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# EIFL-FOSS: Free and Open Source programme

Improving ICT infrastructure in libraries

## AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA: SUBJECTSPLUS

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EIFL-FOSS CASE STUDY

December 2013

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*This case study was compiled by Stanislav Tsymbalov, Senior Web-developer, American University of Central Asia and Sania Battalova, Director of Information Resources and Technology, American University of Central Asia*

## SUMMARY

### SUBJECTSPPLUS IN THE AUCA LIBRARY

In order to create and manage online guides for open educational resources, databases or other electronic resources the AUCA library has implemented SubjectsPlus (a FOSS tool) as a platform for subject guides.

### BENEFITS

1. SubjectsPlus serves as a platform for access to both commercial and open access e-resources. Thanks to SubjectsPlus all of the electronic resources available in the library (subscribed and free of charge databases) as well as open access e-resources (e.g. open educational resources) can be organized into subject areas, so that we can provide our patrons with easy access to a variety of e-resources in each area, including journals, books, e-texts, courses, videos, etc.
2. Patrons can benefit from enhanced access (on-campus and off-campus) to resources both licensed and open access e-resources (also it might be both popular e-resources, and new e-resources) by subjects, courses or topics guides on the created SubjectsPlus website (<https://subject.auca.kg/subjects/index.php>).
3. Subject librarians can organize e-resources by subjects or topics as well as an organized A-Z list of databases. Besides, subject librarians can be visible to their users and can be more reachable to them (e.g. <https://subject.auca.kg/subjects/guide.php?subject=EH>).
4. Subject librarians collaborate closely with faculty and departments of the University in the field of creation of the content for the guides and making sure that the guides contain the right information as well as facilitating and promoting of the online subject guides among the students and teachers.
5. Training sessions on SubjectsPlus have been held in the library. As a result, the library staff have become proficient in a new technology. We have also held a training session for other libraries in our country, building bridges with others with whom we can pool and share expertise.

## PROJECT DETAILS

### INSTALLATION PROCESS

The installation process is not automated. There is no install script for easy installation of SubjectsPlus by a potential user (e.g. a technical librarian). Also, wiki notes and hints on the official website are out of date. This includes the default username and password. This information has been fed back to the SubjectsPlus development community so that improvements can be made. To help support the process of installation and make it much easier to follow, EIFL has created a step-by-step guide to the installation and use of SubjectsPlus, which can be found here:

<http://www.eifl.net/subjectsplus-step-step-guide>

## TECHNICAL LESSONS LEARNED

When installing SubjectsPlus a problem arose almost immediately. On our server was PHP version 5.4. But the software release at the time was written for versions below 5.3. However, the required functions have been successfully replaced, and SubjectsPlus is in continual development to prepare new releases that are compatible.

It was noticed during installation that we could make numerous small changes that would help future users (for example, unused lines of code, issued Notices, undefined variables, no special characters). We tidied up the code to remove these small issues and posted an improved text file 'Bugfix for SubjectsPlus 1.0.2' to the development community for inclusion into the main software development. Anyone can also do this if they spot code that should be changed, and the development community is very receptive to this interaction.

## TROUBLESHOOTING THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

To translate the technical and policy terms does not take much time and effort, as it is essentially simply a literal translation of a string of words and terms.

However, the English version of SubjectsPlus uses many phrases with English slang. It is often difficult to translate these directly. For example: "No FAQs yet. Why not dream one up?", "Headshot", "Thy Will Be Done", "They're going to rise up against us someday", "Hmm, That Was a Tricky Bit of Math". This has been fed back to the development community so that they might make the translation file a bit more straightforward and containing less slang.

Also, many phrases are repeated and this increases the time needed for translation.

There are also some repeated phrases, but written differently "TalkBack", "talkback", "Talk Back". In this case, the question arises - is the name of the service or just a phrase? So a recommendation has been made to the development community to improve this process, which should be a very small task on their part.

Using gettext for the localization process instead of a simple text file or a PHP-file with the language pack also creates some potential problems. To use gettext you need to have root-access to the server and the ability to overwrite Apache. It is often not possible because there is genuine uninterrupted work on the server, such as other websites. So potential new users of SubjectsPlus who want to undertake a translation should be aware that they will need to find a way of overwriting Apache in order to use the gettext facility.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Director of the library was actively in contact and explicitly supported the project. However the project was slowed down by the fact that at the end of the year there is a lot of work for the staff and it took time for them to find the right content for the SubjectsPlus guides.

Time needs to be allocated to talking with and training library staff. We created the role of 'Library Liaison' to specifically build contacts between the library and academic departments, based on the need to accurately populate SubjectsPlus with relevant and useful information. The AUCA library liaisons are working in cooperation with the university faculty to update and to improve the current SubjectsPlus web-page and the Research guidelines – they have each been given a target to engage with three faculty members within the first month to get them interacting directly with the Subject Guides and their contents. The Library Liaisons work with the course syllabi and analyze the sources faculty present to students (for separate courses or by subject). Together with interested faculty they collect the sources, describe and present them on the Research Guidelines page of the AUCA library website <https://subject.auca.kg/subjects/index.php>. They also present some additional sources (from the databases the library subscribe to or have access to) with comments and suggestions on a better use.

The next step in terms of internal communications is to work with the faculty to link the sources they place on Moodle (e-course system) with the sources collected on SubjectsPlus, perhaps labelled as additional or required reading sources for the course.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

### STATISTICS

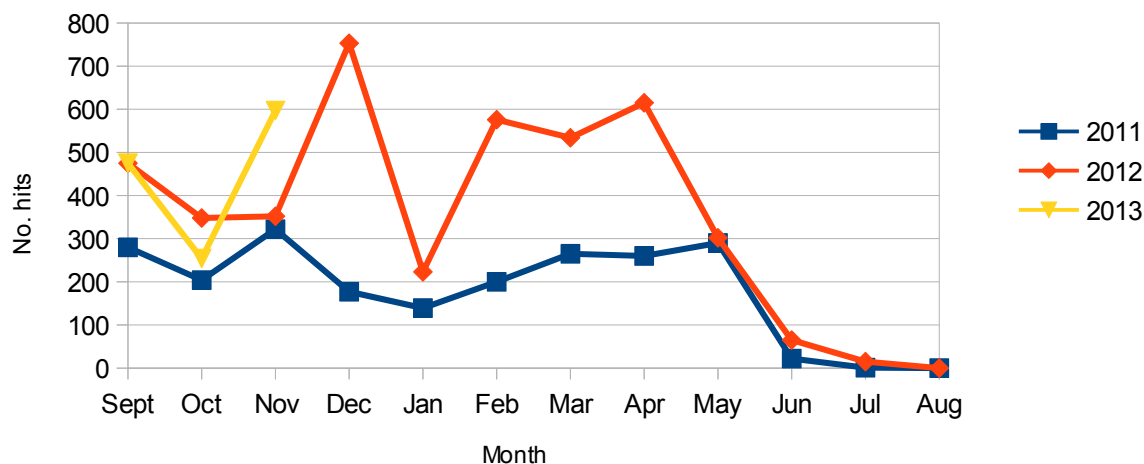
At this time, the American University in Central Asia, is progressing an Open Educational Resources focus, which we decided to build on the SubjectsPlus software. This is a new service and it will be actively pursued. It is intended that usage statistics in this area will increase.

Meanwhile usage statistics for AUCA's e-resources show some promising signs. Since the first batch of Subject Guides using SubjectsPlus were rolled out for the start of the 2012-13 academic year, usage of EBSCO resources (the most commonly featured resources in the guides at that time) has been consistently higher than the year before (see Figure 1). There is an indication that the enhanced promotional activities and improvements to the guides rolled out in October-November 2013 (see below) has also had an effect, although it is too early to be sure of this.

Figure 1. AUCA Usage statistics for EBSCO resources September 2011 to November 2013

## AUCA Usage statistics for EBSCO resources 2011-2013

(SubjectsPlus rolled out Sept '12, improvements and marketing push Nov '13)



### PROMOTING THE PROJECT

Promotion externally has taken place by speaking at an international conference - the project technical lead spoke at the conference "Issyk-Kul 2012: Libraries and the democratization of society," with the presentation "Web-navigation for electronic library resources". SubjectsPlus received some interest there.

In addition, a practical training workshop "Development of virtual library services: implementation of SubjectsPlus in the libraries practices" took place at the Library of the Kyrgyz State Technical University in November 2013 - <http://bik.org.kg/en/news/177/> The workshop brought together 27 librarians / IT specialists from four libraries: Kyrgyz Technical University, Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavonic) University, Kyrgyz-Turkish University, and Kyrgyz State University.

The main goal of the workshop was to introduce SubjectsPlus as a solution to create electronic resources research guidelines for the library users (students, faculty, researchers). The workshop was led by Irina Pak, Executive Director of the Kyrgyz Libraries and Information Consortium and EIFL Licensing coordinator.

Irina made a presentation about the main characteristics of SubjectsPlus and benefits of using it in libraries using the example of the research guides created in the AUCA library. During the practical part of the workshop participants learned how to create content in SubjectsPlus, add and edit information blocks, generate links to electronic resources and insert images.

All workshop participants received handouts with detailed steps of creating Research Guides. Two of the libraries' training participants (Kyrgyz-Turkish and Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavonic) Universities) - were interested to start working immediately with the resources provided during the training. The opportunity to use the Russian language interface is being discussed. We expect that in Spring-Summer 2014 these two institutions libraries will present their Research Guidelines pages.

The workshop was considered a success and was highly appreciated by the participants. KLIC is going to continue the promotion and presentation of SubjectsPlus among the Kyrgyz libraries. In February 2014 another workshop is planned.

## ELECTRONIC RESOURCE WEEK

Our Electronic Resources Week (November 18-22, 2013) was supported by the AUCA administration and PR office. Whilst there was not a specific focus on SubjectsPlus, the focus was on enhancing the awareness and usage of e-resources via the library as a whole across the university, with an additional aim to enhance the relationship between the library, students and faculty.

For this week of promotion activities, many types of activities took place, including:

- workshops (e.g. [https://auca.kg/en/auca\\_events/1071/](https://auca.kg/en/auca_events/1071/)),
- master classes (e.g. [https://auca.kg/en/auca\\_events/1068/](https://auca.kg/en/auca_events/1068/)),
- intellectual games (eg. [https://auca.kg/en/auca\\_events/1073/](https://auca.kg/en/auca_events/1073/)),
- flash mob “Electronic resources” ([https://auca.kg/en/auca\\_events/1074/](https://auca.kg/en/auca_events/1074/)),
- student’s presentations “My favorite database”, and
- an open talk “The Library: There and Back Again” on the use of electronic resources in the educational and research process.

To promote the event widely, the Library posted notifications about the week on its main web homepage and banners to encourage users to explore and use the e-resources through social media (eg. Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AUCALibrary> – see Figure 2).

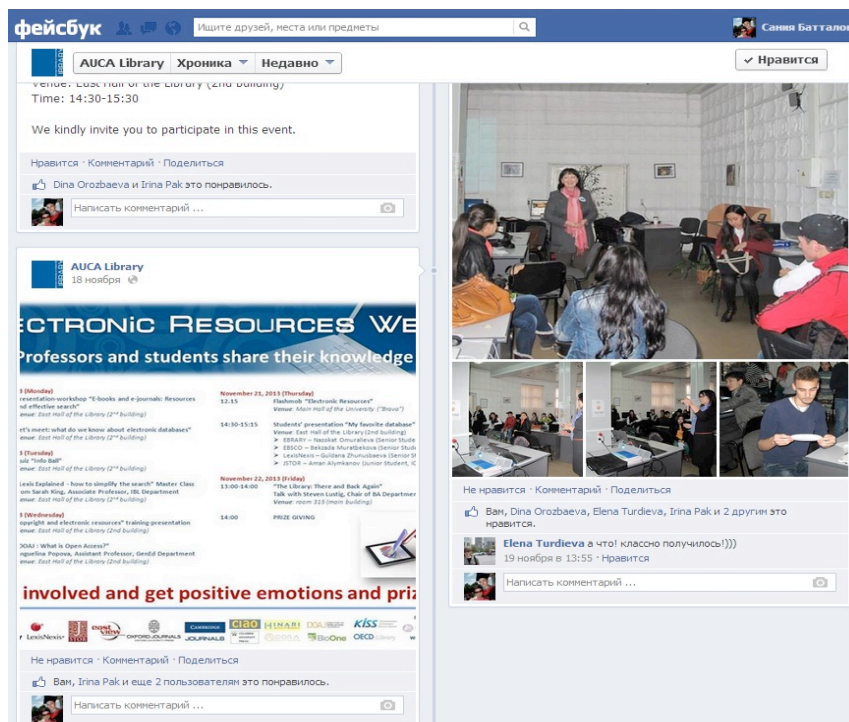


Figure 2: Screen capture of AUCA Facebook profile showing promotion for Electronic Resources Week

As a part of the e-resources week a video was prepared. Faculty members and students gave interview responses to the question 'What is the role of electronic resources in the academic activity of the University?'. This video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLgLtIQBgcs&list=UUVVR3wVmKVQ9pM1xTpLzI4Q>

A second Electronic Resources Week is planned for Spring 2014, and this will include specific focuses on the Subject Guides, now that the general message about electronic resources has been disseminated.

## SUBJECTSPPLUS COMMUNITY

It is a good idea to create a space for discussion of the open source SubjectsPlus (<http://splus.pbworks.com>). The technical lead from this project, Stanislav Tsybalov, is actively participating in the community, saying “it is always welcome to have a virtual platform for communication between professionals and users”.

Stanislav goes on to say “Overall I believe that the open source SubjectsPlus software is a good idea. This software is designed to help. But, above all it is necessary to continue the work – installing the software and rolling out the guides is just the first stage in a long term process of using the software to highlight e-resources and hopefully maximise their usage within the university.”