Penn State Digital Badges

Using digital badges at the University Library to showcase, recognize, and inspire information literacy skills.

The Challenge

Information literacy instruction in the library has traditionally been taught through individual one-shot classes. The limitations of this pedagogical approach are that higher level competencies cannot be covered in one class and that there is uneven distribution of instruction. Some students receive the same instruction multiple times and others do not receive any information literacy instruction at all.

The Solution

The University Libraries is now offering 15 badges, which give students personalized and flexible activities designed to help showcase, recognize, and inspire information literacy skills. Implementing a series of badges has enabled the capture of learning across all learning environments. The badges allow students to build a learning pathway, focus on the big ideas of information literacy, and carry their learning beyond the classroom.

The digital badging platform supports learners through the full badge lifecycle; not just awarding badges, but scaffolding the entire learning experience and storing evidence. Instructors create their own badges as a series of steps for the learner to work through; in each step, learners get background information, instructions for the activity they need to complete, and can even watch embedded learning content from platforms like YouTube or ThingLink.

The Impact

Badges have allowed us to reach new students that we don't traditionally get to see through our existing face-to-face sessions. All World Campus students enrolled in our essential English course will now be introduced to library resources and information literacy topics in a way that wasn't possible before. Feedback from our pilot program indicated that the students in the courses that implemented badges showed vastly improved quality of sources and accuracy of citations compared to other students.

Badges have an incredible potential to impact education moving forward. The modularity that badges afford will allow for greater customization of learning pathways, and increased access to educational opportunities for millions of people.