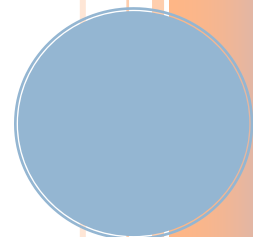# ONLINE STUDENT INPUT & FEEDBACK TEAM

Pilot Report 2017-18

Summary of Results and Follow-up Recommendations

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
Dalhousie Libraries

Online Student Input & Feedback Team

Pilot Report 2017-18

BACKGROUND

In July 2016, Dalhousie Libraries revamped the Student Advisory Group and created the Student Input & Feedback Team (SIFT) – a series of open feedback sessions (similar to focus groups) on each campus. This better fulfilled recommendation 10.1 from the 2016 Senate and external review that stated: "The Libraries, perhaps through the Office of the University Librarian, should create some kind of formal consultation process with the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) and the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students (DAGS) to have a recognized conduit for student advice regarding changes in services and space on campus."

Following this first year of a revamped approach, we decided to pilot a SIFT for online, distance students, and chose Social Work students as a good fit for this first attempt. Lindsay McNiff, Dominic Silvio, Brian Lesser, and Michelle MacDonald joined the organizing team. Together, we fashioned a list of four questions – one for each month of the winter semester and created an online discussion in Brightspace. Eleven participants were recruited through the School of Social Work and given a $10 Tim Horton's gift card. All but one participant contributed to discussions. Responses were coded and summaries are provided below.

COMMUNICATIONS

Students received an initial communication about the opportunity to participate from Wendy Terri Klaus, a facilitator for the social work program. Students were asked to write to sift@dal.ca if they were interested. They would receive a reply from Marlo who would enroll them in the Brightspace discussion.

The rest of communication with student members happened through the discussion board and discussion threads. Marlo and/or Linda replied to every student comment, whether it needed follow-up or not, to acknowledge their participation and demonstrate we were listening.

Once the online session closed for the year, Marlo wrote thank you letters that were co-signed with Linda and included $10 Tim's cards (so that students across Canada could easily use them). Marlo sent these envelopes to Wendy so they could be mailed to students' homes.

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

January - Tutorials

Have you viewed the library tutorials for distance students? (See "Helpful Videos" here: http://dal.ca.libguides.com/SocialWork/distance)

Did you find them helpful?

Do you have any further feedback?

Total number of student respondents: 10

Only 1 student stated that they had seen the tutorials before reading this question. 2 viewed them after reading the question, and for the remaining it was unclear if they viewed them before or after seeing the question.

7 students stated that they found the tutorials helpful. For the remaining 3 students, it was not clear whether or not they found them helpful. The reasons why students had a positive experience with the tutorials were quite varied: there were 5 general comments on their usefulness for navigating the library's resources, 2 positive comments regarding the tutorials for creating citations, and 1 each for help with searching and using document delivery.

4 suggestions for improvement were given, mostly centering on awareness: 1 suggested bringing the tutorials to the attention of students as early as possible in the program, 1 felt students should be reminded of document delivery, and 1 suggested informing students about the tutorials via email and a "BB recording" to walk students through using them. The other student was more specific, requesting the addition of the "retrieved from" portion of the APA citation.

6 students made comments on **document delivery** within this discussion, 5 stating they had never used it before (the 6th was unclear), and 2 said they did not know it existed before participating in this discussion. The reasons given for not using it: 2 said they find everything they need through available online resources, 1 didn't know how to use it and it seemed like a hassle, 1 didn't want to pick up materials, and 1 simply wasn't aware of it when they found items they actually wished to use.

February – Library Resources

In general, what types of library resources or material do you find yourself using during your course activities? For example, do you mostly use books, or journal articles for research assignments? Statistical data? Information from government sources or others on the internet? etc.

Do you find our collections holdings (e.g., books available, online access to journal articles) sufficient for your course work?

Total number of student respondents: 10

Resource	# of students who used this
Journal articles	9
Government sources/policies	6
eBooks	4
Books (not specified if online or print)	1
Newspaper article (online)	1

8 students said the library collection is sufficient, and 5 stated a positive experience with accessing resources. 1 stated it took a while for them to "figure out" how the library website and resources worked.

Another comment on document delivery was made during this discussion by a student just using document delivery for the first time and telling fellow classmates. They firmly stated the service needs to be promoted "on a large scale" at the beginning of the program.

March – Obtaining Books and Journals

In February, we asked about the types of library resources/materials you use for your course work. How easy is it for you to access these materials? (these could be online or print materials)

Do you use the document delivery service for obtaining books or journal articles?

Total number of student respondents: 10

4 students commented that Dal Libraries are easy to access, 1 stating that journals in particular were easy to access. 1 student indicated that the website is easy to navigate, and 1 felt that the libraries have a vast collection.

Only 1 of the respondents had used document delivery before, and that was just after hearing about it in one of the earlier discussions. From their statements, it appeared that 4 seemed to think that the service was for print items only. 5 felt that they have not needed to use the service, possibly bypassing material that could have been ordered for material more readily available. 2 indicated that they perceive the service as being inconvenient for distance students (potentially not realizing that items are shipped directly to them as opposed to requiring a pick-up at the library.) 1 felt that it can take a long time for items to reach them on the west coast. Attitudes and perceptions appeared to change after learning about document delivery, with 2 students expressing gratitude for the service with 1 planning to use it in the future. Another said they would use it if/when they needed to.

5 students mentioned using e-books. 1 said they were disappointed when they encountered e-books only available at other universities and not to Dal students, while another found some e-book formats difficult to use, possibly because they use a Mac.

April – Brightspace

As a distance student, have you felt supported and prepared to use Brightspace for your online learning?

Total number of student respondents: 7.

4 found Brightspace easy to use. Of the remaining 3, 1 was not explicit in their answer, another felt frustration with some of the features, and 1 was initially overwhelmed by it. 3 students mentioned

using a different online learning platform in the past, and all 3 said they preferred Brightspace. Only 3 commented on feeling supported: 2 felt supported (1 in terms of students helping each other), while 1 felt it would have been helpful to have more instruction on how to use all the features.

When it came to features, 2 stated an appreciation for having everything in one place (1 listed off several features: phone app, class schedule, alerts, and messaging), and 1 mentioned feeling more connected despite distance due to the BB Collaborate tool.

4 respondents reported issues with Brightspace – 3 of whom appeared to have resolved their issues or became comfortable using it. Of the issues mentioned, 1 experienced a "learning curve" with BB Collaborate, 1 a broken link, while another listed off several issues: copying text from Word into discussions caused formatting to be lost, and instant messaging "rarely worked" – the text box was not visible on their screen and they would have to click messages several times in order to open them. (This student was disappointed in the performance of Brightspace, given their $200 per class for distance services.) 2 students gave suggestions: 1 suggested making the features and information "buried in Brightspace" easier to find. Another suggested eliminating repeated notifications for the person who begins a thread.

3 students mentioned the Brightspace tutorials; 2 stating they watched and appreciated them, 1 felt they did not need them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote/highlight library & Brightspace tutorials and document delivery to distance students early in the first semester. Brainstorm different means of promotion (e.g., screenshots or video snippets). Reminder emails should be sent out during the academic year.

Ensure tutorials adequately cover BB Collaborate and how to turn off discussion notifications in Brightspace.

Consider the suggestion of adding "retrieved from" instructions to APA citation tutorials/instructional content.

Provide clarity on the kinds of material that can be delivered and how they will be delivered (i.e., not picked-up from the library).

Investigate "un-burying" all the features and information within Brightspace.

Check the performance of Brightspace instant messaging (see comments under April).

Investigate ease of e-book use on Macs.

Investigate if document delivery usage statistics are available for distance students for the past 3-5 years and monitor use going forward.

2019–20 Online SIFT

The two SIFT co-chairs met with Brian Lesser, Instructional Systems Administrator, to discuss the feasibility of expanding this pilot online SIFT in 2018-19. Together, we felt that the Libraries should be given some time to act on the recommendations in this report, particularly with regard to distance liaison roles, and decided that the next online SIFT will be planned for the winter of 2020.

This online SIFT will take the form of a one-time, live, online event and will also serve as an exercise to see if SIFTs for on-campus students should be run in the online environment as well. Brightspace will allow us to mimic the in-person events with break out "rooms", polls, and Q&A. One Head Librarian, two Brightspace staff, and two librarians, minimum, will be required to run the event, along with the co-chairs, to provide expertise within the discussions and to answer questions. We recommend testing the online SIFT environment with staff in December 2019. We also request that assistance with coding and summarizing findings continues to be provided by library interns. We anticipate inviting distance Social Work, Nursing, and MBA students to attend.

APPENDIX

CODING AND SUMMARIES OF MONTHLY DISCUSSIONS

January SIFT responses -- Library Tutorials

Question: Have you viewed the library tutorials for distance students?

Total number of students: 10

Did students view the tutorials before the online focus group?

- Only one student stated that they had seen the tutorials before the focus group
- 2 students stated that they had only viewed the tutorials after the focus group
- It was unclear for the rest of the students whether they viewed the tutorials before or after the online discussion

Positive experiences with tutorials

- 7/7 students who commented on this section said they found the tutorials helpful (for the remaining three students, it was not clear from their comments whether or not they found the tutorials helpful)
- The reasons why students had a positive experience with the tutorials were quite varied

The following are the comments from students elaborating on how the tutorials helped them:

- "Research is not a strong point for me and therefore any information I can gather is important. I found the tutorial helpful for how to search and for what the links mean. I especially found it helpful for citation as that feature saves a great deal of time."
- "I found them very helpful. It has been a long time since I've done research and written a paper so navigating the library was intimidating to me. Thru this I was a bit overwhelmed by the abundance of information out there for students. I was made aware of the Writing Centre and accessed their services a couple times, which was very helpful. The reference for citing resources in APA format was very well laid out and explained. Pleased with the video presentations and that they were current."

- "I found it helpful, particularly document delivery for journal articles since I have wondered in the past how to do this if the journal wasn't marked available in a search. Thank you for bringing this to my attention!"
- "I found these videos to be very helpful! In exploring the Brightspace pages for my social work courses, under "Content" and then "Learning Resources" I located information and instructions on how to navigate the Dal library early in my degree. I found these resources to be helpful as well, because the university I studied at previously had a very different system than Dalhousies."
- "The tutorials were good once I viewed them, but it was basically after I had figured a lot of things on my own"
- "I found the tutorials useful and user friendly, however as I live in a remote community I have never picked up any books."
- "I found the tutorials helpful" AND "The tutorials and library website are pretty clear and straightforward. I use the Dal Library website for every assignment."

Suggestions for improvement

4 students made suggestions for improvement. They were as follows:

1. **This student wanted information added on the use of "Retrieved from" in APA citations, as well as information on finding similar articles when researching:**

" If possible, a helpful addition might be to include the "Retrieved from" portion of the citation as it is required in APA however I understand the web address may not be initially available when selecting the citation link. The other feedback I have is allowing for a search link to find similar articles. Often we require several sources for research papers and it would be helpful to have a quick link to find similar sources when we have found a relevant article."

2. **This student would have liked to have been informed of the tutorials via email and would like a BB recording to walk them through the tutorials:**

"It would have been helpful for an email to go out to distance students explaining these tutorials. I also think maybe a BB recording, walking students through them would have been helpful as well."

3. **This student did not get introduced to the tutorials until they were a year into their program. They would have liked this to have happened at the beginning of their program through distance:**

"I was aware of the library website and that there were lots of resources and such but didn't have a good working knowledge until after our residency. We are both in the Bachelor of Social Work program and during our two weeks at the school we received a very good lecture on the library

and how we can access all of the resources. The biggest problem with this lecture was that it occurred at residency basically a year into the program. I know I made recommendations (to the School of Social Work) at the time that this would be awesome when we start with Dal and working via distance. When I started this degree, I recall watching videos on how Brightspace works and how the online class would work in general. I think this would be the perfect spot to have some sort of intro class/video.   The tutorials were good once I viewed them, but it was basically after I had figured a lot of things on my own. It would have been so helpful at the start of the degree. I am a mature student so there was a lot of learning about the advances of how the modern library works."

4. **This student wants more information to be provided to distance students on document delivery:**

"The next majority University is 2 hours away. As a new student to DAL I think it would be a good idea to remind distance delivery students of this."

Document delivery

- 5/6 students who commented on document delivery said that they had never used it before. It was not clear whether or not the 6th student had used it.
- 2 students said that they did not know about document delivery before this

Summary -- Reasons for not using document delivery:

- They have been able to find everything they need through online resources (2 students)
- Did not know how and seemed like too much hassle (1 student)
- Did not want to bother picking up materials as a distance student (1 student)
- Had encountered resources they wanted but were not available and they just skipped over these resources because they did not know about document delivery (1 student)

Document delivery comments:

- "I will say I have not ordered materials thru the library only because the availability of online resources is exhaustive so I've had no need to take the extra step and order a book or resource."
- "I was also not aware of the tutorials or document delivery! What a great resource. I typically find enough in the online resources for my papers but it is good to know I have this option in the future."

- "In terms of ordering books, I have not done this. I have always used resources that are available online. I have refrained from ordering books because I did not know how, and for me, it seemed like too much of a hassle." Marlo -- would he use it now he knows more about it? "I would absolutely use the document delivery service if need be! I used this quite a bit with my old university. I just haven't needed to yet with Dal because there seems to be a larger selection of already available articles/books :)"
- "I was so excited to learn about the document delivery option by both email and for print items, this is so great that there are no barriers to accessing as many materials as we would otherwise be able to if we were on-campus. I had no idea about this website and have generally just skipped over anything I've seen that's not available online, it's great to know I don't have to do that anymore!"
- " The next majority University is 2 hours away. As a new student to DAL I think it would be a good idea to remind distance delivery students of this."
- "never have used ordering documents or books as a distance student because I didn't want to bother with picking them up. I just use online articles and sources." AND "I think I will try ordering documents after being reminded by this discussion that it is easy. Maybe it is worthwhile to remind distance students of such a service."

February summary – Library Resources

Total number of students: 10

Questions:

- In general, what types of library resources or material do you find yourself using during your course activities? For example, do you mostly use books, or journal articles for research assignments? Statistical data? Information from government sources or others on the internet? etc.
- Do you find our collections holdings (e.g., books available, online access to journal articles) sufficient for your course work?

Resources used

Resource	# of students who used this
Journal articles	9
Government sources/policies	6
eBooks	4
Books (not specified if online or print)	1
Newspaper article (online)	1

Specific comments on resources

Government sources

One said they used these for specific courses (like a policy course). Another student explained, "I do, on occasion use government sources as well if I need statistic information however I don't usually look for those through dal library"

eBooks

One student commented: "I have used online books and when it was available, it was convenient." Another indicated: "I haven't dived into EBooks yet, but it is on my list, I am old-school and want the real thing." Another student: "I like how some of the books are available online."

Print books

"As a distance student, I don't find myself looking for books mostly because it is inconvenient, and more time involved to obtain the book."

Do students find the library collection sufficient? Have they had a positive experience accessing resources?

- Student who claimed that our library collection is sufficient: 8
- Students who have had a positive experience accessing resources: 5
- 1 student did not comment on this section
- The only student who reported issues with access stated the following:

"Trying to figure out the how the library website works/options/resources when the program first started took a while. I was looking for a tutorial or quick tour. I felt that is where being a distance student there may be a disconnect. That being said, the efficient website layout allowed me to figure it out, and I have had access to some amazing resources." AND "Hey Marlo - yes I eventually found the tutorials. I just had to breathe and look!"

Other – note on document delivery

"I am trying out the document delivery for the first time (just waiting for the book to arrive) and have told many others in my program about it, who also didn't have any idea - I think this *really needs to be advertised to distance students on a large scale at the beginning of their programs*."

March summary – Obtaining books and journals

Total number of students: 9

Resources used

All 9 students mention their use of online resources. 1 student uses online resources exclusively. Another student uses a combination of online and print materials. It is unclear whether the rest of the students use a combination of print and online or exclusively online materials. 3 students mentioned journal articles as resources they prefer. Other resources mentioned were: encyclopedia entries, newspapers articles, ebooks. Other students were vague about which types of resources they use.

EBooks

5 students have mentioned or indicated that they use ebooks in their comments. 1 student found it "disappointing" when they found ebooks that were available at other universities and not at Dalhousie. 1 student found some ebook formats difficult to use and expressed worry that this may be because they use a Mac as opposed to a PC.

Ease of access of lib. Resources

4 students commented that Dal libraries are easy to access. 1 student indicated that it is easy to navigate (not sure if they meant the resources or the physical space). 1 student of the 4, indicated that journals in particular were easy to access. Another 1 of the 4 students felt that Dal libraries have a vast collection.

Used document delivery?

None of the 9 participants had used document delivery before.

Misconceptions of document delivery

4 of the participants seemed to think that document delivery is only for print materials. It is unclear what the rest of the participants think

Perceived difficulty or inconvenience of document delivery

1 student indicated that she does not use DD because it is inconvenient as a distance student. Another student indicated that she felt it was inconvenient as a distance student as well, particularly because she lives in a remote area. Overall, 2 students indicated that they perceive document delivery as inconvenient for distance students. This reveals that the students must think that document delivery requires a physical trip to the library.

Lack of need to use document delivery

5 students indicated that they have not used document delivery because they have not needed to. They have been able to find what they need. 3 of these students indicated that they have not needed it because they have been able to find what they need online. I wonder if, because they think that document delivery is for print materials, that there have been online articles that they would have liked to have had access to, but did not think DD applied to that? So, therefore they think they have not needed it? Or maybe they have been able to get access to all the online resources that they find.

Attitude towards document delivery after learning more about it

2 students expressed that they were grateful to know that document delivery can be used for online resources and that it seems like a helpful option. 1 of the 2 indicated that they plan on trying it out in the future. Another student indicated that they would use document delivery if they needed to, but they have not needed to yet.

April Summary

Total number of students: 8

Question: As a distance student, have you felt supported and prepared to use Brightspace for your online learning

Brightspace as easy to use

1 student did not offer any answers as they have been using Brightspace for years. I will omit them from the count.

4/ 7 students found Brightspace easy to use/navigate and straightforward. Out of the 3 remaining, 1 simply stated: "I think it's a great online learning platform," which would imply that they view Brightspace as easy to use but they did not explicitly say this. The 2nd of the 3 felt, overall, Brightspace was easy to use "just some of the features provided frustration". The 3rd of the 3 was initially overwhelmed with Brightspace, however, they attribute this to being out of school for a while. They did acknowledge that "Once I became familiarized and watched some of the tutorial videos I found it very user friendly and easy to navigate."

Overall, all the students did mention that Brightspace is user-friendly. Most of the students did not have issues navigating Brightspace when they first started using it. Only 1 person mentioned being "overwhelmed at first". Another student had issues with more specific features within Brightspace.

Words used to describe Brightspace: "easy to navigate", "organized", "great online learning platform", "straightforward", "thorough", "clear", "use-friendly", "easy to use"

Difficulty with Brightspace / issues with Brightspace

- 1 student found BB collaborate to be a "learning curve" but stated that it was " a very helpful tool to have that served to help decrease the literal distance between myself and my class-mates."
- Another student mentioned students helping one another when "issues arose". It is not clear what these issues were, but one example was a broken link, which was fixed very quickly.
- Another student found multiple issues with Brightspace (this is the same student that had trouble with various "features in Brightspace"). These issues included "Posting to discussions was difficult as the formatting was lost." For longer responses, this student would write their responses in Word first and then would have to fix the formatting when it was posted to the BS discussion. They found this time consuming. They also had issues with the instant messaging feature: "The instant messaging feature rarely worked for me. The text box that you type in was not visible on my screen and it was strange that I would have to click on the messages several times to open them." This student also wanted to mention that, " as a distance student, paying $200 more per class to use the distance delivery, it is frustrating when those extra dollars don't equate to a flawless presentation."
- 1 student found Brightspace "overwhelming" when they first began using it. Once they became more familiarized with it though, they did find it "very user friendly and easy to navigate." See quote: "I found Brightspace overwhelming when I first began my courses in September. That being said, I had been out of school since 2008 so I think I was just a little unsteady getting started. Once I became familiarized and watched some of the tutorial videos I found it very user friendly and easy to navigate."

Overall 4/7 students had some sort of issue arise with Brightspace. The scale of these ussies varies greatly. Only 1 student had major issues with Brightspace. Out of these 4, 3 seemed to have their issues resolved or grew comfortable with Brightspace.

Use of tutorials

- *Stated that they used tutorials*: 2 -- ("I had watched the tutorials but just looking around & figuring it out was pretty straight forward." AND "I did appreciate at the beginning of the year we were provided with user tutorials and over all the application is very user friendly, easy to use, just some of the features provided frustration")
- *Did not use tutorials*: 1 -- ("I did not need the tutorials as everything was right there as long as you clicked around!")
- *Did not indicate*: 4

Supported and prepared to use Brightspace?

- 1 student felt that it would have been helpful to have had more instruction on using all the different features within Brightspace
- Another student "felt prepared and supported to use Brightspace."
- Another student explained, "A couple of times when issues arose students helped each other out. So, I would say yes to feeling supported and prepared"

Overall 2/3 students who commented on this felt prepared and supported to use Brightspace, while 1 student felt there could have been more instruction on using more specific features in Brightspace.

Experience and comparison with other online platforms

- 1 student is taking a course at another institution and was "disappointed to learn that they do not use Brightspace." This institution uses Moodle. This students' remarks on Moodle: "I am still trying to figure out the system. It is a complete mess. I am thankful that Dalhousie system is user-friendly and organized."
- Another student had used Blackboard in the past: " I remember that for online learning in my previous degree we used Blackboard, and I think Brightspace is far superior to that."
- Another student also used Blackboard in a previous program: "The previous University that I attended used Blackboard as their online platform, so I found Brightspace a refreshing change."

Overall, 3 students indicated that they had used a different learning platform other than Brightspace. All 3 students preferred Brightspace. 1 student explained that they liked Brightspace better because it is "user-friendly and organized".

Previous experience with Brightspace

- 1 student indicated "I was fortunate to have had 4 years of experience using Desire 2 Learn/Brightspace during my previous university program, so this question does not really apply to me."

Brightspace features that students liked

- 1 student explained that BB Collaborate allowed them to "decrease the literal distance between myself and my class-mates."
- Another student likes the centralized aspect of Brightspace: "It is convenient to have all the classes in one space as well as notifications."
- Another student: "I really like the phone app, the class schedule, the alerts, and the messaging! It is nice to connect easily to my schedule, classmates, and dates in one place.

All three students who responded to this question had fairly different answers. 2/3 did mention that they like the centralized aspect of Brightspace (having everything in one place). One student

pointed out that the BB Collaborate tool in Brightspace allowed them to feel more connected to their classmates, despite there being geographic distance.

Suggestions for improvement

- 1 student mentioned that there are "a lot of features and information buried in Brightspace". Perhaps some of these features are difficult to find?
- Another student had a complaint about notifications: "The only suggestion I might have is, if possible not to have repeated notifications show up for the person who starts a thread."

Other: Notes on document delivery (posted in April but meant for the March Discussion)

"I seem to have missed March - sorry about that. I think the question was fairly similar to February and I forgot to get around to it, but what I would say is that I've used document delivery and wasn't aware it existed until February when we were talking about it. My experience with it has been pretty good, sometimes it can take a bit longer than I'd like but it's been good learning for me that I need to try and plan further ahead. Mail takes a long time to get from Halifax to Victoria and sometime if the resource isn't yet available, that timeline is even longer."