It is practically obligatory to begin by saying that Augsburg College is used to doing a lot with limited resources. With 12 library staff members (seven of them librarians) to serve nearly 4,000 students, the college relies on traditional face-to-face reference service and a lot of bibliographic instruction to reach students. Starting in 2005, a few librarians had created online research guides using LibData software, but all these were lost when the library's server was upgraded in the spring of 2009 ... and, the sad thing is, nobody noticed.

A team of librarians chose LibGuides as the software for Augsburg's replacement guides, and decided to hire contractors to work with the library liaisons, rather than adding the burden of researching and writing the guides onto an already-stretched staff. (Like many other CLIC colleges, Augsburg is in the middle of a hiring freeze for salaried positions.) From August to November last year, three contractors (Meg Holle, Rebecca Ganzel Thompson, and Matthew Voss) created 16 guides, plus a template and a style sheet.

The contractors did multiple guides at once and worked as a team. Because they had experience in writing and publishing, they treated the whole project like a publishing project with a firm deadline. They interviewed the librarian liaisons extensively to make sure the research guides met their vision; they also reviewed class syllabi and course catalogs. The initial (brief) guidelines evolved into a many-page style sheet, complete with snippets of HTML code as they proved useful.

What made us happy about the Augsburg–contractor relationship?
- The idea of starting from scratch was overwhelming. Editing contractor-created guides is more doable
- Contractors offered fresh perspective on our collection (they found materials other librarians didn’t know we had)
- Contractors were not involved in office politics
- Contractors encountered no stonewalling; everyone at the library wanted to do right by the students
- Librarians find renewed faculty interest as they talk to faculty about new guides
- Librarians now watch new items more carefully
- The guides got done on time!

What challenges did we see?
- Contractors were not familiar with the curriculum or the collection
- Contractors needed to navigate between expectations of the boss/administration and librarians’ expectations
- Contractors had to show librarians the difference between teaching (or exposition) and creating a list of resources
- Librarians had no idea how long coding and editing took
- Differential pay (different compensation for what were perceived as more or less complicated guides) was guessed at, and sometimes didn’t match the work that went into each guide
- Maintaining the guides after their creation needs to be built into librarians’ schedules
- Librarians like the guides and show them to students, but do they feel ownership?