Hello, and welcome to the most thrilling 6 minutes and 40 seconds of your life! Buckle up, and settle in for a groundbreaking presentation on the initial research process for IL Fox, The Virtual Toolbook for Information Literacy!
In May of 2012, the office of the SUNY provost announced a new grant opportunity: the Innovative Instruction Technology Grants program, or IITG for short. This program aims to encourage and support the exploration of technology in teaching, and especially emphasizes partnership and collaboration.
This call was heard by three stalwart folks at the University at Albany Libraries: Information Literacy instructors and librarians Carol Anne Germain and Tor Loney, and John Pardavila, a library web developer and designer. This program seemed like a perfect opportunity to create an Information Literacy resource!
For those unfamiliar with the term, Information Literacy is most often defined using the American Library Association’s definition: a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."
In fact, the lack of widespread familiarity with Information Literacy was part of the inspiration for this grant: our humble heroes realized there was not currently a central resource specifically dedicated to defining and promoting Information Literacy, either for students or instructors.
They proposed the creation of an information literacy toolbook: a multilevel online dictionary and encyclopedia of information literacy terms, that would also include instructional modules and could be used by students, instructors, and others. IL Fox was born!
Their proposal was accepted, and they were awarded funding to conduct a thorough exploration of what would be required to create this resource, ranging from content development to technological considerations, and especially including finding partners to share in the project.
Now we’d like to talk in detail about what IL Fox will be, starting with its objectives.

Users of this resource will:

- learn Information Literacy terminology, history, context, and applications;
- have 24/7 access to a centralized IL resource;
- and, have shared access to instructional materials for use in teaching.
IL Fox will employ several components to do this. First, it will provide a dictionary defining pertinent words and terms from IL curriculum. Definitions will be gathered from various sources, as well as tailored and created as needed.
The terms themselves will also be gathered from a number of sources, including a wide range of academic and library-related sources in print and online, and from experts in both Information Literacy and more specific disciplines.
The toolbook will also provide an encyclopedia in which each dictionary definition will link to a supporting page detailing each term, giving an overview, history, and relevant examples.
These entries will contain sections designed to spark deeper thinking for student exploration, by hyperlinking to relevant sources. For example, the page for Fair Use could link to the online video *A Fair(y) Use Tale*.
Finally, for pedagogical purposes, this resource will provide access to instructional materials for use in teaching, including term-specific lesson plans, examples of best practice, and assessment tools.
So, how will we create this awesome thing? First, we will conduct a review of Information Literacy materials and more, searching in the literature and professional organization standards for terms to use.
Additionally, we will look at technical considerations. This will include an analysis of which tools will be most effective for learning outcomes, an exploration of platforms supporting collaborative enhancements, and issues of maintenance and sustainability.
We will also identify assessment tools for measuring the outcomes of IL Fox use. These will include peer-reviewed tools such as PRIMO and MERLOT, and possibly discipline-specific tools where appropriate. We will also determine which usability testing measures are best suited to this resource.
Finally, and most critically, we will develop collaborative partnerships on several levels. First, we will identify domain-specific experts, such as Creative Commons’ Lawrence Lessig, to recruit as “definition adopters” who will maintain specific content in the toolbook.
Additionally, we will seek wider partnerships with organizations such as NYLA, SUNYLA, COIL, ACRL, AASL, and others. We will also interview vendors, who can provide insight into software applications and other possible resources for IL Fox.
Now, here’s where YOU come in!
We are actively seeking input for all aspects of this project.
We would love to hear any suggestions regarding content development and presentation, software recommendations, teaching and assessment tools, and more.
We are especially eager to find partners for this project! If you are interested in participating on any level, or know someone who might be, we would love to hear from you! We can be reached at the email addresses above, or through the University at Albany Libraries’ website. Thank you!