Introduction
The Ashford University Library offers live instructional webinars that are open to all students and faculty. After 2 1/2 years of offering them, we’ve learned from the challenges we faced to come up with best practices for developing, marketing, and assessing the webinars.

Why Webinars?
- Efficiently and effectively provide instruction to a large distance population
- Regular online courses: asynchronous learning environment
- Webinars provide synchronous learning opportunity that students miss
- Create community, break isolation of distance education environment
- Can be recorded and posted on library website

History/Background
- Summer/fall 2013: webinars open to English Comp students only
  - Courses are asynchronous; couldn’t require attendance at a synchronous event
  - Advertised through online classroom only
  - Very low attendance
- Spring 2014: webinars opened to all students
  - Advertised through multiple channels (email, student portal alerts, advisors, instructors)
  - Held on regular days/times
  - Attendance increased, has held steady

Developing
- Initially developed for English Comp (ENG122)
  - Basic library overview
  - Scholarly vs. popular
  - Basic searching
  - New format (open to all students)
  - Started with what we had for ENG122: this became a “Library Orientation”
  - Add webinars on more advanced search techniques and other research topics
  - Re-use topics periodically, intersperse with new topics
  - Use survey data for new topic ideas (question on post-webinar survey)
  - Use reference transactions for new topic ideas (frequently asked questions)
  - Moved from Wednesdays to Tuesdays based on survey and website usage data

Marketing
Original marketing relied on ENG122 instructors to inform students. Attendance was low; one session had 0 attendees.

- Emailed all students before re-launch
- Presented to student advisors before re-launch
- Current marketing for each webinar includes:
  - Email to faculty with wording and pre-formatted announcement to post in their courses
  - Student Portal alert
  - Announcement and calendar on library homepage
  - Periodic presentations to student advisors

Assessing
- Survey students at end of each webinar
- Collect attendance data, use to schedule upcoming topics (repeat popular topics more frequently)
- Collect student IDs from attendees (voluntary), send to Business Intelligence department for demographic analysis (in progress)

Future Steps
- Offer more webinar sessions on other days and times to provide more options for live attendance
- Offer more subject-specific topics
- Use demographic data about attendees to help develop future topics
- Create webinar series for faculty
- Work with faculty services and department chairs to increase faculty marketing effort

“I always learn something new in each webinar, I never miss them.”

Best Practices
- Open webinars to all students
- Hold webinars on a regular schedule (1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month)
- Develop a multi-pronged marketing campaign to promote webinars: target different populations (students, faculty, staff) and utilize multiple channels (emails, student portal alerts, presentations)
- Market the webinars to faculty the week before and to students a day or two before
- Set up webinar “room” the day before the webinar
- Have one person, who is not presenting, in charge of the technical aspects of the presentation
- Have at least one other person monitoring and answering questions in the chat box
- Share new presentation slides with webinar chatters ahead of presentation
- Record webinar and post the latest version of each topic on library’s website
- Document procedures for hosting webinar and post-webinar data collection
- Create “best practices” document for presenters

Challenges
- Determining the most effective marketing strategies
- Balancing the need for topics with broad appeal (since webinars are open to all students) with the need for more specialized topics for certain groups (health care, business, etc.)
- Getting faculty to promote webinars in their classes

“What’s been so helpful. I actually feel calmer now about my paper. Can’t wait for the next one.”

“I’ve been using the library for 3 1/2 years, and I still learned some new stuff tonight. I love when that happens!”

Bridging the Gap: Connecting with Distance Students Through Instructional Webinars