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Fair is Fair, or is it? Library Services to Distance Learners

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Abstract

Librarians from the Florida Distance Learning Reference and Referral Center, a statewide reference service, Central Michigan University, a public university, and Springfield College, a private college, will discuss the issues surrounding the provision of library services to distance learners. The panel will share the challenges and success of serving a distant clientele within their different institutional settings.

Serving the needs of distance students has been a growing concern of libraries for many years. The ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services state that "institutions of higher education must meet the needs of all their faculty, students, and academic support staff, wherever these individuals are located." (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2000) Libraries have approached this in a variety of ways depending on their resources. This paper explores the way three different types of institutions; a state-sponsored, referral center, a medium-sized public university and a small private college have approached these challenges.

Florida Distance Learning Reference & Referral Center

The Florida Distance Learning Reference & Referral Center (RRC) was created in the fall of 1997 as a part of the Florida Distance Learning Library Initiative (DLLI). DLLI has received funding from the state of Florida to provide library support to distance learners at Florida's ten state universities and 28 community colleges using a five-tiered approach. The five components of the Initiative are provision of electronic resources which have included approximately 50 FirstSearch databases which are available to distance learners from remote locations; a reciprocal borrowing that allows Community College System (CCS) and State University System (SUS) students access to CCS and SUS library collections; a courier which provides delivery of print materials to libraries across Florida; and centralized research assistance and library instruction.

The University of South Florida (USF) received the grant to operate the RRC and the services were located in the USF Tampa Campus Library. The RRC's services were designed to complement, but not replace, the services provided by the distance learner's home institution.

Distance learning courses in Florida are taught via a variety of methods, including face-to-face at off-campus locations, online via the Internet, live satellite broadcasts to remote sites, audio- and videotape, and traditional correspondence. Though the Florida Virtual Campus exists to assist in providing affordable access to quality distance learning opportunities and services in a cooperative atmosphere Florida has not yet created a comprehensive master listing of distance learning courses or faculty.

Service Strategies –How We Provide Reference, Instruction, Document Delivery, etc.

Florida's Reference & Referral Center was charged with providing reference and instruction. Initially, reference service was provided using a toll-free phone, email, fax, and a webform. In April of 2000, the RRC initiated an online chat service, *RRChat*, which was used for both reference and instruction. Librarians assisted distance learners with every aspect of the research question, from technical issues relating to off-site access of electronic resources to creating successful search strategies, to obtaining the materials located during the search process.

The RRC was not funded or staffed to provide document delivery. RRC staff directed students needing interlibrary loan or document delivery to either their home library or a local public or academic library that was able to fulfill these needs. ILL and document delivery was enhanced by DLLI's courier component. Florida negotiated a contract for a statewide courier system that moves print materials among over 250 participating libraries.

Staffing

The RRC was staffed by five full-time librarians and three part-time graduate assistants from the University of South Florida School of Library and Information Science (USF SLIS). Librarians were responsible for providing research assistance, instruction, creating pathfinders, maintaining the RRC website, and promotion of the RRC's services.

The RRC was open the same hours as its host, the USF Tampa Campus Library, Monday – Thursday from 7:30am until 1:00am, Friday from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., Saturday, 10:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., and Sunday from 12:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m. Distance learners could request assistance 24 hours a day, seven days per week by leaving either a voicemail message if the RRC was closed or submitting an email or webform. *RRChat* was open from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., Monday – Friday.

Funding

Funding for the reference and referral and instruction components of DLLI originally came as grants of \$100,000 and \$30,000 respectively from the State in 1997-98. In 1998-99 funding for DLLI was appropriated strictly for electronic resources with no mention of the Reference & Referral Center. Savings from vacated positions and a \$70,000 grant from the Florida Public Post-secondary Distance Learning Institute covered most expenses until a grant of \$245,800 was received from the Florida Distance Learning Network.

In 2001-2002, funding for the DLLI project was dispersed directly to the community colleges and they made the decision not to fund all aspects of the DLLI project. Because of limited funds available, it was determined that each institution would be responsible for serving their distance learners and that the RRC would operate until December 2001 on funds remaining from the 2000-2001 fiscal year. During the final months of operation, the RRC's hours were reduced monthly as staff found employment elsewhere.

Library Instruction

Instruction is critical to distance learners. Because many of them never actually have the opportunity to visit their home institution campus, much less the library, frequently they have no idea of the multitude of resources and services that are available to them. The RRC offered distance learning faculty a variety of instructional opportunities, including: face-to-face instruction wherever they met, online instruction in either *RRChat* or their courseware chat room, broadcast instruction, online pathfinders designed to meet the needs of individual course requirements, brochures, handbooks, and user-aids for individual resources.

Instruction led by an RRC librarian covered a variety of topics, depending on the research needs of the group. All workshops covered services available from the RRC but also included information about services available from the student's home institution.

Early on the RRC decided that the best way to publicize its services to students was to conduct face-to-face instruction, either at their off-campus class meeting or during an orientation. Because time is so valuable for many instructors, the RRC was willing to take whatever time was allowed, from 20 minutes to 2 hours. Any time the RRC conducted an instruction session students received a brochure describing how they could get library services from both the RRC and their home institution.

Advocacy

The unfortunate thing for many distance learners is that they are unaware of the services guaranteed them by ACRL DLS Guidelines. The Reference & Referral Center worked with a variety of groups to advocate for needed services for distance learners. These included the ability to obtain a library card without coming to campus. Access to many services hinge on having a library card number that validates a student. Other access issues included the need for remote access to databases, which for the state university libraries meant the need for a proxy server. Also essential to research needs were reciprocal borrowing arrangements and document delivery, preferably direct to the student's home.

Challenges

One of the RRC's biggest challenges was promotion of services to distance learners. Florida does not maintain a list of distance learning classes, faculty or students so the RRC was forced to create a list each semester. This list was then used to send promotional material to distance learning faculty. Because the RRC did not belong to one specific institution, it was also harder to 'sell' the service. Precariousness of funding was always an issue for the RRC and made it difficult to plan for future services.

Successes

Though the RRC was closed in December 2001, the project saw many successes that are evidenced by the national recognition the RRC received during its operation. Several projects undergone by the RRC, but most notably the use of RRChat for instruction, have served as models for libraries and students enrolled in library schools around the country.

Each year distance learners' use of the RRC for research assistance steadily increased, as did the number of faculty responding to mailings for instructional support for their courses. The response to the User Satisfaction Survey administered by the RRC was always very favorable and indicated the need for increased awareness of library services available to distance learners.

Central Michigan University

Overview

Central Michigan University (CMU) is a public university in Michigan that serves approximately 19,000 students on-campus and an additional 12,000 off-campus annually. CMU is a doctoral/research university located in Mt. Pleasant at the center of the lower peninsula of Michigan.

CMU has been offering degrees at a distance through the Extended Degree Programs of the College of Extended Learning (CEL) since 1971. Degree programs are available at over 60 centers and cohort locations throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In addition, online and print-based learning package courses and degrees are available nationally and internationally through the Distance and Distributed Learning (DDL) division of CEL.

Courses offered at program centers and in cohorts are taught in classrooms by campus or adjunct faculty. All of the classroom courses are offered in a compressed format. Many are taught on weekends over a six-week period. Others are taught on weeknights over six, eight or nine weeks. DDL courses are taught through the World Wide Web and through print-based learning packages.

Masters' degrees in administration and education make up the bulk of degree offerings in the classroom programs outside Michigan. Within the state, more than 50% of the students are enrolled in undergraduate completion programs, with most of the remainder enrolled in the master's in administration or education. DDL offers all of these programs as well as an online doctoral degree in audiology.

In 1976, CEL instituted a library service to work exclusively with students taking courses off-campus. The department, Off-Campus Library Services (OCLS), resides in the CMU Libraries but has a reporting and strong working relationship with CEL.

Service Strategies and Staffing

OCLS is a centralized library service designed to provide all library services to CMU students enrolled through the College of Extended Learning at CMU. It is a separate unit within the CMU Libraries and is responsible only for services to off-campus students.

Reference is provided by telephone, email, fax, and chat. Librarians alternate shifts on call for any requests that come in by telephone, email or fax during the assigned period. Chat reference is handled in separate reference shifts. Librarians assist students with research by discussing search strategy and suggesting appropriate databases and search terminology, as well as trouble-shooting technical problems that occur during students' use of the OCLS Web site. Librarians also answer ready reference questions and do database searches for students and faculty on request. Most questions are answered within 24 hours of the request.

The Document Delivery Office (DDO) processes requests for library materials for off-campus students. Students may request up to 50 items per week by toll-free phone, toll-free fax, email, or by using forms on the OCLS website. Most items are processed for sending within 24 hours.

OCLS also has a copyright staff that obtains permissions to use any materials required by faculty that are copyrighted. In addition, OCLS maintains a web site that was designed by the OCLS staff and is constantly improved to provide more materials and better access for the students.

Staffing

OCLS has a staff of seven librarians, six and one half FTE support staff, and 12-15 student assistants. Three librarians, five and one half of the support staff members and all of the student assistants are based in the CMU campus library. One librarian is located in CEL Detroit regional office, the Washington regional office, the Atlanta regional office and the Kansas City program center. In addition, half time reference assistants are located with the librarians in the Detroit and Atlanta offices.

In the fall of 2001, reference assistance was available on Mondays from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Tuesdays through Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The DDO was open Mondays through Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Saturdays from 9:00 a.m., to 6:00 p.m., and Sundays from noon to 9:00 p.m. The copyright service was available from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. All hours are in Eastern Time.

Historically, the primary means of contact with OCLS has been by telephone. In 1977, the first toll-free number was set up for students in Ohio. Over the years, one toll-free number was available for all student contact to the OCLS departments in the main library. Students contacted librarians in other offices through separate toll-free numbers or by calling collect. In January 2000, all calls began to be routed into one toll-free number that rings into the DDO. Reference calls are transferred to librarians on duty, regardless of the office in which they are working.

In 1997, OCLS launched its first Web site, www.lib.cmich.edu/ocls, which included forms for ordering library materials as well as an “ask a librarian” form for reference questions. In 2001, OCLS introduced a new Web site, ocls.cmich.edu, in which the “ask a librarian” link was moved to the home page. Both forms generate requests on a daily basis for assistance. All document delivery requests go into one departmental email address, which is monitored by a designated document delivery staff member. Reference requests go into a departmental email account, which is monitored by the librarian on reference duty. In addition, the email addresses to both departmental accounts are freely available to students and requests are frequently sent directly to them.

OCLS encourages the students to send document delivery requests in by fax. Fax cover sheets, which include spaces for all of the necessary contact information are given out in all packets that go to students. In addition, OCLS has a toll-free fax number for the students’ use. Since students are allowed to make up to 50 requests per week, fax is often the most efficient way to send and receive a large number of requests.

Funding

The College of Extended Learning funds OCLS. CEL is a self-supporting unit within Central Michigan University. CEL has been generous with the OCLS budget throughout the library service’s 25-year history. Money has been available for librarians to travel to each program center at least once a year and to every cohort group once in order to do library instruction. In addition, OCLS has generally had the funds necessary to upgrade equipment on a regular basis and to purchase laptop computers and projectors for all of the librarians to use for their instruction classes.

Since November 1999, OCLS has also received financial assistance from the Libraries’ budget. OCLS submits a large number of requests to the Inter-Library Loan (ILL) department daily. All fees are paid out of the ILL account.

Instruction

At CMU, students enrolled through CEL rarely live close to Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, so almost no instruction is given in the campus library. The majority of library instruction is done face to face in the off-campus classrooms. Students enrolled in the Master of Science in Administration (MSA) degree and the Master of Arts in Education (MAE) degree all take a required research class. Off-campus librarians travel to the classroom locations to teach a library instruction class that lasts from one to three hours, depending on the availability of computer labs. At the time of the research class instruction sessions, librarians also visit any other classes being offered at the CEL center at the same time to give a 20-minute library update. In addition, librarians conduct instruction classes during the first course of a graduate cohort in other disciplines and in many of the undergraduate classes with specific research assignments.

In some locations, librarians have conducted library instruction classes in the military libraries on bases where classes are held. In addition, some cohorts, who are affiliated with businesses that have in-house libraries, such as hospitals, have opened their libraries for instruction or tours.

In 2000, the librarian responsible for instruction to DDL students began to offer library instruction via chat to students in the research classes and in other classes with research assignments.

Advocacy

As electronic databases and journals became more accessible, OCLS librarians worked with colleagues in the main library to identify database providers that would ensure equal access to on- and off-campus students. Off-campus students were initially provided with passwords to gain access to the licensed databases. As new vendors were added, a remote authentication script was created that would verify a unique student PIN number to give students access to the databases. In the summer of 1999, a commercial proxy server was mounted on the OCLS Web site in an effort to make remote authentication

simpler. The opposite occurred because many major Internet access providers were not compatible with proxy servers. In 2001, OCLS in cooperation with the CMU Libraries agreed to test a new proxy server created by the commercial vendor.

Because OCLS was originally created to offer complete library services to off-campus students, it has not set up reciprocal borrowing arrangements or outsourced any of its services. However, the librarians have historically developed relationships with librarians on the military bases where CMU offers courses. This has provided venues for library instruction on many occasions and also afforded students access to collections of military publications that were not available through the CMU Libraries.

In late 1999, OCLS partnered with ILL in the main library to increase the fill rate for document delivery by sending requests for items not owned to ILL. By July of 2001, the fill rate for document delivery had increased by 14%.

Challenges

In recent years, one of the greatest challenges has been providing remote access through a proxy server that is difficult for many students to set up. The difficulties have caused the librarians to believe they were working at a help desk rather than as part of a reference service. These difficulties have also intimidated students who began to look elsewhere for library assistance.

A significant challenge over the years has been to reach the students to teach them about the library services. OCLS has been in a better position than many library services because it provides library instruction in one class required of most master's degree students. Ideally, students are expected to take the required course among their first three. However, many defer it to the end of their programs so have little exposure to OCLS, other than a welcome letter from the librarian when they register. Different ideas have been posed and tried over the years to reach students in a timelier manner. These include orientation sessions in the metropolitan areas, packets distributed to new students, as well as online presentations and handouts given to students by CEL staff members. They have all succeeded to some degree but have not allowed for a system wide change in alerting students about library services at the beginning of their programs.

Another perennial challenge has been the hours that reference assistance is available. All but one OCLS staff member works in the Eastern Time Zone. The West Regional Librarian is located in the Central Time Zone. CEL has program centers and cohorts operating from Boston to Honolulu and from Vancouver, Canada to Guadalajara, Mexico. This creates up to a six-hour time difference between OCLS and many of the students it serves.

Until the summer of 2000, OCLS reference hours were Monday to Friday from 8:00 to 5:00. Since then, there have been increases to 9:00 p.m. on Mondays and to 6:00 p.m. from Tuesday through Thursday. Further increases with current staffing levels are difficult because most of the OCLS librarians travel for instruction on the weekend and several also conduct instructional sessions on weeknights.

Communication has been a minor challenge because of the decentralized reference unit. In the early 1990's an electronic list was created for OCLS. It has always been one of the busiest lists at CMU. OCLS staff uses it to conduct business, discuss issues, make decisions, share information and questions about current work for students, and provide a social forum to some degree. In addition, the department has staff meetings by conference call every two weeks and an annual staff meeting in Mt. Pleasant for several days.

Successes

The major success of OCLS has been its ability to provide quality library services to students all over North America for the past 25 years. Many of the CEL program centers and cohorts have been located in remote parts of North America with little access to research collections. OCLS has responded to student needs by being flexible with services and using any means at the staff's disposal to ensure that students received the

research assistance and materials they needed in the fastest possible manner. One of the hallmarks of OCLS has been to listen to the complaints and suggestions of CEL students, faculty, and staff in order to continuously improve.

Springfield College

Overview

Springfield College is a small private college with the main campus located in Springfield, Massachusetts. Besides the main campus there are eight other campuses, known as the remote campuses, each of which has some administrative space, some classroom space and at least a few terminals linked into the campus network. All students at these campuses (plus some at the main campus) are part of the School of Human Services (SHS), an adult education program offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees in human services. With the exception of one campus that is experimenting with evening classes, all SHS classes are on the weekends and most classes run all day. Individual courses generally meet four times, one weekend day a month for four consecutive months. In between class sessions students may not be on campus at all and many may live quite far away. Of the College's approximately 5,000 students approximately 1,500 are in the School of Human Services at the remote campuses.

Service Strategies and Staffing

Babson Library, the College's library, is located at the main campus in Springfield, MA. Remote students can do their research using the network of databases that the Library maintains. All databases are accessible while on each campus through the Library's web pages and, wherever possible, they are also accessible from off-campus. Since the Library does not have a proxy server some databases, whose vendors restrict access by IP range, are only available on campus. Students needing help with their research can contact the Library by phone (800 number or regular number), by fax, by e-mail or via a special Reference question web form. The Library's Web pages also provide a few web tutorials and some answers to technical questions to help them get started. Once the students know what items they want, they can submit their requests via an Electronic Interlibrary Loan form - which they may use for items within our collection as well as for items from other libraries. They may also submit their requests via mail, fax, phone or e-mail. Items are sent to them at the address of their choice. These services provide effective ways to make information resources available to our students at the times and places of their choosing.

Springfield College integrates services throughout the Library. One librarian, the Reference and Distance Learning Librarian, has half her time committed to serving the distance students. Besides working on developing new services, she acts as an advocate for, and coordinator of services, for the students at the other campuses. However, the actual services may be provided by other Library staff. For example, all requests for items are sent to the Interlibrary Loan Assistant who fills them from the Library's collection or through Interlibrary Loan, as appropriate. She reports back any issues or problems to Reference and Distance Learning Librarian. Reference services to the remote students work in a similar way. Students contact the Library through phone numbers, e-mail accounts and web forms that go directly to the reference desk. Whichever reference librarian is available handles the question. This method of integrating the services throughout the Library serves to ease the overall workload and maximize the use of limited resources. It also keeps the needs of our remote students alive in the minds of our staff when evaluating, revising or planning services.

Babson Library has seven librarians, nine support staff and forty student assistants. The Library is open 108.5 hours a week, Monday – Thursday 7:30 a.m.-midnight, Friday 7:30 a.m. – 10:00 p.m., Saturday 9:00 a.m. –10:00 p.m. and Sunday 9:00 a.m. - midnight. All hours are Eastern Time. The reference desk is staffed all but 2.5 of these hours. The Interlibrary Loan department is staffed from 8-4 Monday to Friday but students can leave messages with their requests at any time, as they can also do with reference questions.

Funding

There is no separate budget or funding for services to remote students. Instead all resources come out of other Library funds. Database subscriptions, which serve our distance students, also serve students at the main campus and come out of the library technology budget line. Salaries for student employees who fill item requests fall under the student employee budget, and those students fill requests from both remote and local students. Like the provision of services, this method of spreading the financial demands throughout the Library eases the burden on any one part of the Library's budget. However it does make it harder to respond to any specific needs of distance students, which require separate or special funding.

Another concern is the lack of financial support from the college for services to distance students. In 1994 there were two campuses besides the main campus, both were in New England and they had approximately 400-450 students. In the fall of 2001 there were eight remote campuses, they were spread across the country and they had 1,500 students. In that same time the number of Librarians and support staff has remained the same (although the number of student employee hours had increased) and the budget has, in most years, been level funded or raised by the cost of living. Also, in that time, we (the Library) have increased our hours, reorganized many services and created new services such as a Library Web site, a Web-accessible database network, off-campus access to most databases, e-mail reference, web forms for reference and interlibrary loan, online tutorials and others. Much of this we did by reorganizing our resources and taking advantage of consortial offerings. While we have done well with the resources available, there have been problems, which have been difficult to address because of lack of resources.

Instruction – Our Major Challenge

One key area, and the area of service where we are weakest, is in providing library instruction to the remote students. At one point some of the limited travel/professional development budget was used to allow occasional traveling to another campus for library instruction, but as the numbers of campuses grew and they began to be farther away this was no longer a possibility. Since we could not get funds to allow for travel and instruction we have spent the intervening years searching for alternative instructional methods. The major methods we have explored are a video, courseware programs, instruction by phone and videoconferencing.

We are looking for two elements in our instruction. One is the actual instruction in using library resources. The other is some sort of face-to-face or live interaction to help build a connection to the Library. (This second point is very important with adult students who may be nervous about research and uncomfortable with computers.). Early on the Reference & Distance Learning Librarian looked at assorted computer conferencing software. Since financial issues were a concern she looked at free programs. One she considered was NetMeeting but realized that the reference staff could not depend on public servers while doing instruction and that the Library was unlikely to be able to get its own a server to support it.

She did create a video that could be used for library instruction, although it lacked the ability to interact with students. Unfortunately the College did not have the best equipment for capturing computer screen images. The video, which took almost a year to make because of the need to edit the video and re-shoot computer images several different ways, ended up with images of computer screens that were fuzzy, if somewhat readable. It was distributed to the campuses with some support from the School of Human Services administration and was accompanied by a letter from the Reference & Distance Learning Librarian suggesting ways to use it, offering to speak with classes via conference phone for follow up questions and requests for feedback. The offer of speaking with a class via phone was never taken up but we did receive feedback from one class. The major comment was the lack of readability of computer screens. The campuses have not found the video useful and it is now out of date because of changes in the Library's web pages and updated versions of the database interfaces shown.

The offer of speaking to a class via phone was not new to the video project. The Reference & Distance Learning Librarian had offered this before and still offers it to the remote faculty at least once a year in the letter they receive at the beginning of the academic year. The offer was finally taken up by one

adjunct faculty member during the summer semester of 2001. Several classes have now been taught by that method. Feedback from the professor indicated that the students, (who take the class in a computer lab), appreciate it very much. However, it is hard to do. The reference librarians instruct from the phone and computer terminals in their offices and cannot see the class to judge if they are following the discussion/demonstration. The faculty member must routinely provide feedback as to whether the student's terminals have loaded a page and it is difficult to hear any questions asked by the students. Still, it is the first effective instruction we have been able to routinely provide to the campuses in years.

Within the last year the college has acquired a courseware program called Manhattan. The Reference & Distance Learning Librarian looked into it as a possible way to provide instruction from the beginning of the pilot project, which brought it to campus. There are ways we could do a tutorial composed of screen shots (which are already being done more effectively through web pages) and ways to run asynchronous discussions or chats. However, these functions cannot be used simultaneously. So a class could chat, but not see images or they could see the images but then have to close them and open a different module to ask a question. As such, the software will not solve the problem of providing instruction, although we are still looking at it as a supplementary tool.

What we would like to move into is videoconferencing. A good system should allow us to see and hear the students, let them see and hear us, and also let us do a live demonstration of library resources. It would also allow us to either teach students at multiple campuses simultaneously or teach different classes at geographically separated campuses in a single day. Once again this is something the Library lacks the resources to do on its own. However, we have been advocating for it to other departments for several years. The School of Human Services in particular sees many ways it can be useful to them, and departments that need to interact with the School of Human Services remote campuses may also find it useful. Although not a Library project, the development of videoconferencing facilities are currently in progress and the Library expects to have some use of the facilities for instruction to the remote students when it is completed.

Advocacy and Successes

Other positive developments over the years include the better recognition of the existence and needs of the remote students by the college as a whole. The Library has played some part in this by advocating for the needs of the remote students and the remembrance of their existence when interacting with the members of other departments. We have also worked with members of the School of Human Services to try to find better ways of providing Library services to their students. One success, which sounds minor but had important implications, was encouraging them to provide student ID cards to all their students. Once the students had their ID cards they also had their full student ID number, necessary for off-campus access to some databases and for submitting some requests. Both the advocacy of the Library and of the School of Human Services contributed to the current move toward developing videoconferencing. SHS is one of the leaders in this, but the School recognizes how it would help the Library provide better services to its students. Other issues the Library is currently advocating for are the acquisition of some method of off-campus authentication so that students would have a simpler way of connecting to the Library's databases. It would also allow us to increase the number of databases available off-campus, would help us get meaningful statistics about who is using them, and could potentially allow us to revamp and expand our E-Reserve system. We are trying to tie it in to the College's current interest in Outcome Assessment. Having statistics about who is using what resources would greatly increase our ability to judge the effectiveness of our instruction and our network. The growing interest in Information Literacy is also giving us a platform to advocate for the regular inclusion of Library instruction in the curriculum of the distance students as the ability to provide it develops.

Conclusion

Libraries that provide service to distance learners face many of the same issues regardless of their organization and funding levels. A common challenge that distance learning library services has is to reach students who may never come to the library and may not understand how essential these services are.

Each library service finds ways to advocate for the off-campus students it serves and to provide the services recommended by the ACRL Guidelines. These differ according to the amount of funding and staff available, the type of support from the parent institution, and the regulations of accrediting bodies, states and parent institutions. But in the end, each library service, in its own way, provides the services it can to its distant learners.

Reference

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