

Barcelona, Spain: The Logistics of Teaching in an International Setting

Larry Thompson
Engineering Librarian – Virginia Tech
larryt@vt.edu

Overview of the workshop

One week, twenty-five hours of class time, "Information Resources in Engineering" workshop for twenty-four librarians from the University Libraries Consortium of Catalonia (CBUC), in Barcelona, Spain.

Preparation considerations for international teaching

No chance to retrieve forgotten items:

This was not being taught in a “nearby” classroom where something forgotten could be easily retrieved. Whatever was left behind was unobtainable.

No time to modify plans:

This course did not extend over several weeks so that material could be changed in response to class feedback. There would be no time to modify the schedule or rewrite the handouts. Content had to be correct from the beginning.

No option to “wing-it” to cover technical problems:

This was not a short conference presentation where technical failures would only cause a slight inconvenience. Barcelona participants had committed themselves to one week of attendance and some had traveled significant distances. Backups of backups were required in order to guarantee that the lessons could be delivered.

No protracted ad-libs:

In most courses if the material runs short and the time runs long, some ad-libbing can fill the void. In this setting, handouts were crucial to communicating the material. It was necessary to have more than enough material to fill the entire week, and to make sure that handouts were available for all topics.

Scheduling the lecture topics

The schedule for the workshop was 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM, Monday through Friday. Ideally, lecturing and canned demos in the morning followed by hands-on in the afternoon would be best. This would allow participants to gain information about the material and then have an immediate chance to practice. It would also give participants a more active role during the afternoon when attention wanders and eyelids begin to droop.

However, just as in the U.S., the internet response time was much better in the morning than it was in the afternoon. Therefore, it was necessary to schedule hands-on during the first part of the class, and lecture at the end.

A Daily Schedule of Topics Covered

DAY 1: Basic Boolean; Searching OVID; Engineering Databases

- I. Introduction to the course
- II. Basic Boolean strategies
- III. Searching Compendex and INSPEC using OVID
- IV. Engineering related databases: general and subject specific

DAY 2: Searching OVID & WOS; Engineering Disciplines & Communication

- I. Searching on OVID, simultaneous searches across databases, removing dups
- II. Searching Web of Science - citation searching
- III. Traditional engineering disciplines – an overview
- IV. The interdisciplinary nature of engineering research
- V. How do engineers communicate and find their information?

Day 3: Searching CSA; Searching IEL; Publishers and Publications; Digital

- I. Searching Cambridge Scientific Abstracts on Cambridge
- II. Searching IEL full text
- III. Publishers: commercial, society, government, manufacturers, universities
- IV. Publication types: journals, books, meetings papers, standards, etc.
- V. Full text online digital materials
- VI. Students and WWW resources

Day 4: Searching SilverPlatter; Selecting Databases; Internet Issues

- I. Searching on SilverPlatter
- II. Selecting bibliographic databases for the collection: issues to consider
- III. Academic publishing on the internet: what effect does it have?
- IV. Issues concerning citation of electronic works

DAY 5: Searching; Miscellaneous Resources

- I. Hands-on time for all resources
- II. Document delivery resources
- III. List-servs
- IV. Table of Contents services: UnCover, publisher specific
- V. Demo and hands-on of presentation software

Databases Available for Hands-On Practice

OVID –

- CSA - Environmental Science & Pollution Management
- Ei Compendex
- INSPEC
- NTIS
- PsycINFO

ISI -

- Web of Science

IEEE -

- IEL

Cambridge Scientific Abstracts

- Metadex
- Pollution Abstracts
- Water Resources Abstracts

SilverPlatter

- Aerospace
- Ei Compendex
- INSPEC

Vendor Contacts

Six weeks before the workshop, I began to contact vendors to set up database access. That was barely enough time. Some vendors such as ISI and IEEE responded quickly, and IEEE even offered to have their Spanish representative attend the session. Other vendors such as SilverPlatter were very difficult to get a response from.

Presentation Tools Used

PowerPoint

- Used for all lectures
- Backups on floppies

Lotus ScreenCam

- Searches canned in the U.S when internet response was fast
- Canned searches played during the afternoon in Spain when response was slow
- Backups were placed on an internet site for retrieval if needed

Adobe Web Captures

- Used for simulating a “live” search without going online
- Backups on floppies

Handouts

Two versions of handouts were used for all lectures

- PowerPoint – slides of the lectures

- Class notes – detailed notes of all the material in the lecture

Some participants used the PowerPoint handouts and filled in their own notes. Others followed along in the detailed notes and did very little writing. In this situation where there were different levels of English comprehension, I felt it best to provide as many options as possible for absorbing the material.

Distribution of handouts:

- Masters were sent as e-mail attachments to Barcelona

- All photocopying was done in Barcelona previous to my arrival

- Handouts were distributed as topics were covered

- All handouts were posted on a web site for access by participants

Backups for handouts:

- Floppy

- WWW server

Computer considerations

- Brought my laptop with me

- Newer laptops run on 110v or 220v

- Surge protector was not purchased

- Plug-in adaptor is necessary

- Verify resolution on computer is compatible with projector provided at the site

On-site contact person

The assistance of this person is critical. This person should be someone who will be in attendance at the workshop every day and who can provide answers to the questions that will arise during the planning stage and the workshop itself. Some of the information / assistance that this person can provide includes:

- List of vendors and / or databases that the participants are already familiar with

- Specifics on the number and type of computers in the classroom

- Mailing address for vendors to send material to

- Confirmation that vendor supplied material has arrived

- Information on the projection system in the classroom

- IP addresses for the classroom if demo databases will have IP controlled access

- Arranging for a computer technician to be on-site before the first class

- Feedback on the class as it progresses

The ability of the contact person to locate resources and provide answers can have a significant effect upon the quality of the workshop and the ease with which it is set up.

Benefits of being “over prepared”

One of the best parts of the trip was interacting with the librarians in the workshop. Each day after class was completed, it was time for a two or three hour lunch. Because all handouts, lessons, and demos were prepared, (some might say over-prepared), before arriving in Barcelona, there was time to enjoy these interactions. Also, even with long lunches there was still time for sightseeing in the evening, and a quick review of the next day’s material late at night. It’s definitely advantageous to have all the course work done ahead of time so that there’s time to interact with the librarians and see the sights.

A related benefit of the lunches and interaction after class was an opportunity to gauge how the material was being received. Was there any difficulty comprehending the material? Was I talking to fast? Was the material too easy? Too difficult?

Time Line for Barcelona Preparation

January, 2000	Initial contact made about teaching Get feedback from Barcelona instructor of previous year
February 1, 2000	Clarify Virginia Tech policy Was time in Barcelona “vacation” or “consulting”? Policy about taking VT laptop to Barcelona Policy about printing materials at work Policy about prep time for Barcelona lessons
February 3, 2000	Ask for details about the Barcelona teaching environment: Lecture room or computer lab? Response time on the WWW? Databases, full text, etc. already available? Vendors that students are already familiar with? Instruction time and schedule for classes?
February 11, 2000	Submit tentative syllabus and possible dates to CBUC
February 22, 2000	Confirm dates for teaching

February 23, 2000	Confirm hotel reservations made by CBUC Make flight reservations
February 28, 2000	Find out about laptop, surge protector setups for Spain
March 1, 2000	Begin work on class lessons
March 15, 2000	Apply for passport
March 23, 2000	CBUC appoints contact person for the class Begin working with contact person on class details
March 29, 2000	Begin contacting vendors about database availability
April 3, 2000	Get IP addresses for computers in lab
April 14, 2000	Send introductory e-mail to course participants with URL for selected online resources
April 15, 2000	Begin sending handouts to Barcelona via e-mail attachments
April 16, 2000	Continue to work with vendors to set up product access
April 17, 2000	Confirm credit card payment options for hotel
April 28, 2000	More handouts sent to Barcelona for copying
May 4, 2000	Another e-mail sent to course participants with: Info on the course content Request for questions they may have
May 8, 2000	Some vendor material not yet arrived in Barcelona
May 8, 2000	Send Powerpoint handouts of all lectures to Barcelona
May 10, 2000	Final info from Barcelona: Confirm class time Confirm ability to get into classroom 1 hour early Confirm computer technician available for set up
May 11, 2000	Final materials from vendors arrives in Barcelona
May 12, 2000	Depart for Barcelona
At the present	I still get occasional e-mails from students