2015

# Google Classroom for Librarians: Features and Opportunities

Amanda Izenstark
*University of Rhode Island*, amanda@uri.edu

Katie L. Leahy
*University of Rhode Island*, katie.leahy8@gmail.com

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**Abstract**

*Purpose:*

This paper shares possible opportunities for librarians, faculty, and students with access to Google Classroom, and includes a discussion of its application and functionality in information literacy sessions.

*Design/methodology/approach:*

This article describes the functionality of Google Classroom with a review of its capabilities for providing information literacy instruction based upon hands-on use in several classes and observation.

*Findings:*

Google Classroom streamlined delivery of materials with students in one-time and multi-meeting classes. Students appreciated its seamless integration with their university email accounts.

*Originality/value:*

Librarians teaching classes often need to share introductory information, exercises, and supplemental materials with students. Google Classroom offers a simple platform for this purpose.

**Keywords:**

information literacy, learning management, library instruction, Google, education, library technology

**Classification:** General Review

**Amanda K. Izenstark** (amanda@uri.edu) is Associate Professor, Reference & Instructional Design Librarian at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, USA.

**Katie L. Leahy** (katie.leahy8@gmail.com) is Lecturer in the Public Services Department of the University Libraries at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, USA.

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**Introduction**

Many librarians already use Google Docs, Google Slides, Google Forms, and YouTube in their outreach and instruction efforts, and many educational institutions have adopted the use of Google Apps for Education, Google's official platform for email and collaboration customized for use at educational institutions. In summer 2014, Google combined the power of these packages when they announced the launch of Google Classroom (classroom.google.com), a simplified learning management system for users of Google Apps for Education. For librarians, this offers several unique opportunities to support student learning and engagement. Google Classroom can provide a lighter load for "embedded" librarians, streamline instruction for librarians teaching credit-bearing classes, and enhance support for librarians meeting classes just once or twice.

**Functionality Overview**

Individuals sign up to use Google Classroom as a teacher or a student, and Google Classroom then connects to Google's other products. When a teacher or student adds a new class to his or her Classroom site, the process creates a folder within Google Drive with features that work specifically with Google Classroom. Instructors get a folder that holds assignment and exercise templates as well as a folder that holds copies of student materials, and students get a folder that stores their copies of documents submitted as assignments.

Instructors can post announcements and assignments to the class page in a "stream" view similar to that used in the Google+ design. Discussion can take place in the form of comments directly on this page without students having to go to a separate forum or discussion tool.

Adding an assignment to Google Classroom for students is similar to other learning management tools. Instructors have the ability to attach documents, video, links, and even connect to documents in Google Drive. Due dates and times can also be designated for each assignment. Delivery of these assignments can also be done in various ways including allowing students to copy or edit a document. Perhaps the most useful delivery method provided by this tool is that instructors can make a copy for each student which automatically adds a copy of the assignment to the student's Google Drive. When assigning a Google Form, however, Classroom does not currently register the form as being completed or "done."

Grading takes place directly in Google Classroom. For assignments submitted via Google Drive, instructors can access those documents and use the editing/commenting tools of Google Docs to provide students with feedback before returning assignments.

At present, the grading mechanism provided by Classroom is not as sophisticated as other learning management systems. Assignments can be graded individually and exported from Classroom. However, no comprehensive gradebook is currently available nor is there a tests or quizzes feature.

When the sessions or classes are completed, the instructor can "Archive" the classes. This allows continued access to materials, but does not allow changes.

**Uses in Library Instruction**

The overall flexibility in connecting with people within an institution's Google Apps for Education makes for an exciting opportunity for instruction librarians. Librarians do not have to be associated with a specific class in a learning management system and can easily create new classes on-the-go or add students as needed. The duration of the class or how often the class meets does not matter, whether it's a one-shot session or a semester-long credit-bearing course, as Google Classroom is not tied to a specific time period and can be created on demand. This tool can be used for a number of purposes which can make providing open instructional workshops or working with small groups for drop-in instruction manageable.

With Google Classroom, creating a classroom is simple and the librarian can share the unique class code for any student to join the class. For librarians using flipped classroom models in their instruction, Classroom can provide an easy way to connect with students before the in-person meeting and offer a platform on which to share preparatory content, surveys, and worksheets while also providing a place for class discussion. Librarians who work with large courses or multiple sections of a course can use Google Classroom as a way to bring those large numbers of students together into one virtual classroom to ensure that all are receiving the same links, materials, and support by sharing the same class code with those students.

Additionally, the librarian can post assignments, announcements, share videos, and more with the class without needing access to the primary instructor's course site. This helps protect student privacy as the librarian does not have access to sensitive class materials such as grades and other confidential communications. The primary instructor can still be involved in the class as the librarian can add them as an additional teacher, fostering faculty collaboration in providing instruction.

**Student Responses**

Overall, from experience in using Google Classroom in library instruction and information literacy classes as a supplement to a current learning management system, students generally responded favorably to this tool. The design was familiar to students as they were already using Google products via their student Google Apps accounts. The students especially liked the connectivity with their Google Drive accounts. No longer did they have to worry about saving documents on the classroom computers due to the autosave feature and the use of Drive made collaborating on assignments easier due to the sharing capabilities.

**Privacy Concerns**

While public Google and Gmail accounts contain advertising, Google Apps for Education is a separate platform and adheres to FERPA regulations (Data Security, Transparency, & Privacy, 2014). The actual applications - Drive, Docs, Slides, etc. - work the same way as those bundled with public accounts, though there are greater controls on eligible users and sharing functionality in Google Apps for Education accounts. Domain administrators determine who is able to receive an account on a Google Apps for Education system, and outside users do not have access to the system. Similarly, only those in the same Google Apps for Education domain can join classes in that domain; outside users cannot be added to a class in Google Classroom.

**Conclusion**

Google's collaborative tools have been widely adopted inside and outside of the academic sphere. This extension of Google's relatively simple user interface to a learning management tool that simultaneously removes restrictions on who can enroll in a class has the potential to expand librarians' reach and impact. Although Classroom is just a year old, it continues to evolve in features and functionality, and may become a more robust tool in years to come.

**References**

Data Security, Transparency, & Privacy: How Google Protects Your Data: A Summary for Education Institutions Using Google Apps for Education (2014), available at: https://drive.google.com/a/google.com/file/d/0B__OTXR_u3Rbbmh5WE5NZVRyOEk/edit (accessed 15 May 2015).