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2012

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### Recommended Citation

Gewirtz, S. (2012). Make your library instruction interactive with Poll Everywhere. *College & Research Libraries News*, 73(7), 400–403.

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Sarah Gewirtz

# Make your library instruction interactive with Poll Everywhere

An alternative to audience response systems

As the information literacy librarian at the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University, I have been teaching one-shot library instructions for first-year students for many years. Instructors of the First Year Seminar (FYS) schedule library instructions in the fall for students to get the basics: tour of the library, introduction to the library homepage, how to find books and articles, and an opportunity to meet a librarian. Some instructors will ask for a discussion on evaluating sources, but the library instruction session is mainly a way for students to get comfortable with the library.

After the tour, students will go to a computer classroom where a lecture/demonstration on how to find items from the library homepage begins. My experience with this is that students are bored. During the lecture they check their Facebook accounts, play games, or search for other things on the Internet. When asked, "Are there any questions about how to find an article (or fill in the blank with anything else taught)?" the response would be blank stares.

Past hands-on activity was a "test" during which the students would work in pairs to see if they understood what they had been lectured on. The pair that gave the correct answers first would win a prize. While the quiz was a success, it was still frustrating to have to re-teach many of the same things over again to the students. Last year a colleague of mine mentioned Poll Everywhere, and I decided to give that a try.

For several years librarians have heard the advantages of using audience response systems ("clickers") in the classroom. "Clickers are advantageous because they require students to participate actively, allow instructors to test prior knowledge, and also serve as a way to introduce new concepts and instantly check for student understanding."<sup>1</sup> Many institutions do not have the resources (money or technical support) to purchase and maintain audience response systems for their classrooms, how-



Poll Everywhere is a Web-based application that makes it easy to gather live responses to questions during an event like an instruction session. It is a free alternative to the audience response systems that have been promoted for a few years. Poll Everywhere enables users to promote active learning. It allows librarians to break up the lecture format by asking questions that check the students' progress and comprehension. Poll Everywhere is a great way to make your library instruction interactive.

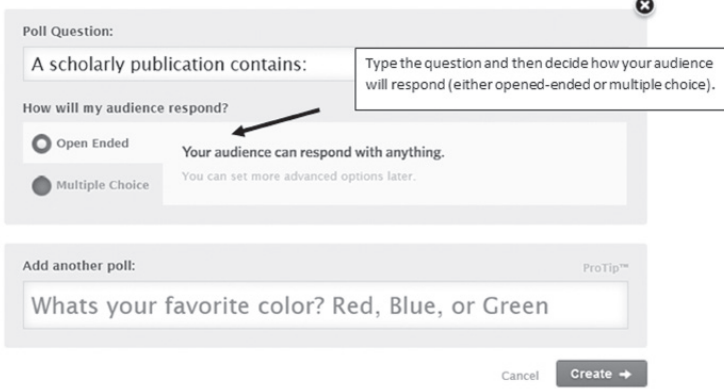
## How does Poll Everywhere work?— Librarian perspective

A librarian asks a question, and students can respond by any one of these methods: text message, their smart phone's Web browser,

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spreadsheet for assessment purposes. For example, if the librarian says to the class, “Tell me two things you’ve learned today” or “What is one thing that you are still struggling with?” you can export the information to a spreadsheet that

Twitter, or the Web browser on the classroom computers. Poll Everywhere is free for audiences of 40 people or less. Librarians can share an account with the free plan, and there are paid plans for larger audiences (K–12 and Higher Education semester-long plans are also available). The number of polls librarians can create is unlimited. Other features include no spam or advertisements for the user or participants, ability to tweet polls directly to a Twitter account, and ability to customize poll designs. With Poll Everywhere, librarians can download the poll into PowerPoint slides that show live results, and it is 100 percent Web based—no software to install.

Polls can be multiple-choice, open-ended, or goal questions. Librarians can decide which poll will be useful for their instruction. Depending on how they want to use Poll Everywhere, the user can decide to close the poll or keep it open for another class to use. Also, librarians can decide whether a poll should allow multiple responses from the same person (open-ended questions allow for several responses from one individual; multiple-choice, respondents can only respond once). Poll Everywhere is easy to use: go to the Web site, decide on a plan, create an account, create questions, and then ask them in a library instruction.

With Poll Everywhere, librarians can download the responses into an Excel

can be shared with other librarians or the instructor of the class. Poll Everywhere is a great way to assess student feedback and make changes to a library instruction, if needed. One more very cool feature—you can Wordle the responses.

### Student perspective

With Poll Everywhere, students are given a poll number to use when responding to questions whether the librarian directs them to respond via text, Web browser, or Twitter. Poll Everywhere is used in my library instructions, with the majority of the use being with FYS classes. Having tried the text feature, I was frustrated by the amount of time it took for responses to appear from students. Now



students answer questions using a computer (Web-based). A URL is given to students where they enter a corresponding number from the poll before they respond.

There is a gentle learning curve the first time students use Poll Everywhere because each question is given a unique number that students need to enter before they respond to the question. For example, with the question, “What questions do you have about the library?” the students typed in 204845 (space) then sent their response to <http://pollev.com>.

## What questions do you have about the library?

Submit 204845 and your message to <http://PollEv.com>

26 days ago

"how long can you check out a book for?"

26 days ago

"Can I check out an iPad and for how long?"

26 days ago

"Is there food allowed in the library?"

26 days ago

"Where do you get dvds?"

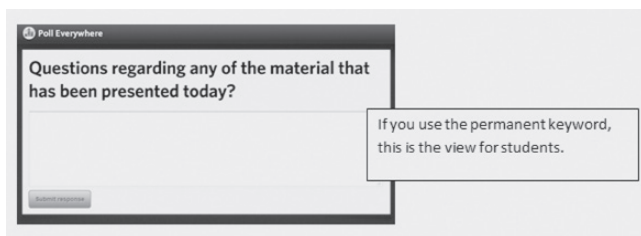
26 days ago



powered by Poll Everywhere

Live Audience Polling

By using Poll Everywhere for open-ended questions, I would receive at least one or two questions each class period regarding the tour, library hours, finding books, etc. This is something that rarely happened prior to using Poll Everywhere.



Initially, students struggled with the poll numbers; they would forget to enter the number before they responded. I have since learned that it is possible to create a permanent keyword (I use *sgewirtz*) to respond to the polls.

A disadvantage to using open-ended questions is there isn't a tally of how many students have responded to the question. Librarians must either count each response or assume everyone has responded.

### How to incorporate Poll Everywhere in library instruction

Poll Everywhere is a great instrument to use to see if students understand the informa-

tion presented. Many times when librarians ask questions, students respond with blank stares. Using open-ended questions from Poll Everywhere, students can respond to questions anonymously. This allows the librarian to begin a conversation with students on difficulties they may still have with the information that was presented to them. According to a study by the University of Wisconsin, students

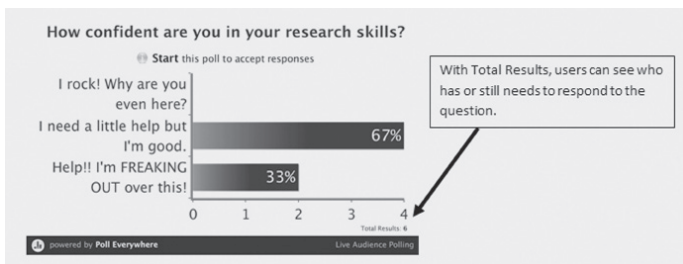
reported that audience response systems "allowed them to participate in the class discussion by answering questions without risking embarrassment for incorrect or naive answers."<sup>2</sup>

By asking questions about students' prior knowledge, the class "becomes tailored, not a one-size-fits all."<sup>3</sup> Asking the question to seniors working on their capstone paper, "How confident are you in your research skills?" allowed me to adjust the session for them. None of the students

felt "they rocked," so review of some of the basics seemed to be appropriate.

Poll Everywhere is also a nice way to break up the lecture via interactive activities.<sup>4</sup> With multiple-choice questions, all students

need to do is type in the number that corresponds to the choice. One advantage of using



multiple-choice questions is the user will know how many students have responded through "Total Results." A disadvantage with using multiple-choice questions is that the results will appear instantly. Asking a multiple-choice question like, "How can I get a book from the other campus?" the first response was the correct one ("Intercampus

Book Delivery”) and students who hadn’t responded would repeat that response. One way around this is to have students enter their choice but stress that they not hit “submit.” Then have them raise their hands when they have made their choice; once all hands are raised, they then hit “submit.”

Poll Everywhere can be used for many hands-on activities in a library instruction session. Students can use the catalog to find a book on their research topic. From there they can post the title and call number of the book, as well as the library where it is located. This exercise can allow the librarian to see if students understand how to find a book, but also allows librarians and instructors to see if students are finding books appropriate for their research papers.

The same is true when students are asked to find a scholarly article through Academic Search Premier (and other databases). Since this is anonymous, students do not have to worry about being embarrassed if they find a magazine article. It can turn into a teachable moment for everyone. Poll Everywhere could be used as a way to start discussions such as whether the Martin Luther King Jr. Web site ([www.martinlutherking.org/](http://www.martinlutherking.org/)) hosted by Storm Front is one that could be used in a research paper.

This spring semester I used Poll Everywhere to ask first-year students what they found difficult about the research process. Responses ranged from not having enough sources or having too many to write the paper, not knowing if the sources were credible, and not being able to determine which ones would be appropriate to use. This allowed me to start a discussion acknowledging their struggles. Being aware of their concerns gave me the opportunity to say, “Guess what? I also struggle with the research process.” I could then end the conversation by stressing that they had people (librarians) who were willing to help them through the process. I plan on creating a Wordle document based on the responses I received this year to show incoming first-year students next spring.

By creating this document I hope to show this new set of students that their struggles are universal.

Response from students has been positive: “It’s fun to use, and it’s a good way to get everyone involved,” “I love the fact that it is interactive! I think I paid more attention,” and “This was awesome . . . easy to figure out . . . great way to ask anonymous questions.”

Instructor feedback was very similar: “I thought this was an excellent way to have a class. It was very interactive, so everyone took part in answering each and every question.”

There clearly are benefits to using Poll Everywhere in library instruction. It allows everyone to participate and keeps students interested in the presentation. Poll Everywhere allows students to respond and ask questions anonymously. It provides a way to do on-the-spot assessment of learning goals. Time spent learning Poll Everywhere and creating questions for library instructions is time well spent. Not only do students and faculty find it beneficial in their learning, but everyone has fun using it.

## Notes

1. Christina Hoffman and Susan Goodwin, “A Clicker for Your Thoughts: Technology for Active Learning,” *New Library World* 107, no. 9 (2006): 422–33, doi: 10.1108/03074800610702606.
2. Robert Kaleta and Tanya Joosten, “Student Response Systems: A University of Wisconsin System Study of Clickers,” *ECAR Research Bulletin* 207, no. 10:1–12, [www.educause.edu/ECAR/StudentResponseSystemsAUnivers/157592](http://www.educause.edu/ECAR/StudentResponseSystemsAUnivers/157592).
3. Anne C. Osterman, “Student Response Systems: Keeping the Students Engaged,” *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 14, no. 4 (2007): 49–57, doi: 10.1080/10691310802046801.
4. Suzanne Julian and Kimball Benson, “Clicking Your Way to Library Instruction Assessment,” *College & Research Libraries News* 69, no. 5 (2008): 258–60. *z*