

Javascript and Linux: Online Tutorials and "Did They Do It?"
<http://www.umsl.edu/services/library/didtheydoit/onlinenw2003/>

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One of the most heavily used resources on the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) Libraries web site is a series of tutorials which interactively teach users how to navigate the library web pages, use the library catalog, and how to more effectively search the most commonly used databases. There will be a brief presentation of one of these tutorials (the fictional database "Ovid Abstracts") demonstrating the use of javascript as the mechanism by which interactivity simulates a connection to an actual Ovid database.

UMSL faculty often request that the students supply proof that they have finished a given tutorial, usually by having them print out and hand in the final web page of a tutorial. In order to overcome this unsatisfactory mechanism of proof, a second utility called "Did They Do It?" has been developed.

"Did They Do It?" will be demonstrated from three viewpoints: (1) the students using a tutorial, (2) the faculty assigning a tutorial, and (3) the librarian administrator of "Did They Do It?"

Students are merely requested to self-identify, and select the class for which the tutorial has been assigned. "Did They Do It?" does not evaluate performance. It simply indicates the completion (navigation) of a series of web pages. As the student proceeds through the tutorial, at selected intervals a database record is created with their name and the module just completed. Since the online tutorials are fully interactive (students must enter correct answers in simulated search forms) users cannot just click through a series of pages.

Faculty are required to register with "Did They Do It?" Subsequent to registration they must then use "Did They Do It?" to specify a class and which tutorial they wish the students to complete. This information is presented to the student at the beginning of a tutorial when they are asked to enter their name. A pull-down menu allows them to select the instructor and class for whom they must complete the tutorial.

The librarian administering "Did They Do It?" has two major tasks: (1) create and place modified links in a tutorial to be used with "Did They Do It?" and (2) enter the name and description of the tutorial in the "Did They Do It?" system. Modification of existing links is a trivial process, as is entering the name and description of a tutorial.

"Did They Do It?" is a linux based application which uses the open source database management system MySQL, and the open source scripting language PHP. Faculty registration, student completion data, and library administration is all done using web based forms, with the information stored as tables in a MySQL database. The faculty utility allows the registrant to track, in real time, the progress of a specific class for a specific tutorial. UMSL faculty log in to the system and simply request the relevant class report which is extracted from the MySQL database using PHP enabled web pages.