relevant?**
  - How do we avoid the “that information is commonly known” comment?

- **Is findability a priority?**
  - How do we funnel U of G students to our content versus elsewhere?

- **How can we make sure that our content does not seem “condescending” / patronizing to students?**

- **Where does the DLC fit into the Learning Commons and physical space?**
  - What about the LC Refresh Project?
Appendix A

Survey and Modified Focus Group Questions

1. Think back to the last time you didn't understand a concept or problem in one of your courses. What did you do?
2. Where do you normally seek out help for your courses?
3. Have you ever received help from the library? If so, what type of help?

Play video / show handout

4. What did you like most about this video/handout?
5. If you could change one thing about the video/handout what would it be?
6. We are trying to make all of our content as student-friendly as possible. Do you have comments on:
   a. Tone
   b. Music
   c. Visuals
   d. Other:
7. Was the information in this video/handout useful to you? Can you see yourself using this?
8. Did you know the Library had content like this?
9. Do you have any other comments?