

**CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW**  
**LibGuides**  
**March 2010**

LibGuides is a content management system that allows libraries to create and publish online research guides. The service includes a content creation system that requires no knowledge of HTML, web page editing, or web scripting languages. Users can create entire guides using a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor. Users also have access to the LibGuides community site, which includes all of the guides created by other LibGuides subscribers. Guides from other institutions can serve as inspiration for a new guide or they be transferred to a user's system to be used as a template.

LibGuides offers many ways to push content to students. Starting at the school's LibGuides homepage, students can find guides through a system search box or a subject directory. Students can also access guides via widgets that can be embedded into course management systems, blogs, other websites, or as an application that can be added to their Facebook profiles. In addition, LibGuides has an integrated Twitter feature that allows librarians to post announcements about new guides.

**OVERALL RECOMMENDATION FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES:**

- #1 --- Not recommended
- #2 --- Recommended with reservations as noted
- #3 --- Recommended
- #4 --- Outstanding offer

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT 3.5**

LibGuides transforms the old research guide into an interactive, interconnected, and multilayered online experience. It provides an attractive page layout with web 2.0 technology plugins that can be dropped in place with easy editing tools. LibGuides can include demonstration and instruction, features that provide easy access to librarians for more in-depth interaction, and links to related guides, such as citation information. Content creation is done through simple content boxes, which are easy to fill with text, links, book cover images, video, RSS feeds, etc. The community site offers users access to all of the guides from over 1,000 libraries.

This product would be useful for community colleges that want to increase and enhance their online content and promote student interaction with the library. Students taking online classes or simply studying with a computer nearby will have access to guides that focus on specific subjects and information literacy skills. The product makes it easy for students to contact subject librarians through their profile pages, which list contact information (instant messaging/chat, twitter, and email) and authored guides.

The LibGuides' community site makes it easy for librarians to begin new research guides or update existing guides. It can be searched by guide, author, or subject, and it can be searched by institution.

Librarians are encouraged to use this site as a database of templates. A guide from another institution can be copied with one click (LibGuides asks that you first send an email to the author and ask for permission). Community college librarians can easily find and use relevant content, including guides on basic skills, ESL, and career technical education. This process puts librarians in contact with one another, opening the door to collaboration.

#### GUIDE CREATION 4.0

Guide creation in the LibGuides system is based on the principals of share, reuse, and remix. When a new guide is published, it is immediately available to the entire LibGuides community, and can be viewed and used as a template by other users. When building a new guide, users are reminded to reuse their own content and/or remix someone else's. Links, content boxes, and entire pages can be reused and repurposed. This philosophy and large collection of user-generated content make the prospect of starting a LibGuides system very reasonable.

Creating a new guide is easy. When librarian-users start a new guide, they see the following dialog box:

**Create New Guide**

Please fill out the information below to create your new guide. Remember that you can use any of the existing [68,103 guides](#) from our community as a template when creating your own content.

**The Template**

You can start with a blank guide, or use any existing guide as a template (this will copy the style and the content from an existing Guide).

Start fresh (no template) [help](#)

Use one of my guides as a template [help](#)

Use another user's guide as a template [help](#)

Use a guide from another institution as a template [help](#)

**Guide Information**

Enter the title for your guide and a short description for visitors to your guide.

Guide Title:

Short Description:   
(256 chars. max)

**Guide Editors (optional)**

Optionally, select 3 \*other\* users as editors, giving them full editing privileges for this guide (you can add more editors later).

----- Select Editor 1 -----     ----- Select Editor 2 -----     ----- Select Editor 3 -----

When starting a new guide, users have the option to “Start fresh” with a blank page or use another guide as a template. Users have the following options when using a template:

1. Users can use one of their own guides.

2. Users can use a guide from a colleague within their institution.
3. Users can use a guide from another institution.

With each choice, the LibGuides system makes it easy to identify which guide will be used as the template. After a user selects a guide, he or she starts with an exact copy. At this point the user can make changes (add and delete boxes, change links, etc.) to the guide to make it his or her own. With over 68,000 guides to use as inspiration, new users will find this feature extremely helpful.

## Content Boxes

The building blocks of guides are content boxes. Users who choose to build a guide from scratch do it one content box at a time. When using a template, a user will edit, add and delete, and move around content boxes to turn the template into a new guide. Whenever a user wants to add a content box to a guide, he or she is presented with the following dialog box:

**Add New Content Box**

Create a brand new content box, or reuse an existing one. If creating a new box, carefully select the type based on the type of content you want to put inside

Type of Content Inside the Box

Create a new box

Link to another box in the system [help](#)

Copy another box from the system [help](#)

Rich Text/Dynamic Content/Scripts  
Simple Web Links  
Links and Lists  
RSS Feed  
Podcast Feed  
Embedded Video  
Del.icio.us Tag Cloud  
Books from the Catalog  
Documents & Files  
Dates & Events  
Interactive Poll  
User Link Submission  
Remote Script Box  
Google Web Search Box  
Google Books Search Box  
Google Scholar Search Box  
Feedback Box  
LibAnswers Box

Rich Text/Dynamic Content/Scripts is the most versatile box type, for any type of formatted text (including html), links, or dynamic javascript code. You can also embed custom scripts, iFrame, etc.

It is important to note that every other box type contains the functionality of the Rich Text Box. So, everything you can do inside the Rich Text/Dynamic Content box type you can do with other boxes as well.

The Box Title and Position

Box Title:  Position: after Collection Overview

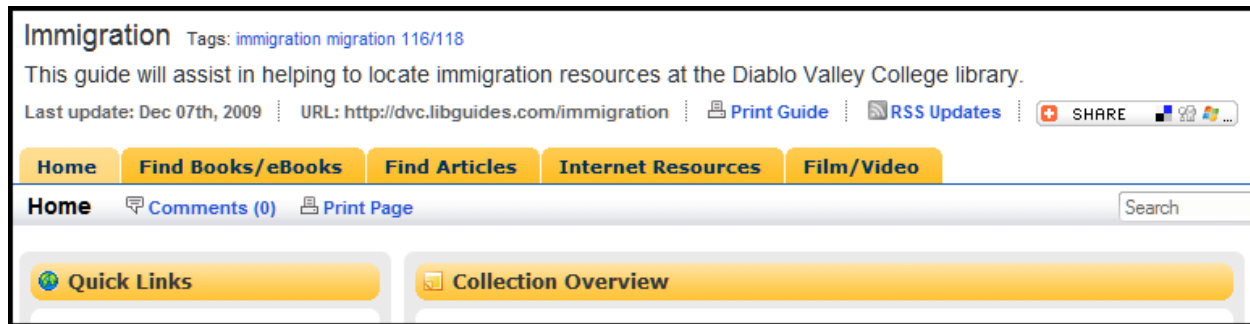
Create Box Cancel

A user clicks a button to “Create a new box,” “Link to another box in the system,” or “Copy another box in the system.” The three choices are explained below:

- **Create a new box:** users create a new box from scratch. They choose from a list of box types (see above image), name the box, and decide where the box will reside on the guide. All content box editors are user-friendly, and do not require knowledge of web programming languages. Users who are tech savvy can use JavaScript, HTML, and custom scripts.
- **Link to another box in the system:** users choose from a list of content boxes from his or her LibGuides system. That box is then placed on the current guide and it is linked, meaning that when the original box is changed, all linked boxes are automatically updated with the new content.
- **Copy another box in the system:** users choose from a list of content boxes from his or her LibGuides system. That box is then placed on the current guide. This box is not linked so that changes to the original will not affect the copied content box.

## Pages

Users can add multiple pages to a guide. A new page appears as a tab along the top of the guide. New pages can also be added underneath tabs, which create a dropdown menu effect. This is helpful for users who want to break up pages into different categories. In the screenshot below, the guide contains five pages: Home, Find Books/eBooks, Find Articles, Internet Resources, and Film/Video.



With each new page, users have the option to start fresh, copy another page from his or her system, or copy a page from another institution's system.

## COMMUNITY DATABASE 3.0

One of the greatest strength of LibGuides is the user-generated content. According to the community site, there are currently, "70,015 guides by 16,588 librarians at 1056 libraries worldwide." The top contributors currently are:

1. Cornell University: 476 published guides
2. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: 438 published guides
3. Duke University: 356 published guides
4. University of Michigan Library: 354 published guides
5. University of Alberta Libraries: 353 published guides

Unfortunately, finding this great content can be challenging. The LibGuides Community site offers users a limited search experience. Users have the option of a full text guide search and a separate title search for institutions. In addition, the list of institutions can be filtered by type of institution (public, K12, special, and higher education) as well as by state. Using the filter generates a results list of institutions. Users cannot use the filter in conjunction with a search.

The screenshot shows the SpringShare Library website interface. At the top, it says "springshare library" and "library 2.0". Below the header, it welcomes users to the LibGuides Community, stating there are 68,313 guides by 16,290 librarians at 1042 libraries worldwide. A search box is labeled "Search for Guides, Authors, or Subjects" with a "Search" button. A red arrow points to this search box with the text "Guide search". Below the search box, there are navigation tabs: "Explore Guides", "Browse Community Members", "Forums", "Blog", and "Twitter". A secondary search box is labeled "Institution search" with a red arrow pointing to it. Below this, there is a "Jump to:" section with a list of letters: A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | Y | #. Below this, a list of institutions is shown with their names, URLs, and the number of published guides:

Institution	URL	Published Guides
A. G. Unklesbay Geological Sciences Library	<a href="http://guides.geology.missouri.edu">http://guides.geology.missouri.edu</a>	0 published guides
Academy for Jewish Religion California	<a href="http://resourceguide.ajrca.org">http://resourceguide.ajrca.org</a>	1 published guides
Acadia University	<a href="http://libguides.acadiau.ca">http://libguides.acadiau.ca</a>	101 published guides
Adams State College	<a href="http://adams.libguides.com">http://adams.libguides.com</a>	0 published guides
Adirondack Community College	<a href="http://libguides.sunyacc.edu">http://libguides.sunyacc.edu</a>	57 published guides

On the right side of the page, there are two boxes: "Don't See Your Library?" with a link to "invite them to join" and "New Community Members" with a welcome message.

When a user executes a search in the guide search box, results are displayed in a new window. Boolean searching is not supported and search results do not appear to be listed in order of relevance. For example, the first result in a search for “literary criticism” was a page with a short list of links of literary criticism websites. Users will have to browse the search results to find relevant and substantive pages.

When a user executes a search in the institution search box, results are immediately displayed on the same page. A search for “Boston” generates a list of four institutions with “Boston” in the title: Boston College, Boston College Law Library, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, and University of Massachusetts Boston. A search for “community” generated 91 institutions— all community colleges. When a user follows one of these links, he or she is taken to the institution’s LibGuides homepage.

Users who want to find good examples of guides must be willing to spend time browsing through search results. Springshare keeps short updated lists of featured and popular guides on the community site. In addition, they recently launched a Best of LibGuides website, which is a showcase for exemplary guides. Users would benefit from either an expansion of these lists or a user-centered rating system for guides that would inform search results.

### USER SUPPORT SERVICES 3.0

LibGuides provides user forums and a small but growing set of Help and Documentation Guides.

Forums are within the Springshare Lounge, a third-party social network of LibGuides users. There are four different discussion categories: System Administrators Hangout; General Questions / Problem Reports; Feature Requests & Suggestions and Examples; Best Practices & Useful Documents. If a user has a problem, they can search the forums first to see what has already been discussed. Adding a discussion to the forums is easy, and Springshare employees are quick to answer questions.

The Help and Documentation Guides are a set of guides on building and maintaining a LibGuides system. Currently there are nine guides, but only four that are specifically focused on practical LibGuides help topics. When asked about the lack of information in the Help and Documentation Guides, a company representative said that a newly-hired employee would be focusing on user support— interacting with users in the forums and writing more Help and Documentation Guides.

Currently, user support for guide authors who are not comfortable getting help through forums is spotty. It appears that the Help and Documentation Guides will eventually become a user support hub where administrators can send their guide authors to get help, but right now it is insufficient. For the time being, there are extremely detailed help pages from other institutions that can be found on the community site.

System and guide usage statistics are available through the My Admin page. Users can run system reports as well as individual guide reports with statistics for each page and each link. Statistics can be displayed in real time on the Usage Statistics page or they can be downloaded as plain text or as an Excel file. Users can also get a snapshot of hits on a particular link while in edit mode. By selecting the statistics icon next to the link, users can see statistics for total hits and hits per month. Users also have the option to use Google Analytics for statistics. One concern about statistics for LibGuides pages is that since access to that content is unrestricted, libraries will not know what percentages of hits are from their own users.

If a library decides to cancel their LibGuides subscription, Springshare will return all of its data in XML format. Libraries have 30 days to make this request.

#### **COST 4.0**

LibGuides annual subscription costs are based on the size of the institution and the number of libraries involved.

#### **AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE**

LibGuides is hosted on Springshare servers. This has positive and negative implications. If a library's Internet connection goes down then so does their access to their LibGuides pages. It also means that a library does not have to install and upgrade software or worry about backups as they would in a locally installed content management system.

#### **Remote Access**

LibGuides does not require authentication to access content. Login is only required for users (content authors). Users control the status of their guides. The default status of guides is Unpublished, and users can change the status to Published or Private. Published guides are assigned URLs and indexed in the LibGuides system, and private guides are assigned a URL but are not indexed.

### **ADA/Section 508 Compliance**

While Springshare/LibGuides is not fully 508 compliant, all of the system's pages are accessible via screen readers. A company spokesperson said, "We are also continuously updating our code and making further changes to get to the final goal of full Section 508 compliance."

### **OTHER USES**

Libraries have been using LibGuides for purposes other than subject guides. Some leading-edge libraries have used the service for their library websites:

- MiraCosta Library— <http://library.miracosta.edu/homepage>
- Allegheny College Library— <http://library.allegheny.edu/home>

Libraries also use LibGuides to create pages for individual courses and for individual faculty members.

LibGuides has recently announced that their product can now exchange data with Serials Solutions, giving libraries that subscribe to both products the ability to create title lists in LibGuides populated by Serials Solutions.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO LIBGUIDES**

A free, open source alternative to LibGuides is SubjectsPlus. It is normally hosted locally and while it would be simple for a system administrator to install, it lacks the turnkey ease of use of LibGuides. The SubjectsPlus homepage is at <http://www.subjectsplus.com/>

LibGuides' long list of customers shows that there is a demand for a turnkey subject guide service.

### **OTHER DISCUSSION OF LIBGUIDES**

- Online reviews, conference presentations, and third-party comments—  
<http://springshare.com/libguides/reviews.html>  
This is a list put together by Springshare on one of their marketing pages.
- Accessibility Tips in the Syracuse University Library Staff Guide to LibGuides—  
<http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/content.php?pid=31563&sid=378014>  
This is a guide—made in LibGuides—on making research guides more accessible/508 compliant.
- "LibGuides: Worth a look" by Jen Maney, *School Library Journal*, January 14, 2009—  
<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6628338.html>

- LibGuides Forums— <http://www.springsharelounge.com/forum/>  
Springshare has an active user community and hosts a web forum for community use.
- Springshare Support Blog— <http://support.springshare.com/>