

# Document Delivery

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## DOCUMENT DELIVERY

Document delivery is a service offered by academic libraries that allows distance education students to access or obtain the research materials required for their studies. These services find the document and send a copy of it to the student (Calvert, 2001). Document delivery services aim to provide the same level of service to on-campus students and to off-campus students. They provide access to library materials at the student's home institution as well as from other libraries. Document delivery services for distance students are generally part of a library's Interlibrary Loan Department but document delivery can be a separate department. Some libraries have a division or department dedicated to serving distance students and document delivery is handled there when they exist. In the United States, regional accreditation agencies consider document delivery services to be a vital part of a distance education program. For example, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' *Guidelines for Distance Education* emphasize that students should have access to the appropriate library resources for the field of study (2000).

## REQUESTING DOCUMENTS

A student identifies the desired document and submits a request to the library. Document types include: journal articles, books, book chapters, videos, and dissertations. A student can request items from other libraries as well as from the student's home library. However, not all libraries will send books from other libraries to distance students. The length of the interlibrary loan does not always allow for the delivery and return of the item before its due date. While requests can be submitted by e-mail, telephone, or fax, in most cases the student will complete an online request form. According to Ressel and Syring, "The emergence of the online request form has revolutionized document delivery" (2002, p. 130). Some databases allow users to place requests directly

from the database. Frequently, the request form will be located on the Interlibrary Loan Web page and will be the same form on-campus patrons use to request materials from other libraries. Some libraries have developed separate pages for distance education students and the request form will be located on these pages.

## DELIVERY METHODS

Libraries employ several methods to deliver documents. Books are checked out to the student and mailed. Most libraries do not charge the student shipping charges when they send the book. Students receive information on the due date and instructions on how to return the item along with a return address label that may be pre-paid. Some libraries require that the student pay the return postage fee. Articles can be e-mailed, sent as an e-mail attachment, mailed, or faxed to the student. The advent of electronic document delivery allows a student to quickly receive research materials from all over the world. Articles, chapters, reports and other documents may be scanned, converted to PDF, and posted to a website for retrieval by a user (Kibbee, 2002). In order to take full advantage of current technology in document delivery services, students need an e-mail address and Internet access.

## TRENDS

More libraries are creating a department for serving distance students. In addition to document delivery, these departments provide reference services and library instruction. They develop web sites for distance students and collaborate with faculty teaching distance courses (Slade, 2000). Libraries will also form a consortium to collaborate together in helping distance students. Another trend is higher user expectations for online full-text access to documents and faster delivery of requested documents. Not everything published is available online now nor will it be in the future, but

the increase in full-text access through indexes and databases creates an expectation with users that everything can be found online (Ressel & Syring, 2002). Enhanced library catalogs will display a book's table of contents so that users can request particular pages be sent to them rather than the entire book (Jackson, 2004). Finally, new interlibrary loan management systems will give users the capability of checking the status of their requests (Ressel & Syring, 2002).

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*This work was previously published in Encyclopedia of Distance Learning First Edition, edited by C. Howard; J. Boettcher; L. Justice; K. Schenk; P. Rogers; G. Berg, pp. 681-682, copyright 2005 by Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global).*

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