Ask Me Anything!: Reaching Out to Online Students in Higher Education Through Librarian-Led Virtual Office Hours

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Athabasca University
18th Distance Library Services Conference
April 13, 2018
Agenda

- Introduction
- Athabasca University and Our Students
- AU Library
- Why Virtual Office Hours?
- What’s Out There?
- Implementing Virtual Office Hours
- How’d It Go?
- Better Next Time...
- Questions?
Introduction

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Town of Athabasca. Photo by anacreon100. https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attraction_Review-g181807-d10698633-Reviews-Town_of_Athabasca-Athabasca_County-Alberta.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumId=101&filter=7&ff=210241497
Located in Athabasca, Alberta, Canada
Distance education institution
Graduate and undergraduate programs
40,000+ full- and part-time students
Diverse, international student body
• Reference services
• Research support
• Instruction in library use
• Materials access and lending
• Interlibrary loans
How do our students reach us?

- Email
- Telephone
- Online form
- Adobe Connect
- Chat (New!)
This is ok, but...

- Service is typically asynchronous
- Few point-of-need reference opportunities
- Many students don’t know we exist 😞
Why Virtual Office Hours?

• Synchronous Library support
• Personal connection between students and AU Library
• Raise awareness of the Library
What’s out there?

• Not a lot!
• VOH usually mentioned cursorily
• Typically discussed as part of embedded librarian effort in course or program
Handler, Lackey, and Vaughan (2009)

- Librarian-led in-person and virtual office hours program at the University of Chapel Hill’s Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Public Health were moderately successful.
- Online office hours received fewer visitors than did onsite office hours.
- The public health librarian stopped offering online office hours after “several sessions of no shows” (p. 339).
A sense of community “is among the most important... factors that may positively affect online teaching and learning environments” (p. 13).

It is important to learning outcomes and overall educational satisfaction that students have a sense of “social presence” (p. 13) in their online courses.
Oguz, Chu, & Chow (2015)

- Students often feel isolated from their peers in online environments (p. 216).
The “power of communication via virtual office hours immediately generates a sense of community” (p. 102).
So maybe...

- Offering a synchronous online presence to students through librarian-led VOH could help them establish a sense of community among their peers, and an emotional connection to AU and to the Library!
Implementing VOH: Planning

- Get the go-ahead
- Get feedback from colleagues
- Pick a date / time
- Find a backup Librarian
Implementing VOH:
Materials

- Procedures
- Tracking documents
- Promotional images
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<td>Is there anything for APA help. I have the manual, but they have nothing in there on table of contents for example. Or if the table of contents is to be included</td>
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• Adobe Connect meeting
• Supported by ITS
• All staff have accounts
• Guests don’t need an account
• Desktop sharing
Implementing VOH: Promotion

- AU’s Brand and Marketing Unit
- Email
- Library homepage
- Social media
VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS

Need help getting started on a project or assignment? Want to know more about how AU Library can help you succeed in your studies? Chat in real time with Jennifer Rempel, AU Library's Information Literacy and Resource Access Librarian.

Every Thursday, 2 to 4 pm MT, beginning February 16
Virtual Office URL: https://athabascau.adobeconnect.com/virtualoffice
Virtual Office Hours

Virtual Office Hours are now being offered every Thursday, from 2 to 4 pm Mountain Time.

These Adobe Connect office hours will provide AU students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to drop in to a free-form web session to ask AU Librarian Jennifer Rempel their questions about Library services, resources, and getting research help.

The Adobe Connect URL is https://athabascau.adobeconnect.com/virtualoffice.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Jennifer at jrempel@athabascau.ca, or 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6257.
How’d it go?

• 32 sessions over 34 weeks
• 14 patrons attended 10 sessions
• 11 patrons asked a question
Overall, a total of 13 questions were asked

- Category and number of questions:
  - Citing sources = 2
  - Library events and services = 3
  - Library website = 1
  - Materials access = 2
  - Reference = 2
  - Writing help = 1
  - Not Library-related = 2
14 chat transcripts analyzed
Feedback was generally positive
No attendees reported negative experiences
Better next time?

- Initial uptake of VOH was encouraging
- Attendance numbers dropped early on
- VOH could have been implemented more successfully
What happened?

- Not enough time
- Not enough staff
What happened?

- Issues with Adobe Connect
- Two-way communication a challenge
- Difficult for guests to set up microphones
What happened?

• It’s better to offer VOH within a specific course or program
Conclusion

- VOH at AU Library was not a success
- But it is important to try new things!
- I know what to do differently in future
Thank you for your attention!

Questions?


