

Expanding the Role of the Library in Teaching and Learning: Distance Learning Initiatives

Carolyn A. Snyder, Dean, Library Affairs

Susan Logue, Assistant Instructional Support Services Librarian

Barbara G. Preece, Assistant Access Services Librarian

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

ABSTRACT

For years some libraries have provided library services to faculty and students involved in distance education, an environment in which students were not physically on the originating campus of the course. The authors will summarize the results of a survey about the extent and type of involvement in distance education by Association of Research Libraries' members. They will also describe examples of individual library programs and services for distance education. The authors will conclude by suggesting opportunities for expanding of the role of libraries in distance learning using the Regional Center for Distance Learning and Multimedia Development as a model.

For years some libraries have provided library services to faculty and students involved in distance education, an environment where students were not physically on the originating campus of the course. This has included courses delivered by correspondence, television, and instructors who traveled to other geographical locations, such as military bases. During the last several years, interactive audio and video technology has been refined and implemented, thus providing another method to deliver courses. This form of distance education, often labeled distance learning, involves the use of equipped and networked classrooms on- and off- campuses. What role can academic libraries play in this environment? Since academic libraries have a long history of collaborating with faculty and students, with telecommunications and computing units, and with other libraries, it is expected they will seek opportunities for enhanced collaboration and services in the distance learning arena.

Recently, the authors in collaboration with the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) surveyed ARL members to determine the extent and type of involvement these libraries played in distance learning.⁽¹⁾ Surveys were distributed to all ARL members. Of the 76 (64%) respondents, 46 (62%) reported that their institution is participating in distance learning programs. When questioned about the program's administration, only seven libraries reported that they administer the distance education program. In most instances, administration is the responsibility of academic departments or a continuing education program. Surprisingly, only three of the seven libraries that administer the program indicated that distance learning classrooms are located in the library. Four additional libraries reported that distance learning classrooms are located in the library. Classrooms are usually scheduled by the academic departments offering courses or the information technology/computing units. Proper functioning of the network is usually the responsibility of the technology/computing units; only two libraries reported that they maintain the network.

When the questions turned to library support for distance learning programs, we found that ARL libraries are providing a number of services. Half of the respondents (23) indicated that they provide assistance with the development of distance learning courses, especially in instructional design, multimedia development, and instructional evaluation. Other areas where libraries play a significant role include reserve services and bibliographic instruction and information literacy. What other services do libraries offer their remote users? All respondents indicated that their library catalog is accessible online to remote users, and over 74% circulate materials to those patrons. Seven libraries reported that the services offered to on- and off-site patrons differ. Four of these libraries do not circulate materials to distance learning patrons. Interlibrary loan services were provided by over 81% of the libraries with 29 libraries providing services without restrictions. Patrons access interlibrary loan services through several transmission methods. The most common methods are e-mail or World Wide Web requests. Some libraries provide for remote charging of items through their online catalogs or accept telephone charges. Only a few libraries, four, reported that patrons sent requests by fax or U.S. mail. Other library services available to distance learning students include reference service by telephone, e-mail, World Wide Web, and scheduled 'one-on-one' meetings. When we asked libraries if they work with the receiving institutions in the area of reserved readings, we found that five used electronic reserve systems that permitted access from any site; 18 established reserve units in off-site locations; while 22 libraries did not arrange reserve services for remote students. When the ARL libraries were asked what department coordinated library services with remote sites, 24 libraries named the Access Services Department. Only six libraries reported that the Extended Campus Librarian served as the coordinator, and in a few cases the distance education coordinator served in this capacity.

The final questions in the survey explored the issue of funding. Thirty percent of the libraries reported that they had received funding to develop distance learning programs. Funding for these projects came most often from special funding that included state grants, foundation grants, or internal reallocation. In a few instances the library received a budget adjustment from the institution. Six libraries that have a permanent budget for distance learning use it for funding technical support, coordination, and management.

The results of this survey indicate that the management of distance learning operations is not very common to ARL members. However, as one might expect, libraries generally offer the same type of library services to remote users and on-site students including online catalog access, reference and interlibrary loan services. Usually there is no difference in providing library services to patron on- or off-site. Instructional support is another area where libraries play a major role. More specifically, libraries play a prominent role in instructional design, course redesign, and World Wide Web development for those who use distance learning.

Academic libraries can play a vital role in distance learning. As Starratt and Hostetler note:

. . . many academic libraries are finding their roles expanding with the infusion of technology into teaching, learning, and research. . . . The library has a role as the key, universal campus support organization for research and for learning by providing many more services and facilities than shelves and a catalog.(2)

Many libraries have turned to the "ACRL Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services"(3) as a guide for establishing library programs to support distance learning endeavors. These guidelines (currently under revision,) serve as the cornerstone for many extended campus library programs.

We have also gathered information from other academic libraries that are involved in distance learning programs including Central Michigan University and the University of North Dakota. Central Michigan University's Library and College of Extended Learning developed a model partnership to serve the distance education students. The Library has served as the key unit to provide library services to the off-campus students. Jones and Moore wrote:

. . . it has become apparent that the current library needs of off-campus students and faculty foreshadow the developing library needs of all students and faculty, as the appearance of virtual learning environments makes the physical site of learning less and less important. In fact, increasingly, the student in a residence hall or at home ten miles away from campus represents a new type of library user, "the periodic distance learner," whose library needs—especially access to electronic information services are not very different from those of a student one hundred or one thousand miles from campus.(4)

Frank D'Andraia, University of North Dakota (UND), described the establishment of a Distance Education Librarian position:

UND and some other campuses [in North Dakota] provided funds for librarians to visit distance education classrooms, to meet with . . . faculty, to make live on-camera presentations, to attend distance education workshops and conferences, to provide document delivery services, and to develop guides and other aids.(5)

The academic support services of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's (SIUC) distance learning initiative are administered by Library Affairs and include instructional support, library services, and technical and network services. Beginning in 1993-94, the Library, in cooperation with other campus information partners and the Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market (SICCM) and the Southwestern Illinois Higher Education Consortium (SIHEC) joined to offer distance learning courses to individuals located throughout the southern one-third of Illinois. This partnership has created a strong and vital distance learning network for the rural southern Illinois area.

The ever-increasing role of the library in the distance learning initiative was recognized early on among the members of these groups. Librarians in the Southern Illinois Learning Resources Cooperative (SILRC), a group that includes members from both SICCM and SIHEC institutions, discussed access to library services for their constituencies enrolled in distance learning courses.

SILRC members agreed on the following when they discussed the distance learning initiative.

The institution offering the course is primarily responsible for library services. The same services will be offered to distance learners as to students on-campus at the home institution.

The libraries also agreed to:

Resolve issues relating to circulation of materials, reserve materials, and interlibrary loan. Develop written policies to encourage resource sharing and reciprocity. Assist the faculty in curriculum development. Make available information about library resources through handouts, brochures, and web pages. Appoint a librarian to serve as liaison to distance learning faculty.

SILRC's Ad Hoc Committee on Resource Sharing developed a document, "SILRC Interlibrary Loan/Reciprocal Borrowing Agreement," that addressed the service needs of off-campus students. Here, interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing privileges were identified as essential services. The agreement focused on the provision of convenient services for students in an academic program requiring them to enroll in classes at another institution. Since the SILRC institutions are members of two different consortia, it was decided that the library service provisions should be transparent to the students and faculty members. The agreement supports the interlibrary loan activities for constituencies of the SILRC member libraries and provides reciprocal borrowing privileges for individuals involved in distance education activities.

Developing and strengthening alliances among distance learning partners is another important part of SIUC's distance learning initiative. SIUC, SICCM, and SIHEC received a grant from the Illinois Board of Higher Education to enhance and expand the Regional Center for Distance Learning and Multimedia Development. This Center, administered by the Library, serves all the community colleges of southern Illinois, the campuses of Southern Illinois University, and the entire region. It serves as an avenue for exploring statewide cooperative efforts with other Illinois higher education consortia.

The mission of the Regional Center is to enhance teaching and learning by exploring innovative strategies, and sharing expertise throughout southern Illinois. Because of its location with the library, the Regional Center brings together the expertise of librarians, World Wide Web and multimedia developers, instructional designers, and graphic artists to offer a complete set of resources for support of teaching and learning in the distance learning environment. This relationship between the library and the Regional Center draws on the traditional role of the library as a central figure in the support for teaching and learning in the academic environment.

The Center is charged with enhancing and training and development opportunities for faculty and teachers within the region by complementing the services available in the member institutions. This sharing of the distributed expertise of the region's faculty and teachers should improve student success and retention by enhancing teaching and learning.

The Center, located in Morris Library, provides a wide range of seminars and distance learning orientation sessions for interested faculty. These orientation sessions acquaint faculty with the technology being used in the two consortiums. Orientation sessions are followed by in-depth sessions that assist faculty in adapting their courses to the technology and other aspects of the interactive video classrooms. Another focus of the Regional Center is to train faculty on the integration and use of multimedia, instructional technology, and the World Wide Web in distance learning classes. Faculty in the consortia and in area schools can receive Internet training, classes on web-based course home pages, production of interactive practice tests, and the development of web-based multimedia modules for the World Wide Web. The Regional Center serves as a clearing house for access to this expertise. The Center offers a series of seminars for faculty working in the distance learning environment. These seminars include: "ABC's and 123's of LCD Projection,"

"Geographical Information Systems and Desktop Mapping," "Resource Sharing Among SICCM/SIHEC Member Institutions," and "Information Literacy Overview," "PowerPoint," "Web Development," and "Multimedia Use."

Other resources offered include a list of copyright sites that are intended to be used as tools when developing materials for distance learning. The list includes such topics as general copyright information, distance education, and multimedia issues.

Conclusion

As libraries continue to make networked services available to patrons, they will be able to better serve their students at remote locations. The question of access and resources is a perennial one to libraries, but the advances that libraries have made in providing access to a diverse group of resources and to a widening constituency group speaks of the potential services that can be offered to remote users. Academic libraries have always been responsible for teaching, providing access to information resources, and consulting with faculty in course design. While our patrons were once expected to come to the library, we now ask how can we better reach the patron, with distance no longer a barrier. Distance learning provides an opportunity for the library to expand its service role on campus and within educational consortia.

NOTES

1. Carolyn A. Snyder, Susan Logue, and Barbara G. Preece. *Role of Libraries in Distance Education*. SPEC Kit. Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, OMS, 1996
2. Jay Starratt and Jerry C. Hostetler. "Distance Learning and Library Affairs: Technology Development and Management at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale." In: *Libraries and Other Academic Support Services for Distance Learning*. Carolyn A. Snyder and James W. Fox. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997 (In press)
3. "ACRL Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services." 1990. *College and Research Libraries News* 51 (April) 353-355.
4. Maryhelen Jones and Thomas J. Moore. "Providing Library Support for Extended Learning Programs: A Partnership Model." In: *Libraries and Other Academic Support Services for Distance Learning*. Carolyn A. Snyder and James W. Fox. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997 (In press)
5. Frank D'Andraia. "The Politics and Economics of Distance Education. In: *Libraries and Other Academic Support Services for Distance Learning*. Carolyn A. Snyder and James W. Fox. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997 (In press)