

2002

Library Services for Off-Campus Business Professionals

Anne Marie Casey

Central Michigan University, caseya3@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/publication>



Part of the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

Scholarly Commons Citation

Casey, A. M. (2002). Library Services for Off-Campus Business Professionals. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship*, 7(2/3). https://doi.org/10.1300/J109v07n02_07

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Library Services for Off-Campus Business Professionals

Anne Marie Casey

Introduction

Central Michigan University started teaching off-campus courses in the early 1900's and has been offering entire degree programs off-camps since 1971. Beginning in 1976, library services for off-campus students have been provided by Off-Campus Library Services (OCLS). OCLS provides library services for all off-campus students regardless of degree program. However, over the years that OCLS has been in existence, the majority of students taking off-campus classes have been business professionals in the Master of Science in Administration degree program. The services described here are available to all off-campus students but because of the high numbers of students taking courses or working on degree programs in administration, most have been tailored to research in business. Most of the OCLS annual acquisitions budget is dedicated to purchasing business monographs and sustaining subscriptions to business periodicals and databases. The OCLS Web site places a strong emphasis on business topics and many of the handouts developed for instruction are also geared to administration classes.

Brief History of CEL and OCLS

Central Michigan University has been offering degrees to business professionals 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.

Program Centers offer one or more courses per term on an open enrollment basis. As soon as students are admitted to the program, they may start taking courses in the next term. Classes are offered year round so students are not required to wait until September or January to start their degree programs. Cohorts are groups of 25-30 students pursuing the same degree program, who take all of their courses together in a predetermined sequence.

Over 12,000 students are enrolled annually in the College of Extended Learning, which delivers over 2000 courses per year. The average age of the CEL student is 37.

Approximately 55% are graduate students and 45% are undergraduates. Of these, --- are registered in the MSA program or the undergraduate administration degree programs.

Most CEL students work full time while they are pursuing a degree through CMU that normally takes about two years to complete. Students in program centers and cohorts are generally not required to have personal access to computers although most have access at

work or at home. In courses where the use of a computer is required in the classroom, it is supplied by CMU.

Library services for students registered for courses through the College of Extended Learning are provided exclusively by OCLS. Established in 1976, OCLS is comprised of reference, instructional services and document delivery services. The operating budget for OCLS comes from the College of Extended Learning. OCLS has developed and maintains a Web site separate from the main library Web site, which focuses more on the needs of students taking classes at a distance. The OCLS staff consists of seven librarians, seven FTE support staff and up to 15 student assistants per semester. The director and two of the off-campus librarians are based in Park Library on the campus of Central Michigan University. One off-campus librarian is responsible for library instruction to students in Canada, and Mexico, the other is responsible for library instruction to students in DDL and in Michigan outside the metropolitan Detroit area. The librarian responsible for instruction in the Metro Detroit area is housed in the CMU regional office in suburban Detroit. The librarian who handles instruction for students in the northeastern U.S. is located in the CMU regional office in suburban Washington, DC. The librarian responsible for instruction to students in the western U.S. is located in Kansas City. The librarian who handles instruction for students in the southeastern U.S. is housed in the CMU regional office in Atlanta.

Six of the support staff are located at the main campus. Five work with document delivery and the sixth handles copyright clearance for faculty teaching off-campus

courses. Half time reference assistants are located in two of the field offices. All of the student assistants are employed in the Document Delivery Office or for the copyright service.

Master of Science in Administration Program and Undergraduate Administration Degrees

“The 36-semester-hour Master of Science in Administration degree program provides the knowledge and skills required for managers, administrators, and supervisors to function more effectively in all types of organizations, plus the specialized managerial expertise needed for a particular professional field.” (Central Michigan University 1999, 52) The MSA degree is offered in program centers and cohorts throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Most of the MSA core courses and the general administration concentration courses are available online.

All MSA students are required to take four core courses: MSA 600 – Administrative Research and Report Methods, MSA 640 – Quantitative Applications in Administrative Decision-Making, MSA 685 – Integrative Analysis of Administration, and either MSA 634 – Managerial Accounting Concepts or MSA 635 – Financial Management.

Additional classes are chosen from a list of concentration courses depending on the student’s concentration.

The ten MSA concentrations are general administration, health services administration, hospitality and tourism administration, human resources administration, information

resource administration, international administration, leadership, public administration, software engineering administration, and sport administration. All concentrations are not available at every program center. Cohorts normally offer only one concentration because they are formed in conjunction with a particular organization such as a hospital or police department. Additionally, graduate certificate programs consisting of 15-18 credit hours are available in all of the concentrations except for sport administration.

Central Michigan University also offers undergraduate degrees and courses targeted to business professionals in program centers in the state of Michigan and through the World Wide Web . The degrees that are currently available are the Bachelor of Applied Arts Degree with a Major in Administration and the Bachelor of Science Degree with a Major in Administration. The Major in Administration has four concentrations, guest services administration, industrial administration, organization administration, and service sector administration.

OCLS Services

Instruction

Librarians provide instruction formally for two of the classes required of all students in the MSA degree program, MSA 600 – Administrative Research and Report Methods and MSA 685 – Integrative Analysis of Administration. For the latter class, which is considered the capstone class and taken last in the sequence, packets are sent to the professors for distribution at the first class or mailed to the students before class begins. The packets normally consist of current handouts detailing OCLS services and

information on the OCLS Web site. In addition, a letter from the librarians is included, which contains contact information and reminds the students to contact OCLS if they need assistance with the literature review section of the final project. Wherever possible, librarians provide on-site library instruction sessions in the MSA 685 classes.

Samples of MSA 685 projects are available through OCLS. These are examples of high quality papers, chosen by faculty committees to serve as examples to the students. Part of the MSA 685 packet is a list of the current samples and instructions on how to obtain them.

The MSA 600 course has been targeted by OCLS for library instruction because it is the research class. Students are required to write a proposal for the final project in which they will explore solutions to workplace problems or write business plans. This is often the basis for the final MSA 685 project. They are also required to do a literature review. The library instruction classes are centered on teaching the students how to obtain materials for the literature review from among the resources available through OCLS or in other places. One of the required texts for this class is the *Off-Campus Library Services Guide*, a booklet that describes OCLS services as well as conducting research.

Librarians travel to most of the MSA 600 classes to deliver an on-site library instruction session. In the major metropolitan areas, the librarians may speak to classes meeting in their own buildings or drive to other classrooms located in the metropolitan area. When MSA 600 courses are taught in other areas, librarians will drive or fly to centers,

depending on the distance. In most cases an OCLS librarian delivers a one and one half to three hour library instruction session for the MSA 600 class. MSA 600 faculty members expect a librarian to present a library instruction session generally in the first or second class meeting. On the rare occasions where a librarian does not present in an MSA 600 class, the professors generally request packets and PowerPoint presentations to help teach the students about OCLS. (Generally the only time a librarian does not teach a library instruction session in MSA 600 is in a cohort where the library instruction session was presented in the first course.)

Library instruction classes vary in length of time depending on whether computers are available and on the amount of time that professors are able to give to the librarian. Regardless of the duration of the library instruction session, all librarians cover the same basic items: OCLS services, accessing databases and full text articles available from the OCLS Web site, and searching for references and articles in a database most appropriate to the concentration of the majority of students in the class. Depending on the length of time allotted and the availability of computers, librarians also may teach students how to do specific research projects required, may teach advanced search techniques in a particular database, such as *ABI/Inform*, or may conduct hands-on exercises.

The regional offices in Atlanta and Detroit have computer classrooms that the librarians can use for the MSA 600 instruction sessions. These are ideal because the students can actually get some hands-on experience and some one-on-one help from the librarians with their individual topics. In other areas, computer classrooms may be available from a

military education office or cohort sponsor and are borrowed as often as possible.

Otherwise, library instruction is done in the classroom. In some classrooms, where phone connections are available, the librarians do live demonstrations. Where live connections are not an option, the librarians do PowerPoint presentations, with screen captures of Web pages. Instruction classes are held occasionally in base libraries or libraries in cohort locations, such as a hospitals and librarians use the online and print resources in these libraries in their instruction.

Class schedules come out on a quarterly or semi-annual basis in most of the program areas, so the librarians normally have time to read the syllabus and discuss assignments with the professor so they can tailor the instruction to specific class assignments and to the concentration of the majority of the students. Most of the time, the *ABI/Inform* database is introduced to the students because they are all working on some type of administrative topic. Other databases are often demonstrated to classes with strong concentrations of health services administration students or software engineering administration students. Special attention is paid to specific class assignments so if the students are required to find ten scholarly articles on an administrative topic, the librarians teach the class how to search in *ABI/Inform* using the class descriptor code for experimental or theoretical treatments. If a class is assigned to find financial information on companies, the librarians include instruction on SIC Codes, common sources of company financial information and finding that information on the World Wide Web or through the OCLS resources.

Most program centers offer two to four courses per term. Whenever the librarians visit a program center to conduct a library instruction session for MSA 600, they also attempt to do mini sessions in each of the other classes being offered at the same time. These mini sessions generally last for about 30 minutes and are made up of a brief description of OCLS services plus information on databases specific to the particular course and assignments.

MSA 600 is taught in many of the open enrollment program centers once a year. If the program center requires air travel or a long drive for the regional librarian, he/she may visit that center only when the MSA 600 class is offered. The result is that some students may be halfway through the degree program before they meet a librarian in person. To address the challenge this presents, print information on OCLS, such as the *Off-Campus Library Services Guide*, welcome letters from the regional librarian, and bookmarks or post-it notes with the OCLS phone and fax numbers and Web site URL, is given to all students upon admission. In addition, OCLS is developing new forms of instruction such as chat sessions and interactive guides to services for new students who may not have a formal library instruction session until they are part way through the program or who need instruction on new services.

Online classes were first developed for the MSA core courses in the late 1990's. The first MSA 600 online class was offered in 2000. Since students who take the Web -based classes do not meet in person, OCLS provides instruction through chat sessions. Formal

library instruction chat sessions are held in online MSA 600 and MSA 685 classes and in other online classes at the invitation of the instructors.

Library instruction to undergraduate students in administration classes has been minimal until the late 1990's because traditionally undergraduate classes made up a small percentage of the overall classes taught through CEL and there is no required research class for all undergraduate students. By the fall of 2000, undergraduate classes made up approximately 45% of the classes taught in Michigan. The undergraduate degree programs do not have a research course similar to MSA 600. However, one course, MGT 312 – Introduction to Management, has been chosen as a course to target for library instruction because it is the first management class that most undergraduates take. In addition, the regional librarians in Michigan read course syllabi in search of research assignments in the undergraduate classes. For many with research assignments, librarians offer to do instruction sessions that cover the basics about OCLS and include a specific instruction component related to the research assignment. Also, because the two librarians responsible for instruction in Michigan are within driving distance of their centers, they are able to respond to occasional requests from faculty and from program administrators to offer instruction sessions in undergraduate classes in which many of the students are new to the program.

Reference

OCLS reference services have evolved considerably over the years due to ever-changing technologies. The reference philosophy has not changed. From the beginning OCLS

librarians have always attempted to assist CMU off-campus students with their research as effectively as possible.

In 1976, two librarians were hired to provide reference and instructional services exclusively to off-campus students. One was based in Park Library on campus and the other at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. In the early days of the service, requests came in by telephone and mail. Librarians did literature searches for students in print indexes or in online databases and mailed the results generally within 24 hours of the request. Alternately, they assisted students in conducting research in libraries in their own areas. This was accomplished by suggesting search strategies, controlled vocabulary, and indexes or databases available in particular local libraries. In the early days, OCLS librarians visited all major libraries in the vicinity of program centers annually and compiled lists of resources available in these libraries.

In 1996, a significant change in reference requests began to appear. In the early part of that year, the basic FirstSearch databases, including a subscription to *ABI/Inform*, was made available to off-campus students first by Telnet, and later that year through the CMU Libraries' Web site. Students were encouraged to do their own research in the databases, assisted by the OCLS librarians. Rather than calling to request mediated searches, students were asking for assistance with their own research through the new databases made available through the Web site.

OCLS received 7535 reference requests in FY 1999-2000. More than half were telephone requests. A very small percentage was walk-in customers. Most of the remainder came in through e-mail. The e-mail requests are divided into two categories. The first are free form requests that may come into the document delivery e-mail address, the reference e-mail address, the main libraries' Web site or individual librarians' e-mail addresses. The other group of requests comes into the [Ask an OCLS Librarian](#) link on the Web site. This link provides a form for students to fill out and enter a request. These are generally much more specific than the free form requests in the other category.

Until January 2000, the librarians in regional offices only assisted students who received instruction from that regional office. At the start of the 2000-year, all references calls began coming into a central toll-free number. From there they are transferred to the reference librarian on duty.

Currently reference requests fall primarily into three basic categories: technical assistance, literature searches, and research assistance. The first category is substantial because many students have trouble reconfiguring their browsers to use the proxy server that CMU has set up or run into trouble with firewalls and browsers that are not compatible with the proxy server.

The second category of reference requests is for literature searches. At the request of the student, OCLS librarians will research a topic in one of the business, health care administration or other databases such as *ABI/Inform*, *Wilson Business Abstracts*, or

HealthStar and e-mail, fax or mail a list of references on the topic within 24 hours.

When performing literature searches, librarians tend to send broad topic searches to give the students some choice on the information they get. OCLS librarians do not choose articles or books for the students.

The third category of reference is much closer to traditional academic library reference. Students, who are using the databases CMU provides through the Web site, call or e-mail for assistance with the search process. In these transactions, librarians work with the students to refine their topics, choose appropriate databases and controlled vocabulary, and set up search strategies. Ideally, if students can be online and on the telephone simultaneously, librarians are able to be online and do the searches with the students and can assist when problems come up in the search. If students are not online when they call, they are encouraged to call back if they run into problems with the search following the directions the librarian has given them. OCLS is investigating reference chat software, which will allow the librarian and student to communicate while working through a database search together regardless of whether the student has a second phone line.

Some reference questions come up over and over again and OCLS develops tools and collections to answer these questions quickly and assist students to find the information easily. Among the most common requests are those for information about developing a business plan and research on small business startups. A significant number of students develop a business plan for the MSA 685 project and contact OCLS in both MSA 600

and MSA 685 for research assistance. OCLS has developed a number of resources for these topics:

- Multiple copies of books on new business startups and developing a business plan have been purchased with OCLS funds for both the general library collection as well as an OCLS office collection.
- Small business and business plans bibliographies are available on the OCLS Web site and in print.
- One area on the OCLS Web site links to relevant Web sites with information on business plans and starting a new business.
- Sample business plans that can be copied and mailed to the students are housed in each of the reference offices.
- Data is gathered about local business collections in the public and other libraries in the vicinity of each of the program centers and cohorts for referrals.
- Referrals are made to associations for further information on a particular type of business.

Document Delivery

In March of 1977, a toll-free number was established for students in Ohio to contact OCLS to request copies of articles and book loans. In late 1977, toll-free access was extended to students in the 48 contiguous states and by 1979 to students in Hawaii. Today, students in Canada and Mexico also have toll-free access. In the first six months of the service, 545 requests were taken. At its highest point in FY 1993-94, OCLS

processed 110,046 requests. In the latter half of the 1990's requests began to drop off as more full text articles became available through the Web site.

Located in the main library on the Mt. Pleasant campus, Document Delivery is opened seven days a week to take requests for books and articles and other library materials from students. Students can submit requests through a toll-free phone number, toll-free fax number, a departmental e-mail address or through a request form on the Web site.

Students and faculty may request up to 20 items per week per course. The OCLS staff processes and sends out anything available in the CMU Libraries within 48 hours of the request. Most materials are sent out by mail or other postal delivery services to students' home or work addresses. In 2000, Document Delivery began to e-mail electronically available items to students.

Books are loaned to off-campus students for periods of 30 or 42 days depending on their geographic location. Off-campus students' library cards are maintained in the Document Delivery Office. Copies of articles, annual reports, and financial data copied from reference books are the students' to keep.

In the late 1990's, OCLS noticed a significant annual decline in the fill rate for article requests. This was attributed to the fact that students were able to obtain a significant number of articles from the online databases available to them through the OCLS Web site. In a successful attempt to fill more orders, Document Delivery began to send any requests for items not owned by the CMU Libraries to the Document Access Department

(Inter-Library Loan) provided the requestor had a minimum of three weeks in which to obtain the article. This has been a very successful venture and improved the fill rate by almost 12% in the first year.

OCLS Web site

OCLS provided access to the FirstSearch databases through the CMU Libraries' Web site beginning in 1996. In 1997, OCLS developed it's own Web site (www.lib.cmich.edu/ocls), geared to the needs of off-campus students and faculty. From it students can be validated through a proxy server so that they can have access to over 70 databases, including nine business databases. Other links on the OCLS Web site include the Libraries' online catalog, CENTRA II, and links to other Web sites, under categories such as business plans, starting new businesses, company information, human resources and training and health care administration. Bibliographies for most subjects taught through CEL are available as well as electronic request forms for reference and document delivery assistance. Formal instruction in classes concentrates on introducing students to the Web site as a powerful tool for research that they always have at their fingertips.

The OCLS Web site has been under constant revision since its inception. Since it truly functions as a virtual library to the thousands of CMU students who will never visit Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, the OCLS staff has been active in soliciting ideas for improvements from faculty and students and in making those improvements. In 2001, a completely revamped Web site was introduced with a new URL (ocls.cmich.edu). New information

was added to the site and links were reorganized and presented in a format that is much easier to navigate.

Partnerships

Unlike many libraries that provide services to distance students, CMU neither has reciprocal agreements with other libraries nor pays for services from other libraries. However, informal partnerships have evolved over the years with libraries in some areas.

Many of the military bases where CMU maintains program centers have strong base libraries that reach out to the higher education students among their populations. Many base librarians have worked closely with OCLS over the years to assist with library instruction. Either part or all of the library instruction is done in some base libraries. In these situations, students can learn about the OCLS resources, get some hands-on experience in the library and learn about the resources available to them from the base library. In turn, OCLS has donated subscriptions to *Business Periodicals Index* and other indexes to many of the base libraries, has invited base library staff to become guest users of OCLS services, and has assisted with collection development of graduate level business materials for some of the libraries. Among the benefits to CMU of the partnerships with military libraries is the accessibility to CMU students of military resources that OCLS would have difficulty supplying and the ability to teach library instruction classes in an actual library. Benefits to the military libraries include stronger business collections for graduate level students and the marketing of their services to graduate students on the installations.

For many years libraries in the metropolitan Detroit area maintained collections of MSA 685 samples for students in that region. Initially, the MSA 685 projects were only available in microfiche so students normally had to go to a library to read them. By having sets in local libraries, students did not have to wait to receive the fiche from Document Delivery.

Libraries in cohort locations have been very helpful. Many cohorts in the U.S. are in hospitals. Often the hospital library has participated in bibliographic instruction and worked with CMU staff to anticipate assignments that may bring students into their libraries. In Canada and Mexico, cohorts often meet on college or university campuses. The libraries on the campuses have allowed OCLS to do library instruction, loaned computer labs and set up reserve collections for CMU.

Ongoing Challenges and the Future

Since the beginning, OCLS has constantly faced a major challenge in promoting the service. Throughout the years that OCLS has been in existence, the most common complaint from students is that they do not know about the library services early enough in their degree programs. In 1979, a Library Student Questionnaire was mailed out to a random sample of off-campus students. Publicity and promotion of the service were listed by those who responded as the areas most in need of improvement (Doyle and Somers 1980, 6). The most common complaints received currently are from students who do not learn about OCLS services until they are nearly finished with their degree

programs. OCLS distributes print materials on its services to newly registered students though program administrators and works closely with instructors to get the message about OCLS across. These methods have not always been effective because many students do not seem to recognize the benefits of OCLS until they need to do research. If they take MSA 600 or MGT 312 in the early part of their programs, they learn to use OCLS services effectively.

In order to promote the service more effectively, OCLS embarked on a study of other forms of instruction in 2000. Some of the areas being explored are regular instruction chat sessions, point-of-use instruction on the Web site, and e-mail distribution lists for selected instruction topics.

Since 1976, OCLS has successfully delivered library services to business professionals taking administration classes all over North America in a timely fashion. The goal for the near future is to promote the service more effectively to reach all students early in their programs and to continue to educate students so they can retrieve the information they need effectively and easily as soon as they need it.

REFERENCES

Central Michigan University. 1999. *College of Extended Learning Bulletin 1999-2000*.

Mt. Pleasant, Mich., 1999.

Doyle, Richard and C. Norman Somers. 1980. "Central Michigan University's External Library Program". Institute for Personal and Career Development, Central Michigan University. Photocopy.