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Microsites as Outreach Tools

A Case for Targeted Engagement in Academic Libraries

Loren Mixon, Adam Johnson, and Joseph Taylor

This column presents a case study in which academic librarians at a mid-sized university designed, implemented, and evaluated a targeted microsite to support first-year students in large-format instruction sessions. The microsite served as a curated landing page linking to high-demand resources and services, and it was promoted via a QR code sticker for ongoing access. The authors describe the institutional context, rationale for selecting a microsite, implementation details (including collaboration with a library makerspace), and preliminary analytics from the pilot project's deployment. The column concludes with practical lessons for academic libraries that are considering microsites as tools for outreach and instruction.

Introduction

Microsites are small, standalone web pages or collections of pages that focus on a defined purpose and audience. They typically provide streamlined navigation and a curated set of links or content, and they are frequently employed in marketing and outreach to highlight a specific campaign, event, or set of services.[1,2] Academic libraries have begun to adapt microsites to guide users toward key services such as research help, specialized studios, makerspaces, and program-specific guides because they present concise, high-relevance pathways to resources.[3] These microsites can easily be included in print, on larger websites, on social media, and on promotional items with the aid of short links or QR codes.

At Coastal Carolina University (CCU), librarians faced the challenge of supporting approximately 315 first-year students in the Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts across five one-hour auditorium sessions. Given the limited time for face-to-face instruction and the complexity of navigating institutional websites, the team sought a durable, student-centered takeaway that would reduce barriers to access and encourage continued engagement.

This column applies the concept of microsites to that context by documenting the development of a curated landing page and accompanying QR code sticker to address the outreach needs of a subset of CCU's first-year student cohort, and it analyzes initial results to inform future iterations.

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About Coastal Carolina University and UNIV 110

The authors are faculty librarians in the Research and Scholarship Department at CCU, a public research university in Conway, South Carolina. With a steadily increasing enrollment now surpassing 12,000 students, CCU Libraries have been augmenting services, including the construction of a new library building and the renovation of the original campus library, adding a makerspace, data visualization and virtual reality laboratory, audio and video studios, scholarly publishing and data management support, and new outreach programs such as Craft Nights and book clubs. Concurrently, CCU has expanded UNIV 110, a first-year experience seminar offered in discipline-specific sections. One cluster of course sections for students with majors in the Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts provided an opportunity to reach approximately 315 students in an auditorium format across five one-hour presentations.

Rationale for Using a Microsite

To provide a relevant takeaway that would persist throughout students' undergraduate experience, the authors elected to create a microsite: a concise, curated landing page with quick links tailored to the needs of Edwards College students.[1,2] The microsite was promoted via a sticker featuring a QR code and Edwards College branding to encourage sustained use. These stickers were given to students during the instruction sessions so they would have ready access to the microsite as a resource. Many students chose to place the sticker directly on their laptop or tablet, which ensured they would have it with them during research-related activities.

Advantages of Using Microsites for Large-Scale Instruction Opportunities

Libraries routinely implement microsites for event registrations and special programming; for example, the University of Toronto Robarts Library developed a dedicated site for its fiftieth anniversary.[3] However, this case provided the authors with the chance to create and deploy a microsite with an instructional edge. The combined UNIV 110 sessions created an opportunity to distribute a targeted outreach tool that provided first-year Edwards College students with rapid access to the most relevant library resources for upcoming projects. Providing a tangible resource in the form of a QR code sticker during the first semester also functioned as a warmth-based intervention designed to reduce library anxiety.[4]

Benefits of Microsites as an Outreach Tool

Microsites offer several benefits: modest implementation costs, a limited scope that helps users locate targeted information quickly, simplified navigation on a single page, and optimization for discovery via search engines or social media platforms.[2] In this case, additional advantages included:

- Curated resource lists aligned with humanities and fine arts students' needs (e.g., recording studio rooms, makerspace services, and program-specific LibGuides)
- Actionable analytics on page access and link engagement through referral tracking, enabling evaluation of resource usage
- A succinct landing page that reduced clickthrough fatigue when compared to complex institutional websites, while remaining easy to place on promotional materials and social media profiles

- A perception of exclusivity and relevance that strengthened students' connection to the library as a key partner in their academic major

Choosing a Microsite Platform

The authors selected Microsoft Sway as the landing page platform because it was readily available within CCU's established Microsoft product ecosystem and could be set up rapidly for a pilot. Sway's analytics provided basic metrics including click rate, views, and broad categories of time spent on the page, but Sway lacked granular timelines of when students accessed the page or link-level reporting.[5] Alternative platforms could provide more detailed analytics, such as access timing, link-specific click counts, and detailed geographic information. Other platforms for creating a microsite include an abbreviated LibGuide that would leverage asset analytics in a manner familiar to many librarians, or a free version of other single-link landing page tools commonly used on social media profiles (e.g., profile link aggregators such as Linktree or Hopp).

Sticker Production

The QR code stickers were designed through a collaboration between the CCU Libraries Makerspace and University Libraries Marketing. The Marketing Coordinator led the graphic design aspect of the project to ensure conformity with brand standards, while the makerspace printed the stickers using specialized paper on a large-format printer and cut them with a vinyl cutter. Libraries without makerspace access could partner with external vendors (e.g., national vendors such as Vistaprint or local, small print companies) or use design tools such as Canva, Adobe Express, or Word processing software. Lower-cost approaches include printing stickers on Avery-style mailing labels and trimming them with a paper cutter.

Initial Results and Future Considerations

Using Microsoft Sway's analytics features, the authors tracked page views and coarse time-on-page categories labeled as "glanced," "quick read," and "deep read." Microsoft provides only general descriptions of these labels, limiting the precision of interpretation.[5] Over the first two weeks, 205 students visited the page, with 108 categorized as a "deep read." After one month, views reached 283, with 102 categorized as "deep read," while average completion increased from 36% to 47%, suggesting a growth in student familiarity and more targeted use of the microsite (i.e., heading to the page for a specific link rather than browsing the list of resources). Future iterations will prioritize platforms with more granular analytics to inform link selection and usage patterns, and the authors also plan to extend the sticker-and-microsite approach to additional populations (e.g., students within other colleges, orientation, and large events).

Conclusion

This pilot project used a purpose-built microsite to create a portable takeaway for a large-scale instruction opportunity and was a successful venture overall. It is a route that can be duplicated easily by other libraries for little to no cost. Although those looking to implement this approach may be doing so on a shoestring budget, the authors advocate taking the time to determine which platforms best meet the needs of each individual library or project. For instance, analytical features that provide detailed insight into time spent on a page are often important when attempting to gauge student engagement with a microsite. Therefore, it would be advantageous to take a

comparative look at several microsite platform options at the outset of any new project. Once a librarian has selected the ideal tool, creating a microsite provides an easy opportunity to share richly detailed and highly relevant information for specific populations.

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