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A Survey of Distance-Administrators in ARL Libraries: An Overview of Library Resources and Services

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A Survey
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SUMMARY. The authors conducted a survey of distance librarian-administrators at Association of Research Libraries member libraries who plan for and manage distance learning library services. Survey questions included: What resources and services do ARL libraries currently offer to distance learners? What changes are being planned for in the immediate future? With libraries experiencing flattened budgets, what will be the impact on distance learners? Findings from the survey will inform librarian-administrators and library deans/directors of the current state of, and emerging trends in, distance learning library services.

KEYWORDS. Survey, library resources, library services, distance education

The literature is replete with articles and chapters describing the delivery of library services and resources to distance learners. A significant number of these are case studies that document how the library developed a distance learning library services program in accordance with the ACRL *Guidelines for*

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Distance Learning Library Services (rev. 2000). There is a need for empirical research on the provision of library resources and services to distance learners. Library deans/directors and distance librarian-administrators are often interested in seeing the range of distance learning library service offered by other institutions. The authors' study provides an overview of current practice and emerging trends in distance learning programs among a select group of academic libraries.

During the 1990s, academic libraries rapidly expanded the provision of remote access to electronic resources and services. Distance learners greatly benefited from this growth. Now, the fiscal situation has changed. The current economic picture presents challenges for academic libraries that are facing flattened or reduced budgets. Albanese (2001) reported how budget reversals at the state level affected university libraries. The fiscal outlook worsened during 2002 as states addressed revenue shortfalls, and university endowments declined (Albanese, 2002). An article in the August 8, 2003 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* lamented the trend toward small increases in state appropriation for higher education, with no relief in sight for 2003/04 (Potter, 2003). While the state-aided budget improved slightly for some regions, other states experienced budget gaps for fiscal year 2004 (Hebel, 2003). The ACRL Focus on the Future Task Force gathered input from academic librarians on the major issues that shape library service. Higher education funding and support of new users (including distance users) are two of the top issues faced by academic libraries today (Hisle, 2002).

The authors conducted a survey of distance librarian-administrators who plan for and manage distance learning library services. The population studied is the Association of Research Libraries, an organization comprising over 120 large research libraries in North America. Several questions were posed. What resources and services do ARL libraries currently offer to distance learners? What changes are being planned for in the immediate future? What are the anticipated impacts of possible budget cuts on distance learners? Survey questions included those related to specific library services and resources, staffing, and budget. The authors believe that findings from the survey will inform librarian-administrators of current practice and emerging trends.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Numerous articles in the literature describe library services and resources delivered to distance learners. The discussion of budgetary or financial support for distance learning library services has often been quoted from the ACRL *Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services* (rev. 2000) at

http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/distlrng.html. Budgetary support has frequently been covered as part of the planning process and start-up costs, or as part of a broader discussion of administrative function and oversight. Case studies typically discuss costs associated with delivery (phone, mail, the Internet). Looking ahead to the Millennium, Lebowitz (1997) forecast the impact of increasingly restrictive budgets on institutions. She asserted that how a library handles distance learning library services would be both a financial and philosophical decision.

An Association of Research Libraries SPEC Kit documented distance learning activity among ARL libraries (Snyder, Logue, & Preece, 1996). The 1996 survey primarily covered program administration, network management, and technical support. Of the 74 respondents, 46 reported that their institution was participating in distance education programs.

The Lebowitz article and 1996 ARL survey provided background for the authors' research. For the purpose of the 2003 survey, the authors defined distance education as the delivery of curriculum where the student and instructor are geographically separated, with the student receiving the course away from campus. The survey was intended to exclude the on-campus or residential user who is remotely accessing the library.

METHODOLOGY

The authors developed the survey drawing upon their previous research on ARL libraries' distance education Web sites, and adapting questions asked in the ARL survey in 1996. The survey was submitted to the university's Institutional Review Board for required approval. Data for the study were collected by a self-administered survey distributed in fall 2003. Surveys were sent to 112 academic members of the Association of Research Libraries. This number constitutes all ARL academic institutions whose primary language is English. The initial mailing included a cover letter addressed to the library dean/director, the survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Approximately three weeks after the initial package was sent, a second packet was sent to non-respondents. This packet included a cover letter, survey, and self-addressed envelope. Seventy-six surveys were returned for a 68% return rate.

Initial questions on the survey asked whether the university offered for-credit distance curriculum and, if so, whether the library offered distance learning library services. The researchers asked questions related to access and delivery options, models of staffing, and collaboration of librarians with distance teaching faculty. Other questions asked the respondent to predict whether budgets that support library services and resources will increase, decrease, or have no change in the next two years.

The survey consisted of thirteen questions. The majority of survey questions were partially close-ended. Suggested answer choices were provided for these questions, although respondents had the option of adding their own comments. Three questions had multiple parts, and three questions were completely open-ended. Several questions were completely close-ended and called for concrete answers, such as "Does the library have a Web page dedicated to distance learners?"

A spreadsheet was developed using an Excel program. Data was manually compiled using raw numbers and percentages. Statistics were tabulated using simple percentages.

RESULTS

Of the 112 surveys sent, 76 responses were received, for a 68% return rate. Three of the 76 libraries declined to participate for various reasons, leaving 73 responses as the basis of analysis. Although the packet was addressed to library deans/directors, it was expected that the surveys would be given to distance learning librarians and/or to appropriate library personnel to complete.

Q1. Does the university offer for-credit distance curriculum?

Classes and degree programs for undergraduates?	Yes = 46/73 (63%)
Classes and degree programs for graduates?	Yes = 50/73 (68%)
For-credit distance certificate programs?	Yes = 34/73 (47%)
	No = 17/73 (23%)

29 universities offer all 3: distance classes at the undergraduate and graduate levels and distance certificate programs

14 universities offer distance undergraduate and graduate classes but no distance certificate programs

3 universities offer only for-credit distance classes at the undergraduate level (no graduate level distance classes or distance certificate programs)

5 universities offer only for-credit distance classes at the graduate level (no undergraduate level distance classes or distance certificate programs)

2 universities offer graduate level distance classes and distance certificates (no undergraduate level distance classes)

3 universities offer only for-credit distance certificate classes (no undergraduate level or graduate level distance classes)

Q2. Does the library offer distance learning library services?

Library services to distance undergraduate students

   Yes   45/73 (62%) of total respondents
               45/56 (80%) that offered distance classes/programs

Library services to distance graduate students

   Yes   49/73 (67%) of total respondents
               49/56 (88%) that offered distance classes/programs

No distance library services

            5/73 (7%) of total respondents
            5/56 (9%) that offered distance classes/programs

5 libraries do not offer distance learning library services (7% of total respondents)

51 of the 73 libraries (69% of respondents) do offer distance learning library services. This number–51–forms the basis of analysis for the remainder of the study.

Q3. Does the library have a Web page dedicated to distance learners?

   Yes   36/51 (71%)

In a 2002 study, the authors found that 48 of the academic ARL libraries had links or Web pages for distance learning library users (Adams & Cassner, 2002). This was determined by checking Web sites of the ARL academic member libraries in fall 2001.

Q4. Of the following <u>library resources</u> for distance learners, indicate whether you expect the budget that supports these resources will increase, decrease, or have no change in the next two years.

Mark NA if not applicable.

Online catalog
    Increase 13   Decrease 1   No Change 31   NA 4   No Response 2

Online indexes and databases
   Increase 29   Decrease 2   No Change 16   NA 2   No Response 2

Cross-database searching
   Increase 28   Decrease 0   No Change 15   NA 6   No Response 2

Internet reference materials
   Increase 26   Decrease 2   No Change 18   NA 3   No Response 2

E-books
   Increase 22   Decrease 2   No Change 21   NA 3   No Response 2

Electronic full text journals
   Increase 37   Decrease 1   No Change 8   NA 2   No Response 3

Electronic journal locator
   Increase 19   Decrease 1   No Change 24   NA 5   No Response 2

Electronic reserves
   Increase 25   Decrease 2   No Change 19   NA 4   No Response 1

   One respondent reported that overall funding will not increase, and likely would decrease, although the proportional allocations will shift. Other libraries indicated that their distance learning budget is not separated out from other expenditures.

Q5. Of the following <u>**library services**</u> **for distance learners, indicate whether you expect the budget that supports these services will increase, decrease, or have no change in the next two years.**

Mark NA if not applicable.

Access to Materials

   Delivery of books from the library's collections
   Increase 15   Decrease 2   No Change 26   NA 7   No Response 1

   Delivery of Photocopies from the library's collections
   Increase 16   Decrease 6   No Change 22   NA 6   No Response 1

   Consortial (system-wide or state-wide) borrowing of books
   Increase 19   Decrease 1   No Change 23   NA 7   No Response 1

Consortial (system-wide or state-wide) borrowing of articles
Increase 19   Decrease 1   No Change 24   NA 6   No Response 1

Interlibrary loan (borrowing) of articles
Increase 17   Decrease 2   No Change 26   NA 5   No Response 1

Interlibrary loan (borrowing) of books
Increase 16   Decrease 2   No Change 27   NA 5   No Response 1

Reference Assistance

Chat-virtual
Increase 34   Decrease 0   No Change 11   NA 5   No Response 1

Consultation with librarian
Increase 16   Decrease 2   No Change 27   NA 4   No Response 2

E-mail
Increase 19   Decrease 1   No Change 26   NA 4   No Response 1

Phone
Increase 10   Decrease 4   No Change 28   NA 3   No Response 1

Toll free phone number to reference desk
Increase 10   Decrease 1   No Change 17   NA 22   No Response 1

Videoconferencing
Increase 9   Decrease 0   No Change 17   NA 23   No Response 2

Library Instruction

Class Web pages
Increase 24   Decrease 0   No Change 18   NA 8   No Response 1

Face-to-face
Increase 11   Decrease 7   No Change 27   NA 5   No Response 1

Live broadcast
Increase 5   Decrease 1   No Change 22   NA 22   No Response 1

Online tutorials
Increase 24   Decrease 0   No Change 22   NA 4   No Response 1

Print handouts
Increase 3   Decrease 18   No Change 26   NA 3   No Response 1

Videotape
Increase 2   Decrease 5   No Change 20   NA 23   No Response 1

Web-based course management software: (e.g., Blackboard, WebCT)
Increase 27   Decrease 0   No Change 11   NA 12   No Response 1

One respondent expected instruction via chat to increase. Another forecast more instructional activity without corresponding increases in funding. One respondent noted the shift from print to PDF format. One librarian said that if any increases occur, they would likely be due to reallocation of existing funds.

Q6. Which of the following access and delivery options are available for distance learners?

Automated request form via database, e.g., FirstSearch–27
Automated request from opac–30
Automated request from union/shared opac–16
Online request forms for delivery of materials from home institution–43
Online request forms for delivery of materials from system-wide or consortial institutions–26
Courier–17
Desktop delivery–42
Expedited delivery, e.g., FedEx, UPS–29

While 42 respondents reported the option of desktop delivery, one individual anticipated the arrival of desktop delivery in spring.

Q7. What model of staffing does the library use?

Distance librarian-administrator and staff dedicated to serve distance learners–12
Librarian and staff serve both on-campus (residential) and distance students–34

Respondents were given the option of "other." One respondent said the digital library services department serves all remote users. Two characterized their staffing pattern as hybrid, with a distance librarian position, and public services/reference librarians providing service to distance learners.

Q8. Does the library plan to increase or decrease the number of staff allocated to serving distance learners, in the next 12 months?

Increase–3
Decrease–0
No change planned–47

The results suggest a modest increase in the number of staff allocated to serving distance learners. No respondents mentioned the impact of prospective budget constraints.

Q9. Does the library have a separate permanent budget for distance learners?

Yes–8
No–43

This finding is quite similar to the 1996 survey, which reported that 6 respondents said the library had a permanent budget for distance education, and 38 said there was not a separate budget (Snyder, Logue, & Preece, 1996). None of the open-ended responses revealed this to be a significant issue.

Q10. Please describe efforts the library makes to serve new distance students.

Forty-two respondents provided a range of comments. Twelve specifically mentioned orientation sessions. Several mentioned distance learning (library) Web pages. Print continues to be a mode of communication to reach new distance students, whether as a brochure or handout summarizing services. Another respondent reported working with the registrar to find ways to inform new distance students of library services.

One respondent stated that the "key is working with faculty in targeted areas." At another library, individual subject specialists develop strong ties with distance education programs in their areas, and in several cases, the librarian has created customized information literacy components for entry-level classes.

Another respondent characterized the population as "fluid–going between on and off campus–that it is difficult to identify who are 'new' distance students." One librarian noted, "we have not targeted new students specifically," while another indicated serving distance students through existing library services, such as interlibrary loan.

Q11. Does the distance librarian-administrator and/or liaison librarians work collaboratively with distance teaching faculty to incorporate library resources into course management software used for distance courses? (ex., Blackboard and WebCT)

Yes, distance librarian-administrator collaborates with teaching faculty–20
Yes, liaison librarian collaborates–21
No collaboration–8

This is an area where activity is starting–"collaboration is in the planning stages" and "this is a new initiative, and early results are encouraging." One respondent has created Web-based bibliographies and resource guides that are linked from course Web sites, and also that many instructors link to the library's electronic reserves from the course website. Another respondent indicated that library pages are a routine part of the request process for their course management software course space. Another library has created a generic library tutorial for use with the university's distance education software.

For some institutions, this is an area that requires future development. Some work on an "as requested" basis when invited by faculty.

Q12. What do you see as the major trends in library services to distance learners in the next several years?

Half a dozen respondents forecast further integration of library resources and services into online course delivery software. One asserted the importance of maintaining librarian involvement with course management systems.

Several respondents predicted the creation of additional online tutorials to assist distance learners in understanding and navigating electronic resources. One commented there would be more interactive, multimedia tutorials. Another individual predicted the development of tools that provide electronic access to a wide range of library resources and services, including information literacy. An individual forecast additional marketing of library services to distance learners.

Moderate growth in the use of chat services that offer application sharing was expected. Another predicted increased reliance on Internet chat for reference and troubleshooting. Several expected an increase in desktop delivery of articles to distance learners.

Respondents forecast more collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty, instructional designers, and other units on campus. One said there would be greater collaboration with local libraries and librarians, with a possible fee structure to support that.

One suggested there would be less demand for document delivery since more full text would be available. Others expected an increase in document delivery. Only one respondent predicted there would be more service delivery via library consortia. An individual noted a trend toward improved federated searching, which will benefit distance learners. One observed that in the future, "we will still be delivering documents–can't get away from it." Another expected to see fast document delivery and information retrieval with minimum effort on the part of the user.

A respondent forecast more computer savvy students among the distance population. This would be a shift from the earlier model of non-traditional distance students.

A significant number of respondents indicated distance learning library service would be blended into library services for all users. "Everyone can be a distance learner–and many are. Distance learning will become e-learning as distance is irrelevant" and "Distance education becomes indistinguishable from everyday service " summed up the sentiment.

CONCLUSION

Respondents' answers to questions 4 and 5, about library resources and services, reflect the ARL libraries' utilization of new technological developments. Library budgets now support cross-database searching, chat reference, class Web pages, online tutorials, and course management software, for example. Library budgets will support new technologies that have been adopted, while older technologies such as delivery of photocopies and print handouts are being phased out. Since many respondents indicated they did not expect to see any change in budgetary support for library services and resources, it can be concluded that libraries are addressing the challenge of flattened or minimally-increased budgets.

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