Article

Using Google Forms to Schedule Classes in Your Library

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Abstract

Google forms are a great way to collect information from patrons. The author describes her use of Google forms as a class scheduling tool to collect information about potential class visits to the media center and to publicize the many services and resources available. The scheduling form is a time saver for teachers and librarians alike and the information received through it is far superior to the information collected via e-mails.

Serving 1,300 students and 80 teachers with a library that has only one computer lab and one reference area requires a bit of juggling for a single media specialist. To help alleviate the situation and to spur the collaborative process, I use Google forms to collect information from teachers who would like to schedule visits to the library. That information is then plugged into a public, online calendar for everyone to see. The combination of a viewable online calendar and scheduling form brings transparency to the demands put upon my library, and more importantly, it encourages collaboration by

promoting the variety of services, resources, and information literacy strategies instruction that are available in the library.

Collaborating with teachers is an integral part of a successful school library program, yet finding common planning time can be difficult. Ideally, the library media specialist and teacher sit down together and plan a visit from the ground up. Typically, I ask the teachers a variety of questions. What topic will the students be covering? What would the teachers like them to learn about that topic? How will the students provide evidence of their learning? As I learn more about the teacher's goals, I can contribute ideas to enrich, adjust, or invigorate the assignment. Through experience, it became clear that not all teachers could or would invest the time in the full collaborative process, but still wanted to utilize the library's resources.

To aid in the collaborative process, I created a scheduling form and distributed hard copies to all teachers in their mailboxes at the beginning of each new school year. However, most teachers still relied on emailing or calling me to schedule their classes. If I were lucky, they would attach a copy of the assignment. If not, we would play e-mail tag for a day or two, trying to sort out what the assignment was and to what level I would be involved in the lesson. In the end, the teachers and I had exchanged anywhere between two and seven e-mails to sort out one particular scheduling request, most often just to nail down a time and space for the class. It is tedious to go through that email rigmarole each time a teacher wants to bring a class to the media center, and reduces me to little more than a receptionist keeping a calendar. Furthermore, I never want scheduling to become a burden for the teachers.

The remedy to this problem came in two parts: an online calendar and then Google Doc Forms. Once my school started using a content management system for the website, I started using its calendar function to maintain an online calendar for the library's spaces. For those without such a system, Google Calendars is a great alternative. Teachers could easily look online and plan dates that fit into their schedules. This eliminated some of the e-mail tag we played. They no longer e-mailed me just to see when I had an opening. While this impacted the quantity of e-mails teachers and I exchanged, it didn't change the quality of the e-mails. I continued to get requests that were as simple as "I'd like to bring down my A4 class next Tuesday." Not wanting to provide poor service, I would oblige and then the e-mail tag would begin so that I could learn about the assignment.

My first attempt to create an online request form did not go well. I used Web-publishing software and worked with webmasters and IT people to get it online. For reasons too technical for me to fully understand, the survey results never quite made it back to me. I abandoned the idea until a colleague sent me an online survey that she had created with Google Doc Forms. She told me how user friendly it is and since I love experimenting with new technology, I immediately created an account and started tinkering. The form was easy to make and professional looking. Once the form was made and saved, Google automatically created a spreadsheet for it. The spreadsheet's form tab allowed me to go back for editing and created an embedding HTML code that I could

copy and paste into a page on my media center's website to provide access to the form shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Scheduling Form

Finished Result(s) of Research *

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ PowerPoint
- ☐ Newsletter
- ☐ Brochure
- ☐ Annotated Bibliography
- ☐ Poster
- ☐ Oral Report
- ☐ a Voki avatar
- ☐ Wordle
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Other: [   ]

Describe materials to be held in reserve in the Library Media Center for this project. *
if none, just write "none" or NA

[text area]

Would you like us to review the location/use of
db=database

- ☐ Search Strategies
- ☐ Web Page Evaluation
- ☐ Noodletools (Works Cited website)
- ☐ Encyclopedias
- ☐ Reference Books
- ☐ iConn
- ☐ Health and Wellness Resource Center db
- ☐ Biography in Context db
- ☐ US History Resource Center db
- ☐ World History Resource Center db
- ☐ CQ Researcher db
- ☐ SIRS databases
- ☐ SIRS Issues Researcher db (viewpoints on controversial topics)
- ☐ Culture Grams db
- ☐ ABC-CLIO db
- ☐ OPAC
- ☐ Other: [   ]

Briefly explain the assignment--or better yet, e-mail a copy of it to me: *
a link to my email is on the next page

[text area]

[Submit]

The form I created goes beyond the basics of who, what and when in an effort to promote many of the services the library offers, as well as the databases at our disposal. For instance, sometimes teachers repeat a project year after year, so the form asks them what the final product of the assignment is in hopes that they may be inspired to try something new (e.g., an annotated bibliography, a commercial, etc.). As technology and my district's Acceptable Use Policies evolve, other options could easily be added (e.g., a blog). Our administration is constantly pushing teachers to try new techniques and technologies, so listing a variety of options is my way of gently nudging teachers to branch out.

Not only does the Google form nudge teachers toward trying new technologies, it reminds the faculty that the library can assist with many information literacy strategies. Many faculty members think they are bothering me when they ask me to help teach their classes, so I've been sure to include a list of items they may want me to teach or review with students. Search strategies and Web evaluation top the list because students struggle with these skills. Teachers often assume that students already know how to search and evaluate on the Web simply because they spend so much time online. Experience tells me otherwise. By including these strategies with the others on the list, it highlights them as skills that need stand-alone instruction and encourages teachers to collaborate with me to incorporate such skills into their lessons.

Furthermore, the Google form scheduling procedure steers our teachers toward the subscription databases. Our district does not want teachers to give assignments in which students are told to search Google for the information without any guidance. Even if the teacher prefers that I not teach information literacy strategies during that particular project, I still want to remind teachers and students about the databases they could use. The teachers are generally aware of the ones we have access to, but this form is a great way to promote them. By listing and describing them in a Google form, the teachers have been more willing to use them with their classes.

The advantages of using Google forms to collect information from teachers are clear, but there are a few more steps librarians can take to make the process easier. Once a teacher has filled out the form, I receive an automatic email alert as notification. I set up this extra feature by going to the spreadsheet's tools menu and selecting notification rules. Once I receive the notification email, I simply go to the spreadsheet and transfer the information onto my online calendar. To ensure I don't confuse new and old entries, I highlight an entire row once I have transferred it. The one drawback to this system is that due to the number of questions on the form, the spreadsheet is physically quite long (horizontally) and I have to scroll quite a bit. I consider it a small sacrifice to make to ensure I get the full picture from teachers as to what they want to do in the library and can figure out ways to collaborate with them. I also save all of the entries for the remainder of that school year for my statistics.

The system, as a whole, is working out well. There are still teachers who would prefer to email me or stop by (I love it when they stop by!), but I also know that there are many teachers who rely on my online calendar in their planning and diligently fill out the form

when they'd like to use the library. As a result of going online for scheduling, I am keeping my library in pace with technology and providing teachers with better service. I feel like we connect much better regarding what will work best for our students. As time goes on, I envision eliminating the e-mail requests all together so that the entire process is streamlined and a bit easier on my end.

Note from the author: If you would like a copy of the form and corresponding spreadsheet to play with, please contact me at jbirschkenney@yahoo.com and I will share a copy of my form with you. I just ask that you make yourself a copy and share it back if you use it. I'd love to see how it evolves and is used across different types of libraries! If you would like to start with something smaller, consider using Google forms to collect material requests (http://bit.ly/dU23cP) or survey your patrons (http://bit.ly/behslibquiz). If you would like to learn about the basics of Google forms, I've compiled a playlist of helpful videos at http://bit.ly/jfEnXF.

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