Harnessing the power of mobile learning with EDS

OVERVIEW
Serving approximately 1,800 students in grades seven through twelve, Boston College High School (BCHS) is the largest private high school in Massachusetts. With more than 100,000 eBooks and a robust collection of subscription databases, the Corcoran Library sought a way to introduce authoritative resources to high school students in a format that would engage them. After looking at several discovery services, the school’s librarians found that EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) had many of the key features they were looking for, such as mobile access and an easy-to-use interface featuring a single search box. The library began a trial of EDS in January of 2013 and ultimately purchased the tool in June of the same year. In addition to increasing the use of the library’s electronic resources, EDS has turned out to be the right tool for meeting students’ learning needs.

CHALLENGES
According to BCHS Library Director Tia Esposito, the library’s web site did not provide students with easy access to electronic resources. Students had to conduct separate searches of the library’s catalog and the individual subscription databases.

“We have so many databases that students often don’t know where to go,” Esposito explained, adding that many students relied on commercial internet search engines to find the information they needed to complete their assignments. “It was a real challenge to make sure students were using scholarly resources. Google is not the answer. Google searches everything on the web, but we don’t know if that information is accurate or authoritative.”

In April of 2012, Esposito and Assistant Library Director Anna Martinez attended the Libraries Information Literacy Association Conference (LILAC) in Glasgow, Scotland, where they presented a workshop on using mobile technology to cultivate active learning in secondary schools. There they met representatives from EBSCO and learned about EDS, a powerful, mobile-ready research platform that combines a library’s electronic resources and provides a single search experience.

“Developing secondary students’ information literacy skills in the vast mobile wilderness of information today has become more challenging than ever,” Esposito said, adding that libraries can best provide for students by leveraging the technology they’re already using. By allowing students to control their learning environment, she said, they are able to personalize and enhance their academic experiences. “These new tools, if used in conjunction with each other and in collaborative research projects, place the focus of learning on the learners.”

The desire to harness the potential of mobile learning led Esposito and Martinez to pursue a discovery service for BCHS.
SOLUTIONS

Esposito and Martinez began evaluating discovery tools in late 2012. They found EDS to be an affordable option and, in January of 2013, started a six-month trial.

Esposito noted how easy it was to customize EDS. The library’s EDS home page, called Corcoran One Search, is branded with the school’s maroon and gold colors and includes links to both school and library resources. The search results pages feature the school’s logo. In addition, widgets display News feeds, and the full-text limiter is set as the default so students can find the information they need more quickly.

Bringing EDS to the library is the second major initiative that BCHS has undertaken to enhance access to the library’s online resources. After digitizing its library catalog, the school earned the 2013 ALA Cutting Edge Technology Award for “meeting students where they are.” Last year, BCHS adopted a new cell phone policy which allows students to use their cell phones in the library for research purposes.

On the mobile interface, Corcoran One Search tops the list of library resources. Since EDS uses responsive web design, all of the pages automatically reformat for optimal viewing on smart phones or tablets. Therefore, information is available to BCHS students at the tap of a finger.

“Providing our students with a single search option gives them an edge and allows them to keep pace with the fast-moving trend in e-books, online databases, and other digital learning tools right from their phone,” Esposito said. “EDS allows for a one-stop shopping type of convenience for our students. It’s just what they were looking for.”

BENEFITS & RESULTS

Corcoran One Search has become quite popular among students at BCHS due to its accessibility and many unique features, such as AP news updates and Twitter feeds.

“The feedback from our faculty and students has been extremely, positive,” Esposito said, adding that she presented Corcoran One Search to several classes during the trial period. In one class, “the students were so excited by the new ease of use of our library resources that they actually applauded.”

Esposito said that EDS integrates well with the school’s “learning commons” model, which positions the library as the center of knowledge, research, and collaboration.

“We are moving toward a more welcoming, less-restrictive atmosphere,” she explained, citing as an example the school’s support of cell phones in the library. “It is truly learner-centered, allowing for access to all the digital data, technology tools, print books, supplies, and space that students need to succeed.”

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Tia Esposito
Library Director, Boston College High School