Chapter 13
Evolving Technology, Evolving Roles for Distance Education Librarians

Lisa Abbott
Appalachian State University, USA

Martha Kreszock
Appalachian State University, USA

Louise Ochoa
Columbia College, USA

Geraldine Purpur
Appalachian State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores technologically driven changes to distance education librarianship and their impact on the job responsibilities of librarians. It examines the necessary skills in the areas of technology, communication, networking, and roles that have emerged in distance education librarianship both globally and at Appalachian State University (ASU). These include: virtual reference librarian, Web librarian, course-integrated and/or instructional librarian, avatar librarian, and marketing librarian. Also discussed are collaboration and leadership opportunities for distance education librarians within the library and campus-wide, as a result of knowledge and expertise gained from providing library support to distance education students. This chapter will be relevant to administrators and practitioners as they make choices concerning library science curricula, hiring, and continuing education decisions.

INTRODUCTION

In the past 10 years, educational, instructional, and information technology tools have evolved rapidly and institutions of higher education have incorporated these new tools into the distance education environment. Within the library setting, distance education librarians have been early adopters of skill sets needed to integrate emerging technologies into library support for distance learners. This chapter explores the impact that these technological changes have had on distance education librarianship. Topics covered include new technologies, evolving roles, and opportunities for collaboration and leadership. We draw on our experiences at Appalachian State University (ASU) and those of others as reported in the distance education literature.

History of Distance Education

Distance education has existed for hundreds of years. An early example occurred between the late 12th - early 13th Centuries, when Genghis Kahn established a "national mobile learning system whereby information was carried by speedy horsemen (arrow riders) for face-to-face delivery" (Baggaley, 2008, p. 42). Correspondence instruction was established in 1840s Germany by Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt, who taught foreign languages in Berlin. In the 1880s, correspondence courses in the United States included those offered by the Boston-based Society to Encourage Studies at Home, the Chautauqua movement, and Thomas J. Foster's commercially successful course in mining and the prevention of mine accidents. Short courses and farmers' institutes developed in 1885 formed the foundation for the university extension at the University of Wisconsin (Simonson, Smaldina, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009). In 1892, the University of Chicago achieved recognition for creating the first college-level distance learning program (Casey, 2008).

The next generation of distance education delivery methods included radio in the early 1920s, and television in the 1930s at the University of Iowa. By the 1950s, college level courses were being offered via broadcast television. Two-way, live audio and video systems were enabled by fiber-optic communication in the 1980s and 1990s (Simonson et al., 2009). Casey (2008) states, "the computer was the missing piece of the educational puzzle that would facilitate the free flow of information between teacher and learner as well as introduce the previously absent interpersonal aspects of communication" (p. 47). In the last twenty years, the Internet has become the primary delivery vehicle for distance education. Allen and Seaman (2010) state:

the growth from 1.6 million students taking at least one online course in fall 2002 to the 5.6 million for fall 2009 translates into a compound annual growth rate of nineteen percent for this time period. For comparison, the overall higher education student body has grown at an annual rate of less than two percent during this same period – from 16.6 million in fall 2002 to 19.0 million for fall 2009. (p. 8)

The 2011 *Horizon Report* highlights the increasing functionality and availability of mobile devices, the seemingly unlimited array of electronically available information, and the fact that "people expect to be able to work, learn, and study whenever and wherever they want" as prominent trends impacting the future of higher education (Johnson, 2011, p. 3). Continuing technological advances and patron expectations offer distance education librarians opportunities to extend and enhance resources and services to the distance and online student population.

Related Content

Developing a Juvenile Literature Collection in an Academic Library

Todd Shipman, Greg Schmidtand Susan Bannon (2013). *Library Collection Development for Professional Programs: Trends and Best Practices (pp. 209-228).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/developing-juvenile-literature-collection-academic/67942

Database-Driven Web Pages Using Only JavaScript: Active Client Pages

Stephen Sottong (2005). *Content and Workflow Management for Library Websites: Case Studies (pp. 167-185).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/database-driven-web-pages-using/7111

Library Showcase: Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind - Interview with Margaret Robison

Lisa Blockand J. Walker (2014). *Information Technology and Collection Management for Library User Environments (pp. 285-290).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/library-showcase/102388

Web 2.0 Technology as a Teaching Tool

Lara Skelly, Jen Eidelmanand Peter Underwood (2013). *Library Automation and OPAC 2.0: Information Access and Services in the 2.0 Landscape (pp. 187-205).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/web-technology-teaching-tool/69271

Hooligans in the Archives: Easing Restrictions and Partnering with the Users

Laurie Gemmilland Jane Wildermuth (2012). *E-Reference Context and Discoverability in Libraries: Issues and Concepts (pp. 209-218).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/hooligans-archives-easing-restrictions-partnering/57925