Using LibGuides to Deliver Communication-based Resources: A Behind the Scenes Partnership between a Writing and Communication Center and a University Library

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In January 2018, Nova Southeastern University opened the NSU Writing and Communication Center (WCC), an innovative academic work environment that offers writing and communication assistance to all 20,000-plus NSU students. A key component of the WCC is its online writing and communication resources. These resources are made available to all NSU students and faculty through a collaboration between the WCC and the university's main library, the Alvin Sherman Library, Research, and Information Technology Center. While the WCC is ultimately responsible for developing and publishing its own web content, the library provides its LibGuides platform as a host for the WCC's resources—and Alvin Sherman librarians help maintain, assess, and contribute to these resources. This article examines the LibGuide-based collaborative relationship between the center and the library, discussing how and why it formed, how it operates, and how it conducts assessment.

How and Why The WCC – Alvin Sherman Library LibGuide Partnership Was Formed

The NSU Writing and Communication Center is the product of a university-wide initiative known as a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that stems from the university's reaffirmation of accreditation from its regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). During the proposal and review processes with SACSCOC, WCC leadership examined spaces on NSU's main campus in Fort Lauderdale, where the new center could be housed. The Sherman Library seemed ideal, not only because it could provide the center with a prime, central physical location, but also because it would provide ample opportunities for WCC staff to collaborate with Alvin Sherman librarians on a variety of projects. The WCC would also form a partnership with the university's second largest library, the Martin and Gail Press Health Professions Division Library, and have a satellite location there. The collaborative relationship with Alvin Sherman Library, though, would offer an opportunity to work on co-developing the WCC's web presence.

Web Presence

With over 20,000 students, Nova Southeastern University is one of the largest private, not-for-profit universities in the south, with a main campus in Fort Lauderdale (around 10,000 students), eight regional campuses (seven in Florida and one in Puerto Rico, and significant online programming. The university has 18 colleges and schools, eight of which are related to health professions. Almost 80% percent of students are enrolled in graduate or professional programs. Most NSU undergraduate students are enrolled at the Fort Lauderdale campus.

With such varied populations of students, the WCC needs to maintain a strong web presence that provides

appropriate resources to students across the disciplines and in different locations. While developing the QEP proposal for the center, WCC leadership recognized that a group of NSU's education faculty had already been working with Alvin Sherman librarians to maintain an online LibGuide that provided education students with writing resources. LibGuides are "content management systems deployed at thousand of libraries worldwide" that "curate knowledge and share information, organize class and subject specific resources, and […] create and manage websites" (Springshare, n.d.). All four of NSU's libraries have LibGuides that support student learning, and the Alvin Sherman librarians have an extensive collection of materials on their platform, much of which is related to communication. The LibGuide education faculty had developed with Alvin Sherman librarians was called SharkWrites (named after NSU's mascot), and it offered discipline-specific writing-related resources to education students, primarily at the graduate levels. Since the goal of NSU's QEP was to provide resources to all students (and to not only target students in a specific college or at a specific level), the WCC partnered with the education faculty and Alvin Sherman librarians to expand the SharkWrites LibGuide into a university-wide writing and communication-based resource for all NSU students.

How the Partnership Works

The LibGuides partnership between the Writing and Communication Center and the Alvin Sherman Library works on several levels. The library provides the WCC with LibGuides as a platform to provide students with resources; the library also provides staff who help develop and maintain the SharkWrites site. The WCC works with Alvin Sherman librarians, as well as with

librarians from the Health Professions Library, to generate content for the site. WCC staff also work with Alvin Sherman librarians to assess the WCC's site based on analytics and survey results. In return, the WCC's presence on Alvin Sherman's LibGuide provides students and faculty with more exposure to the library's online platform, and it increases the number of hits on its LibGuide. An image of the WCC's SharkWrites LibGuide main page can be viewed below.

Image 1. *Screenshot of the NSU Writing and Communication Center's SharkWrites LibGuide.*
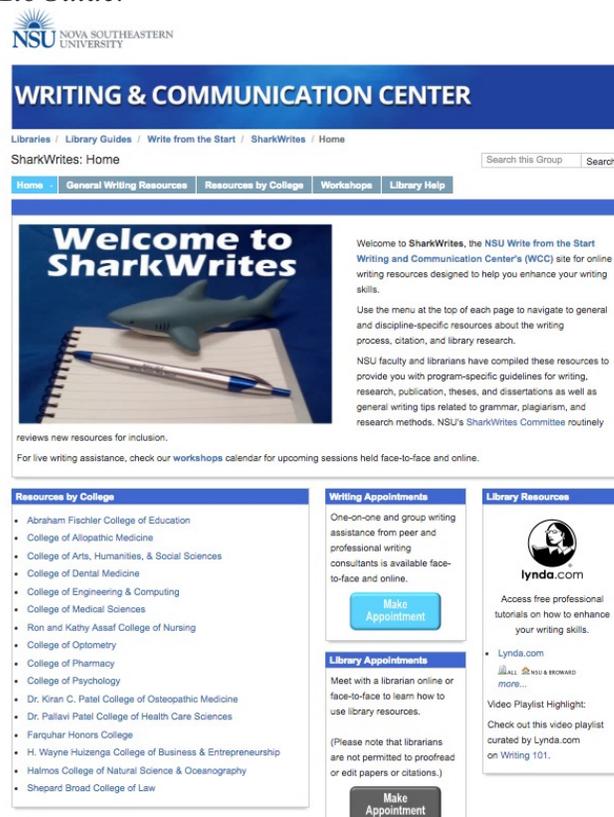
The main page offers general information about the WCC and the SharkWrites platform. It provides links to each of the college's specific resources (see below), as well as opportunities for students to 1) make an appointment with a WCC consultant, 2) make an appointment to meet

with a librarian, and 3) access the library's Lynda portal. So, students have the ability to interact with both the center and the library through this page.

College-Specific Pages

During the course of preparing their QEP proposal, WCC leadership attended faculty meetings for each of NSU's 18 colleges to learn what faculty believed they needed/wanted in the form of writing and communication-related resources. Not surprisingly, the requests differed from college to college based on discipline-specific conventions, styles, research, and projects. Based on these needs and with approval from faculty representatives from each college, WCC leadership decided to create a university-wide LibGuide that provided each college the opportunity to have its own college-specific page, which they would be able to use to offer resources approved and/or developed by their own faculty and library liaisons.

The decision to create college-specific pages was significant because university-level communication centers that offer online resources often do so in more general terms. For example, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Writing and Communication Center's current resources page offers information on the following:
- Resources for Writers
- Resources for Speakers
- Resources for Teachers
- Mayfield Handbook Index (MIT only)
- International Writing Centers Association's Resources for Writers
- How to Write and Publish an Academic Research Paper from Journal Prep.com
- The MIT School of Engineering Communication Lab (MIT Writing and Communication Center, n.d.)

While all of this information is certainly useful, NSU's WCC leadership believed that providing college-specific pages would reduce the amount of searching students would have to do to locate appropriate resources and it could possibly prevent them from using resources not related to their programs and classes. For example, faculty in NSU's Ron and Kathy Assaf College of Nursing are adamant that their students only use the APA Style Guide and accompanying APA Style Blog for research projects and presentations. They want their students to avoid using popular websites like the Purdue OWL and UNC Chapel Hill's Writing Center because they recognize the APA Style Guide as the sole authority on its style—it provides the most detailed, accurate, and up-to-date information on how research is to be presented. Therefore, nursing faculty asked the WCC to only provide links to the two resources produced by APA. A screenshot of their resource page can be seen below.

Image 2. *Screenshot of the NSU Ron and Kathy Assaf College of Nursing's resources page*
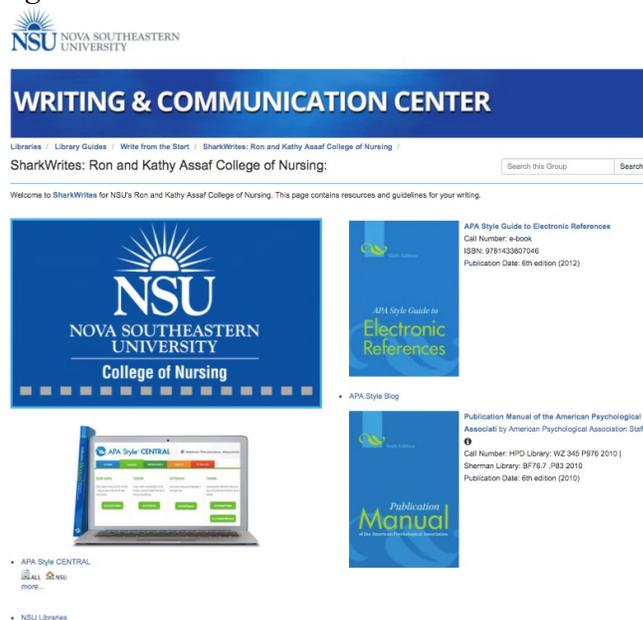
Unlike the College of Nursing, NSU's College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS) is comprised of multiple disciplines that use a variety of styles, so their webpage cannot focus on one guide. Thus, their webpage has a tab for each of the college's departments, as can be seen in the image below.

Image 3. *Screenshot with dropdown menu options on the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences' resources page*

Each of the departments within the college has its own webpage that provides resources faculty have chosen and are appropriate to its disciplines. The Department of Writing and Communication has resources on the Writing and Communication Center, as well as APA Style and MLA Style, while History and Political Science and Performing and Visual Arts both have extensive information on the Chicago Manual of Style.

Content Development and Approval

The WCC works closely with the NSU education faculty and Alvin Sherman librarians who originally developed SharkWrites throughout the content development and approval process. The initial plan for content development was to invite faculty from each college to supply information for their own college-specific pages. Having faculty be part of the process was important as continued faculty buy-in and support of any communication center is critical to that center's long-term success (King & Atkins-Sayre, 2012). NSU faculty are encouraged to send content to the WCC's Executive Director, who provides an initial review before sending materials to education faculty and Alvin Sherman librarians for final approval. This review process ensures that quality, effective resources are being shared with students.

The second phase of content development, being implemented this fall, involves more participation from librarians at the Health Professions Division Library, as well as librarians from NSU's Panza Maurer Law Library, and NSU's Oceanographic Campus Library. Each of NSU's academic departments has its own library liaison who works closely with faculty to make sure their students' needs, as well as their faculty's own research needs, are being met by the libraries. The liaisons will meet regularly with the WCC and SharkWrites committee members to review content and determine resources that either need to be developed or located for their students.

Assessment

Assessing various levels of a communication center is necessary to managing sustainable growth and increased student usage (Butler Ellis & Clark-Hilt, 2012), as well as ensuring quality services are being provided to students (Preston, 2015). As part of this process, determining the effectiveness of a center's web presence can be an incredibly complex endeavor (Cooper, 2012). Having an online presence

increases opportunities for students to access materials outside the classroom, but it is difficult to track exactly which students (if they are even students) access materials and how they use them to support their own learning. To that end, the WCC works with Alvin Sherman librarians and web services staff to track SharkWrites site usage, review

analytics, and assess the site's quality and usability. The LibGuide platform allows Alvin Sherman staff to generate reports that show site usage by the year, month, main page, and college pages. The image below shows a yearly overview of the SharkWrites main page's hits by month.

Image 4. *Screenshot of a graph showing number of online monthly visitors to the SharkWrites main page.*
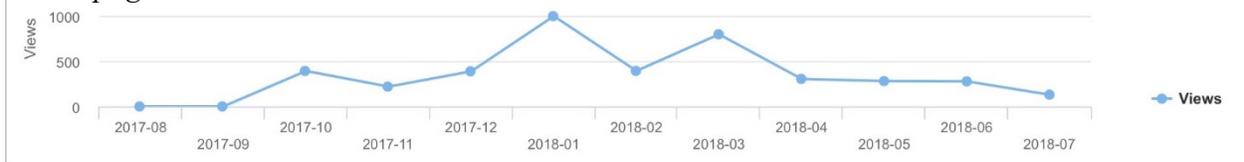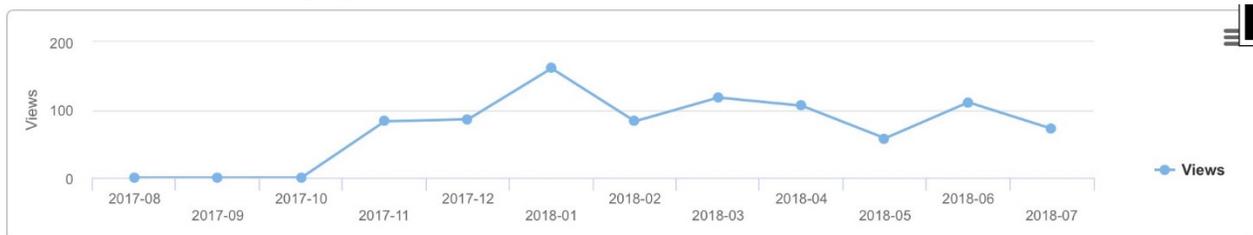

1 guides, **4178** views, **12** months

Guide ID	Guide Name	2017-08	2017-09	2017-10	2017-11	2017-12	2018-01	2018-02	2018-03	2018-04	2018-05	2018-06	2018-07	Total Views
735534	SharkWrites	0	0	392	219	388	998	393	797	304	280	277	130	4178

Though the graph shows twelve months, the new version of the site was only live for ten months, and the WCC's official opening occurred in January, which was the month with the highest number of visits. After opening January, the number of site visits dropped by more than half in February (393) before doubling in March (797) and again dropping by more than half in April (304). It should not be surprising that there was a drop again in May, June, and July, as most NSU undergraduate programs have

lower enrollment during the summer. In addition to reviewing the main page, WCC staff can examine hits on college-specific pages. Perhaps not surprising, the College of Education tallied the most hits, since their faculty had created the original SharkWrites platform and had already been encouraging their students to use it. The image below shows their usage over the course of nine months. A similar spike and drop occurs between January and February, with some increased usage in March.

Image 5. *Screenshot of a graph showing number of online monthly visitors to the College of Education's resources page.*


1 guides, **878** views, **12** months

Guide ID	Guide Name	2017-08	2017-09	2017-10	2017-11	2017-12	2018-01	2018-02	2018-03	2018-04	2018-05	2018-06	2018-07	Total Views
746922	SharkWrites: Abraham Fischler College of Education	0	0	0	83	86	161	83	118	106	58	111	72	878

Since the WCC was only in its first semester during winter 2018, this data is serving as a baseline. The next step is to use the baseline data to establish desired goals for an expected number of hits per college and increased usage during each of the next five years (Butler Ellis & Clark-Hilt, 2012). Using best practices noted by Leek, Carpenter, Cuny, and Rao (2015), the data will also be used to determine which colleges need to be the focus of the WCC's SharkWrites marketing campaign.

In addition to tracking site usage, the WCC staff created a brief survey to determine the usability and student-centeredness of the site, and Alvin Sherman staff placed a pop-up survey on the bottom right corner of the homepage.

Image 6. *Screenshot of a SharkWrites main page with survey in bottom right corner.*
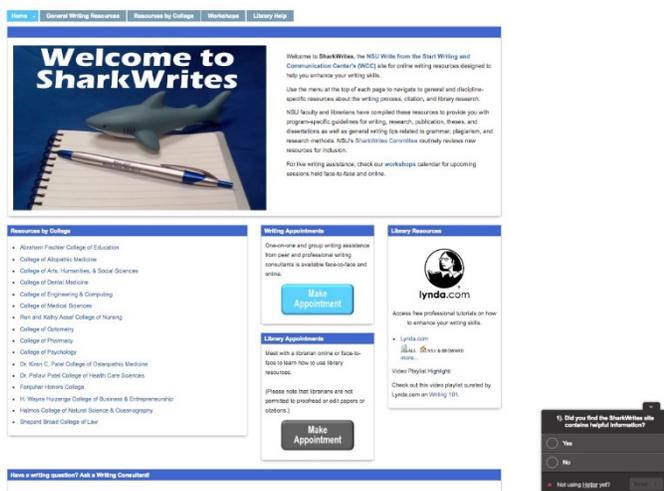
The survey appears each time a student accesses the main page, and it asks the following questions:

1. Did you find the SharkWrites site contains helpful information? [Yes/No]
2. Were you able to find the information you needed easily? [Yes/No]
3. What additional resources would you like to see on SharkWrites? [Open Ended]

An Alvin Sherman Library web services manager regularly sends the WCC Executive Director a survey report that provides data from the questions, which includes the user's device type, browser, operating system, and country. To date, fifty-eight users have started the survey (by completing question one), thirty-nine have completed question two, and nineteen have finished question three. Fifty-five out of fifty-eight users who answered question one responded "yes," while only three responded "no." The same three also responded "no" to question two; only one person who responded "yes" to question one responded with a "no" to question two. Three of those four who responded "no" to question two provided answers to the open ended third question, with one asking for basic contact information (which has been added to the page), a the second asking for "word 2016," and the third asking for "NSU letterhead." Four responses to question three provided suggestions for additions to the website. They asked for better information on how to make an appointment with a consultant, basic contact information, if services were available to faculty, and for dates when graduate student writing workshops would be offered.

Conclusion

The collaborative relationship between the NSU Writing and Communication Center and Alvin Sherman Library staff has been a success so far. The library has provided a platform to the WCC so it can share writing and communication-based information with students, and the library has provided staff to help maintain that platform. In return, the WCC's presence has promoted the library's LibGuide to more students and faculty, with over 3,000 hits on the site during the WCC's first six months of

being open. With increased marketing, continued assessment that leads to improved resources, and more students and faculty becoming familiar with SharkWrites, the number of hits per year should continue to grow, suggesting that the WCC is meeting its QEP-based goal of providing a resource for all NSU students. In addition, this collaboration will help both the WCC and the Alvin Sherman Library as they work together to support student learning.

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