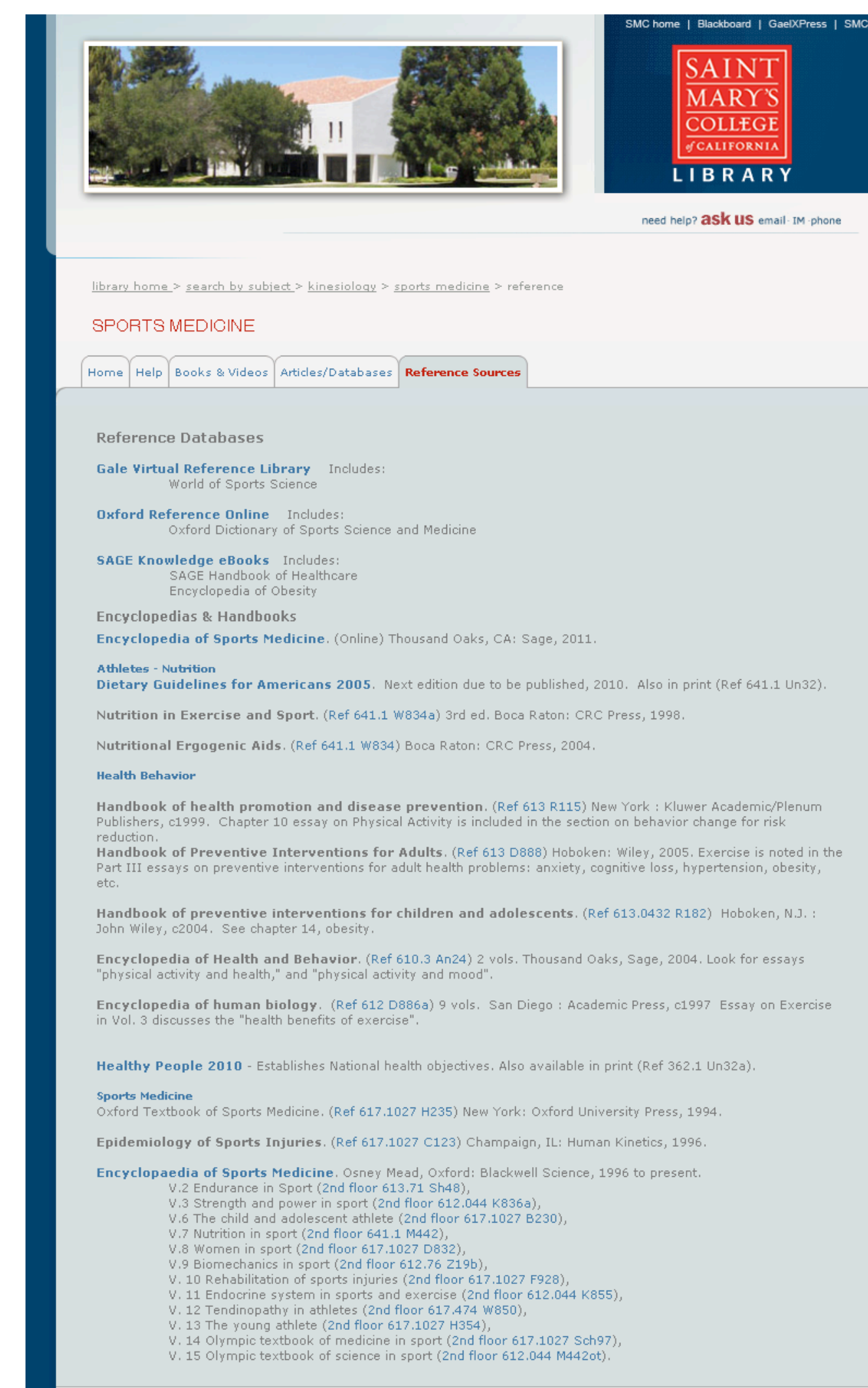
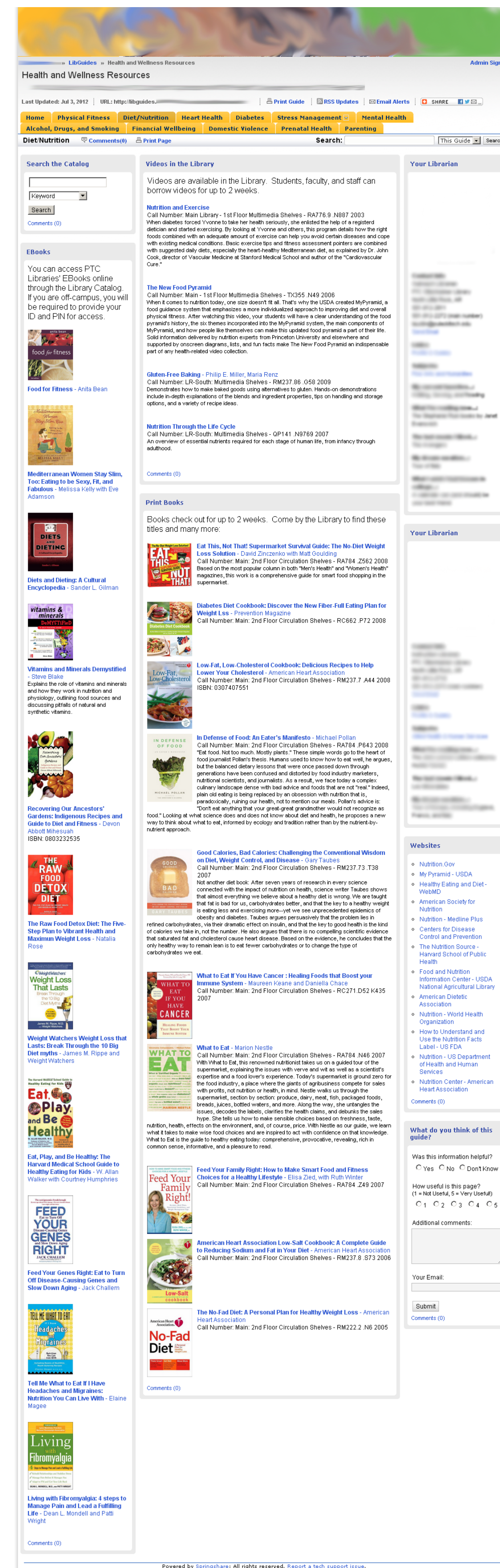


Who Have You Asked?

Poster presented April 5, 2013 at California Conference on Information Literacy, by Sarah Vital, Reference and Instruction Librarian

How do subject guides look today?



Librarian opinions

- Long and overwhelming text
- Questionable context
- Not intuitive without instruction
- Hard to maintain
- Can contain biases on what is chosen or excluded
- How do students find them or know about them?
- “Why recreate the catalog?”

Student opinions

- 53% of students never used subject guides (Reeb & Gibbons, 2004)*
- Students who did use them did so to access subject databases (Staley, 2007)
- Users were skeptical of bells and whistles, such as comments and ratings (Hntz, 2010)
- Course guides were more useful because they were more specific (Coutois et al, 2003)
- “Students want subject guides simply to help them search the same way that they have searched, only more effectively.” (Ouellette, 2011)

How did we get here?

Bibliography --> Path Finder --> Subject Guide

Bibliography: “a systematic list or enumeration of written works by an author or on a given subject” (ODLIS)

Path Finder: “step-by-step instructions” (Canfield, 1972) and “map of library resources” (Stevens, Canfield & Gardner, 1973)

Subject guides: A mix of both.

But sometimes, it seems we lean a bit too much towards the list just to be “safe.” We want to make sure the best information is found, and it is hard to let go and trust that students will find what we want them to find.

Librarians need to reclaim a balance.



How do we balance?

Focus on what we want students to take with them and on what they lack: *an appreciation of experts*

“We have a generation that has lost its understanding of the authority of experts. Such authority is far from absolute, but to lose it is to risk losing our ability to survive as a society.” --William Badke, 2011

“This generation of workers for whom research often begins by plugging keywords into a search box, also discussed how they learned that the traditional forms of research, like tapping the expertise of a trusted and knowledgeable teammate, could be more fruitful-- and efficient-- than they ever imagined.” --Project Information Literacy, October 2012

Strategies moving forward

- Continue to include subject specific databases, as this is what students want.
- Replace lists of books or websites with recommended experts in the field to:
 - free librarians from maintaining unsustainable bibliographies in an ever changing information world
 - discourage librarians from aiding students’ passive consumption of information
 - assist students search effectively on their own (as suggested was the goal in Ouellette, 2011)
 - encourage students’ interactive and engaged search for information in a guided way through experts and reliable sources

What does it look like?

<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/library/subject-guides/health-and-wellness>

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