**BACKGROUND**

The smartphone is rapidly becoming a common tool in the healthcare environment. Increasing numbers of students began asking for assistance in identifying and locating information resources onto their mobile devices. In anticipation of the release of a mobile VPN to access the University’s wireless network, the library began developing materials and services to provide support to patrons.

**Mobile Survey**

To get a better understanding of the prevalence and use of smartphones among our students, the library conducted a survey in the summer of 2010 soliciting feedback from medical, public health, and health sciences students regarding their mobile usage and preferences.

- 102 respondents responded: 46 medical students, 44 public health students, 14 health sciences students
- 34 students reported using some sort of mobile device; 70% reported using an iPhone or iPod Touch; 30% reported using another device such as Android or Blackberry
- 31 students reported envisioning using an iPhone, iPod Touch or other mobile device to access medical or public health resources in the future
- 60% of respondents said they would use their mobile device for library reference assistance (IM, text, email, or phone reference)
- 86% of respondents said they would like to renew books and place holds via the library catalog using their mobile device

**Mobile Website**

Based on the information obtained from the survey, the library developed a mobile web page; one of the first web pages on campus. We wanted to be proactive and have our website easily viewable on a handheld device, so the library’s mobile website has been evolving. We realized that the layout we had chosen to display the mobile apps and mobile-optimized websites is not clearly linked to a website or web-based resource. For example, one section gathers practical information on the various platforms as well as step-by-step instructions on accessing GW’s wireless network from a mobile device.

**Mobile Drop-in Sessions**

- As part of the mobile initiatives launch, the library also initially offered four two-hour afternoon drop-in sessions. These scheduled sessions at the library’s Technology Help Desk were geared toward providing students with one-on-one assistance in loading apps, accessing the University’s wireless network, and resolving any other library-related mobile issues.
- The drop-in sessions proved popular. Additional sessions were scheduled for the fall and continued into the spring semester.
- The session times were staggered with some beginning at noon and others starting later in the afternoon, in order to accommodate various course schedules for students in different schools.
- As of mid-April 2011, attendance at the noon time sessions ranged from 1 to 10 people, and at the afternoon sessions from 0 to 6 people.
- A total of ten sessions have been held, with two more scheduled for June 2011 to accommodate summer session students.

**Mobile LibGuide**

The Reference Desk receives numerous questions from patrons about smartphones; everything from resource availability to platform and purchase advice. In order to gather all of our mobile information together, the reference staff developed a LibGuide that is available to patrons at all times.

- It includes a section on specific health information mobile-optimized websites and apps; both freely available and obtained via the library’s electronic resource licenses. Another section provides links to free and fee-based clinical calculators, and a third section focuses on mobile utilities for GW users.
- One section gathers practical information on the various platforms as well as step-by-step instructions on accessing GW’s wireless network from a mobile device.

**Future**

- Mobile LibGuide continues to evolve. A few additional resources have been linked to the site, and some of the category wording has been tweaked to be clearer.
- In early 2011, the University launched their mobile app and a link to the library’s mobile website has been included in the app.
- The Mobile Resources LibGuide is also evolving. We realized that the layout we had chosen to display the mobile apps and mobile-optimized websites is not easily viewable on a handheld device, so we are experimenting with new layouts that will display more easily on a mobile device.
- As additional resources become available, we plan to add them to both the mobile website and the Mobile Resources LibGuide.
- Due to the popularity of mobile devices, the reference staff has begun experimenting with QR codes. A QR code is a barcode that can be photographed with a smartphone and then decoded with free software nearly instantaneously. The bar code can be linked to a website or web-based resource. For example, to view the Himmelfarb Mobile website, photograph and decode this QR code.