Chapter 4.3
Library Services for Distance Education Students in Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary distance education has its roots in early forms of postal correspondence study but has evolved to sophisticated, technologically grounded forms of education. It has progressed from simplistic forms of written, correspondence study, known as the first wave of distance education (1870-1970), to early forms of television, satellite, and compressed video delivery and open education, known as the second wave (1970-1992), to its present stage of computer-based delivery, mainly over the Internet and its multimedia component, the World Wide Web (WWW). This form constitutes the third wave or phase.

While the means by which institutions of higher learning deliver education remotely will continue to change, there is at least one constant—distance students will need support from their institutions and, in particular, access to library resources and services to successfully complete their educational endeavors. Libraries' roles are indeed changing in light of Web-based distance learning, as well as such developments as full-text databases, e-books, and on-demand services. For years, libraries have struggled with the tension between "just-in-time" versus "just-in-case" collection development, and the need to now serve remote users *and* on-site students exacerbates this tension. Yet, serving remote students is not novel—the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) issued its first guidelines for serving "extension students" in 1963. The ACRL Guidelines are now in their fourth revision (ACRL, 2000).

What must a library do for its distance students? It is useful to cite the ACRL's definition of "distance learning library services":

Distance learning library services refers to those library services in support of college, university, or other post-secondary courses and programs of-

fered away from a main campus, or in the absence of a traditional campus, and regardless of where credit is given. These courses may be taught in traditional or nontraditional formats or media, may or may not require physical facilities, and may or may not involve live interaction of teachers and students. The phrase is inclusive of courses in all post-secondary programs designated as: extension, extended, off-campus, extended campus, distance, distributed, open, flexible,franchising, virtual, synchronous, or asynchronous.

Given the potential range of responsibilities generated out of this definition, newfound roles for the library emerge. First, a change in perspective enables serving distance students appropriately: The library is no longer a passive entity awaiting patrons to walk through its doors, but is now a proactive entity that reaches out through a variety of methods and services to its users.

Secondly, the library must reposition itself as a central entity and key player on university and college campuses. As colleges and universities forge ahead with new online programs—with the National Center for Educational Statistics reporting that 85% of higher education institutions engage in some form of distance education (NCES, 2001)—they must be cognizant of the importance of the library in serving these students. The library should be central as a planning board as new programs are launched; any institution that does not fully involve the library in planning for distance programs is doomed to fail. Specifically, the library's role in planning entails (Buchanan, 2001):

- Employing a full-time DE librarian (or realigning duties so there is a designee for DE students);
- Working closely with programs offering and planning to offer DE to determine resource needs;

- Working closely with IT or Network Operations Personnel to monitor technology needs and resources;
- Developing a virtual student advisory board to enable communication with the students it must serve remotely;
- Holding virtual focus groups to hear from students on library services;
- Participating in regular meetings or contacts with faculty/program representatives to ensure faculty and programmatic needs are being met; and
- Overseeing accessibility measures so Web pages are accessible for screen readers and other accessibility devices.

Thirdly, new services should emerge out of the unique needs of distance learning students.

EMERGING LIBRARY SERVICES

Libraries must serve distance students on a number of levels: access, instruction, and materials are three critical areas involved in serving remote students. Jones (2003) has suggested that services off-campus must always be equivalent to those on-campus. That doesn't necessarily mean *exactly* the same, but it does mean that distance learning students should have access, somehow, to library/learning resources and services, designed to support the specific programs offered. These services/resources should meet the same standard of academic quality as the same courses offered in traditional settings.

In the realm of access, libraries must provide easy proxy or other remote access to databases, indexes, e-books, and other tools. Regardless of their location, students should have the same means of access to facilitate their studies. Libraries will need clear, concise, and simplistic instructions to set up and use proxy servers, if

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