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# Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship



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## Tallying the Chad Marks in the Ballot Box: A Survey of Distance Learning Library Services in Florida's State Universities

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### Abstract

As distance education continues to grow in Florida, libraries are developing the resources and services to meet the needs of faculty and students. This article identifies what distance learning library services the Florida's State University System (SUS) Libraries are providing. It concludes with recommendations for additional and improved services and identifies areas for future research in the state of Florida.

### Introduction

Distance education continues to grow. Nearly 3.2 million students enrolled in at least one online course in 2005.<sup>1</sup> This is 850,000 students more than in 2004 for a growth rate of 35 percent.<sup>2</sup> As the number of students taking online courses increases, the characteristics between online students and traditional students becomes blurred. No longer is distance education exclusively for older individuals who are employed with families living in remote areas. More and more students living on campus are taking online courses.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the perception of the quality of online learning has improved. In 2006, 62 percent of academic leaders rated the learning outcomes in online education as equal or superior to face-to-face classes (compared to 57 percent in 2003).<sup>4</sup> Faculty is becoming more accepting of distance education as an equal and alternative means of delivering education.<sup>5</sup> Online learning is becoming central to the long-term strategy of many institutions.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, President Bush signed the Higher Education Reconciliation Act in February 2006.<sup>7</sup> The bulk of this act is related to student loans and higher education. However,

it also contained a provision repealing the “50 percent rule.” This provision had previously limited the number of online courses that nonprofit universities could offer. The impact this rule has on the growth of distance education remains to be seen.

This article addresses how Florida’s libraries are meeting the needs of distance education students and faculty.

## **Distance Education and Library Services**

As distance education continues to grow, library resources and services must meet the needs of faculty and students. As a result of this need, the Distance Learning Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries has established Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services.<sup>8</sup> The guidelines address eight areas: management, finances, personnel, facilities, resources, services, documentation, and library education. This study touches on all areas except library education.

## **Florida’s State University System**

The Florida constitution directs the state government to provide institutions of higher education. According to the constitution, education is “a fundamental value of the people of the state of Florida.”<sup>9</sup> As a means to this end, Florida’s State University System (SUS) was established. The purpose of Florida’s SUS is to:

- Enable all students to participate in the search for knowledge and individual development
- Stress undergraduate education
- Offer selected professional, graduate, and research programs based on state and national needs
- Foster diversity of educational opportunity
- Promote service to the public
- Make effective and efficient use of human and physical resources
- Function cooperatively with other educational institutions and systems; and
- Promote internal coordination and the wisest possible use of resources.<sup>10</sup>

According to the US Census, the population of Florida in 2005 was 17,789,864.<sup>11</sup> This is 1,807,546 more than in 2000, an increase of 11 percent. As the state’s population continues to explode, the number of students seeking higher education increases creating potential access problems. The number of students admitted into Florida’s ten state universities increased 32 percent from 1991 to 2001.<sup>12</sup> In the fall of 2005, the eleven institutions (in 2001, New College became the eleventh institution in the SUS) had 287,375 students enrolled.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the ongoing growth, the 2001 Justification Review of the State University System suggested two ways to ensure Floridians have access to higher education.<sup>14</sup> One suggestion was to alleviate access issues by reducing excess credit hours students take. The other suggestion was to make more efficient and effective use of new instructional technology through distance learning. The report argues that distance learning can increase geographical access to universities by not requiring students to live near a college campus. It describes some of the advantages of distance learning, including: the reduced need for physical classroom space, ability of students unable to travel to a campus to gain a college degree, opportunity for students to take a broader range of courses than those offered at their own university, and greater flexibility in scheduling.<sup>15</sup>

Distance education is taking off in Florida. Universities are developing fully online degrees; the state is developing the infrastructure, and the number of students enrolling in distance education is increasing. From 1998-1999 to 1999-2000 the number of students who took a distance education course increased 22 percent.<sup>16</sup> As distance education has increased in momentum, the SUS Libraries have developed means of resource-sharing and collaborating with each other.

## **SUS Libraries**

The SUS of Florida University Libraries is comprised of individual libraries at the eleven institutions, the Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA), and consortia developed by the libraries.<sup>17</sup> FCLA was established in 1985 to provide automated library services. Through joint purchasing of electronic databases, FCLA minimizes cost and maximizes access to over 250 databases for the eleven SUS libraries.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the shared licensing of databases, the eleven SUS institutions have reciprocal borrowing agreements for all SUS students. SUS students can use any of the SUS libraries to borrow books, request items through interlibrary loan, and get reference help. Furthermore, each region of Florida has established library networks designed to enhance collaboration and resource-sharing. For example, patrons from member libraries in the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) can borrow materials from any other SEFLIN library. These types of collaborative efforts are examples of how Florida libraries are attempting to meet the service and resource guidelines established in the Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services.

## **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the Florida's SUS Online Library Services survey was threefold: (1) to identify what distance learning library services the Florida's SUS Libraries are currently providing; (2) to assess the state of distance learning library services in

Florida; and (3) to recommend and implement additional/improved services for SUS Libraries.

## **Research Questions**

The survey asked questions relating to distance learning library services and support for distance learners. It also included several general questions about distance learning at the institutional level. The survey questions were designed to answer:

1. What is the nature of online learning programs at the university level? Does the university have a centralized online learning program? Are full programs available online? Is there an additional charge for online classes?
2. What is the staffing model for the library and distance learning services?
3. What services are provided for online students? What level of service does the library provide? How is the level of service maintained?
4. What services are provided for faculty? How is this level of service maintained?

## **Methodology**

The research design for this survey was based on three surveys from the distance learning library services literature. In 2005, Zheng Ye (Lan) Yang surveyed the United States Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to determine the extent to which they were providing services to distance education library patrons.<sup>19</sup> A principle goal of the study was to determine whether the ARL Libraries have a designated librarian in charge of services to distance education students. The SUS survey modified seven questions from the Yang study.

In 2003, Mary Cassner and Kate E. Adams conducted a survey based on their previous research on ARL Libraries distance education websites.<sup>20</sup> The SUS survey adapted five questions from the Cassner and Adams study.

Finally, the research questions for this survey took into account the 1996 SPEC Survey on the role of ARL Libraries in Distance Education.<sup>21</sup> Although this survey is somewhat dated, the researcher found the questions relating to the budgeting of distance learning library services relevant.

In the fall of 2006, the author designed the survey and examined the nine SUS Library websites to determine the appropriate person to contact regarding distance learning library services. The library websites examined were University of Florida, University of Central Florida, University of South Florida, Florida State University, Florida Atlantic University, University of North Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University,

University of West Florida, and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. The tenth institution in SUS is the author's institution—FIU. The author did not include the New College of Florida in this study because it is primarily an undergraduate liberal arts college.

The author examined the various online survey tools to determine the most appropriate one. After evaluating the different tools, QuestionPro was selected because it was free for academic purposes and allotted enough flexibility in design and time for the current survey. Seventeen questions were formulated and designed for the online survey.

### **Survey Instrument**

In the fall of 2006, the author reviewed the distance learning library literature to design the current survey instrument. Seventeen questions were devised based on the three surveys designed for the Association of Research Libraries mentioned above. Some questions were redesigned and others were original; this ensured that the research questions would be answered.

The survey originally had 25 questions. The author piloted these questions to her colleague to determine clarity and ease of understanding. As a result of the pilot, the question set was reduced to 17 questions.

The questions were divided into four sections. Section one included four questions regarding general information about the distance learning program at the university. Section two had four questions on the staffing within the library for distance learning library services. Section three had four questions on services for distance learning students. Section four had five questions on services for distance learning faculty. The survey used various types of questions including Likert-type, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions.

A number of online survey tools were evaluated for this research. QuestionPro was selected based on its ease of use, flexibility of question choices, and zero-cost.

The author searched each of the Florida's SUS Library websites for contact information on the distance learning librarian. Five institutions did not list a specific person for distance learning. In this case, the author made an educated guess based on titles or chose the head of Reference to contact to obtain the information needed.

## **Response Rate**

An initial blanket e-mail message went out to the list of contacts gathered from each of the respective library websites. In the first paragraph, the e-mail asked, “If you are not the distance learning librarian, can you please pass this e-mail on to the appropriate person at your institution?” The e-mail message was concise. It asked the receiver to spare fifteen minutes to take a short, fast, and easy survey. It provided a link to the survey with contact information for questions and comments. The first e-mail message resulted in a response rate of zero percent.

As a result of the zero-response rate, the author called each of the individuals that were e-mailed. In most circumstances, no one answered the telephone, so a voicemail was left. The voicemail asked the individuals to consider filling out the survey. It concluded with the name, phone number, and e-mail of the caller. Voicemail recipients were encouraged to call or e-mail the author with questions. Immediately after calling, another e-mail message was sent. This e-mail message was personally addressed to each individual. The author explained it as a follow-up to the phone call and again requested the receiver to participate in a short, fast, and easy survey.

As a result of the phone call and follow-up e-mail message the response rate increased to 89 percent. Someone from eight out of nine libraries responded and filled out the survey.

## **Results of the Survey Data**

The results of the study are clustered together based on the four research questions stated earlier in this article.

### **Research Question 1**

What is the nature of online learning programs at the university level? Does the university have a centralized online learning program? Are full programs available online? Is there an additional charge for online classes?

To answer this research question, the following questions were asked:

- Does your university offer:
  - Full programs/degrees via distance education?
  - Single courses via distance education?
  - Little to no distance education?
- Does your institution charge extra fees for online courses?
- Is distance learning centralized or decentralized at your institution?

- Does your university distance education web page link to the distance learning library web page?

One hundred percent of the institutions offer at least a single course via distance education. Seventy-five percent responded that their institution offers full programs and/or degrees online. Twenty-five percent responded that their institution charges extra fees for online classes. FIU offers full undergraduate and graduate degrees online in select disciplines. Each online course costs students upwards from \$299.

None of the respondents have a fully centralized online learning center. Eighty-six percent responded that the online learning program was a combination of centralized and decentralized services. Just recently, FIU has begun to centralize online learning; it has named a vice provost for FIU Online. Online learning at FIU originated in the College of Business. However, each department offered online courses independently or in conjunction with support from the College of Business. Before the centralization, students taking an online class in business and another online class in sociology needed to log into two different WebCT shells. One of the purposes of FIU Online is to centralize distance learning services for students. As a result of the centralization, students log into one place, have one phone number for technical support, and use one standardized WebCT shell. Before FIU Online, students were confused about where to find their course, who to call for support, and needed to learn two or more different WebCT interfaces.

Sixty-three percent responded that their distance education web page links to the distance learning library web page. Currently, FIU Online doesn't link to the distance learning library web page. Once the distance learning library web page is updated, the distance learning librarian will be marketing the page to FIU Online.

## **Research Question 2**

What is the staffing model for the library and distance learning services?

To answer this research question, the following survey questions were used:

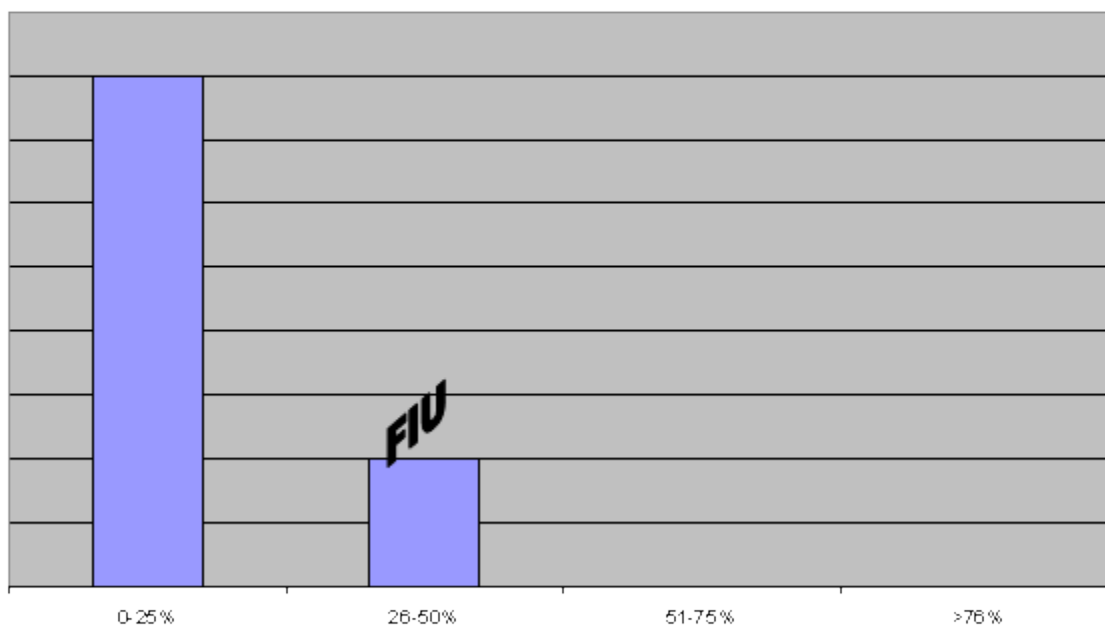
- What model of staffing does the library use?
- If the library has a dedicated distance learning librarian, is this a full-time position? If no, what proportion of duties is devoted distance learning?
- To whom does the distance learning librarian report?
- Does the library have a separate permanent budget for distance learning? If yes, how large?



The first question was an attempt to determine whether the university library had one person responsible for coordinating distance learning and library services. One hundred percent answered that individuals serve both on-campus and distance students. No one answered that they have a distance learning librarian and staff dedicated to serve distance learners. However, when the author searched each of the library homepages, four of the people contacted had a title equivalent to distance learning librarian. The wording of this question was unclear which was evident from the responses to the follow-up question.

The follow-up question asked whether the distance learning librarian position was full-time. The actual wording of the question was, “If the library has a distance learning librarian, is this a full-time position?” In actuality, no one should have answered this question based on the staffing model question. However, 100 percent responded that the distance learning librarian position was not full-time. Eighty percent responded that up to 25 percent of his/her time was spent on distance learning library services while 20 percent responded that 26–50 percent of his/her time was spent on distance learning services (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Proportion Devoted to Distance**



FIU has a person dedicated to distance learning library issues. This person has the title distance learning librarian but also contributes to reference and information literacy.

She spends approximately 35 percent of her time on activities related to distance learning library services.

When asked about the reporting structure of the distance learning librarian, 40 percent report to the Head of Public Services. Twenty percent report directly to the Director, and 20 percent report to the Head of Reference. The remaining 20 percent do not have a distance learning librarian. In the current FIU structure, the distance learning librarian reports to the Head of Reader Services. This structure is due to the fact that the distance learning librarian held the position of reference librarian before the distance learning librarian position was created; the reporting structure did not change. As can be seen from the results of the survey, most distance learning library positions in Florida's SUS follow a public services reporting structure.

The last question in regards to staffing was whether the library had a separate budget for distance learning library services; none of the respondents have a separate budget. FIU doesn't have a separate budget. In fact, when the distance learning librarian position was created, it was done without additional compensation. Basically, the librarian took on more responsibilities for the same pay.

Overall, most of Florida's SUS libraries may have someone with the title of distance learning librarian but that person does more than just distance learning library services. The person responsible for distance learning library services reports to someone in public services and doesn't have a budget for providing distance learning library resources to faculty and students.

### **Research Question 3**

What services are provided for online students? What level of service does the library provide? How is the level of service maintained?

To answer this question, the survey asked the following questions:

- Do you have a list of registered distance education students from your university?
- Do you define distance education students for specific services provided? If yes, then how do you define them?
- Do you mail books to distance education students? If yes, do you charge your students for shipping?
- Does your library have a toll-free phone number for your distance education students and faculty? If yes, who answers the phone?

Seventy-five percent of the respondents do not have a list of registered distance education students. The two librarians who have a list of distance education students use this information differently. One institution uses this information to confirm eligibility for specific distance learning library services such as interlibrary loan. The other institution uses the information to determine when and where information literacy sessions should be held and how many students can be expected at the sessions. The FIU Libraries do not have access to a list of students registered as distance learners or students registered for WebCT classes. This information would be useful to inform the students of the services available. With the current student administration system, there has been no way to ascertain this information.

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents define distance education students by some criteria. The criteria include geographical distance from school (63 percent), students who take all of their classes online (25 percent), and program-identified students or those who do not have any classes on-campus (13 percent). Currently, FIU does not have a way to identify or define distance education students. There are a number of students who take online classes but live on campus. Many students live in Miami (where FIU is located) but have enrolled in a fully online program. Additionally, there are some students who live in another city or state and take classes online. The FIU Libraries' policy is to serve each of these students as completely as possible. However, because FIU is lacking in the ability to reach-out to distance education students, the distance learning librarian depends on faculty members to refer students. Some students stumble onto the distance learning library services web page and learn about the services by accident.

Sixty-three percent responded that they mail books to distance education students. Of those who mail books to students, 60 percent do not charge shipping costs. The other 40 percent do not charge to send the book but the student is responsible for return postage. Book mailing is mentioned deep within the bowels of the FIU Distance Learning Library Services webpage. This service is not advertised and has never been used. Part of the reason this service is not advertised is because of lack of funding for the service. It was an added service to meet the needs of distance learning students but not budgeted or planned for. On the flip side of this, the few students who have found this service have requested items that were not owned by FIU Libraries. This service is offered for FIU owned library materials only and for students who never come to campus. The FIU Libraries will pay for the cost of shipping the material. The student is responsible for return postage.

Fifty percent of the respondents have a toll-free number dedicated for distance learning library services. The phone rings at the reference desk for two institutions. Another phone rings at the science reference desk, and one phone is answered by the Ask a Librarian staff. FIU does not have a toll-free number.

## Research Question 4

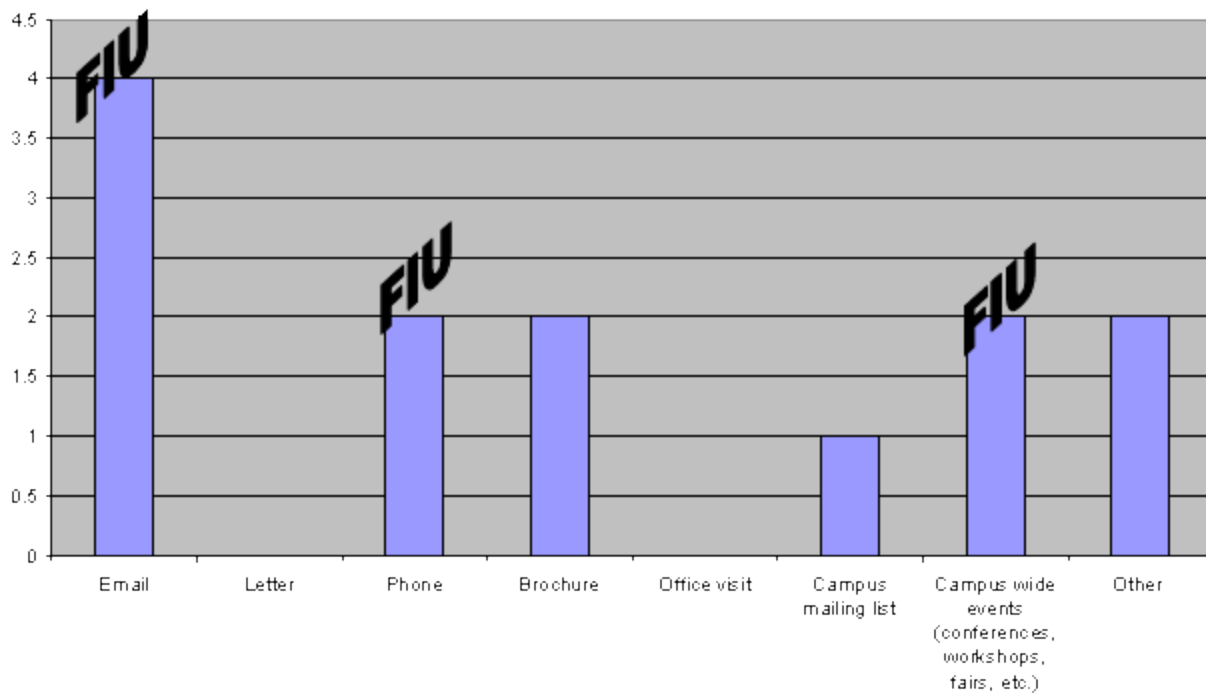
What services are provided for faculty? How is this level of service maintained?

To answer this question, the survey asked the following questions:

- How do you contact faculty about distance learning library services?
- How many times per semester do you contact faculty?
- On average, how many distance education faculty do you collaborate with per semester?
- What kind of collaboration projects do you participate in?
- Are you involved in a university level committee on distance education issues?  
If yes, in what role?

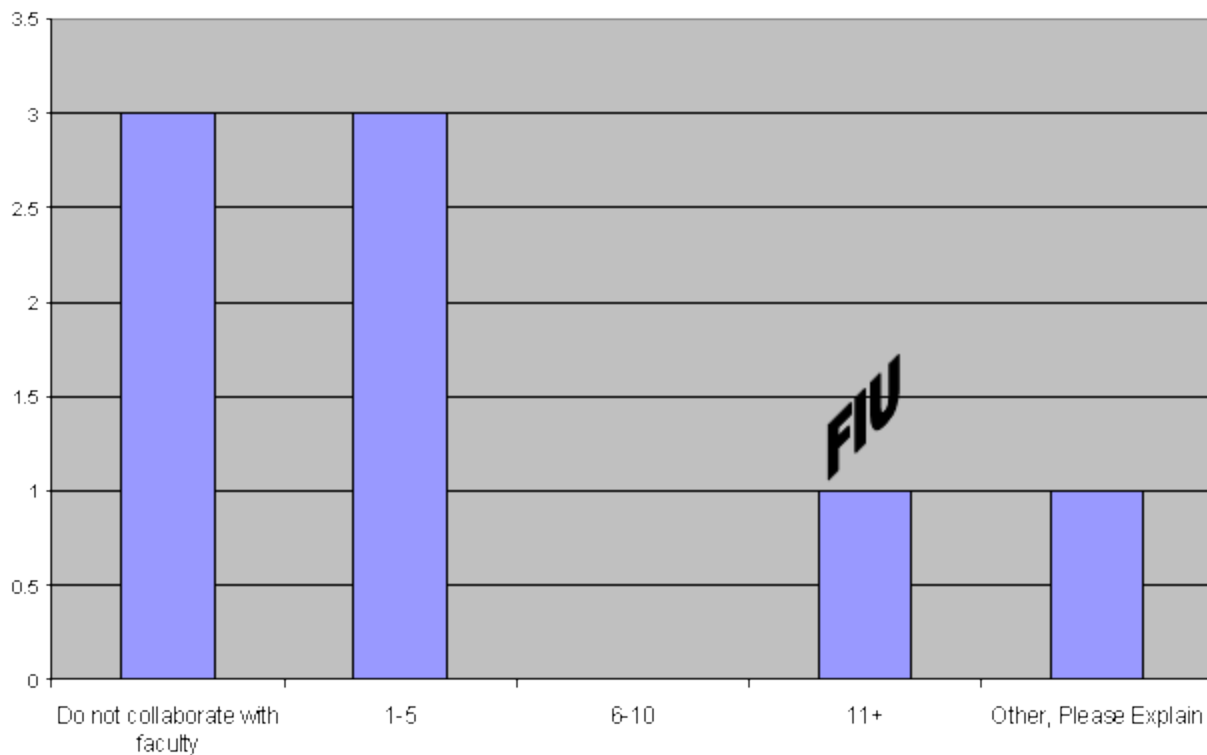
Florida's SUS librarians contact distance education faculty in a multitude of ways and most (57 percent) contact faculty one or two times a semester regarding distance learning library services. The most popular means of contact is via e-mail (50 percent). Two librarians contact faculty by telephone, brochure, and campus wide events. Other means of contact include a campus mailing list, the library website, and various methods depending on the subject liaison. The FIU Distance Learning Librarian contacts faculty via e-mail, phone, and campus-wide events. See figure 2 for a graphical representation of faculty outreach methods.

Figure 2  
Methods of Faculty Contact



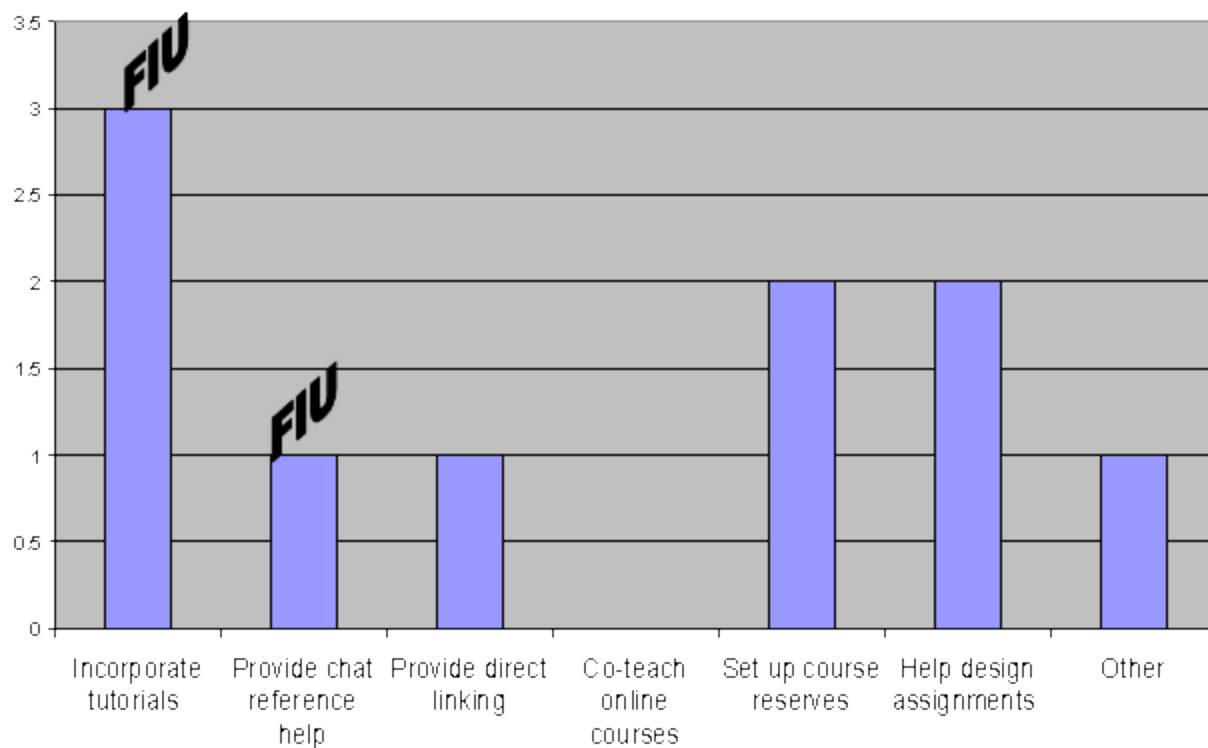
As a result of the current methods used to reach faculty members, the FIU distance learning librarian has ongoing relationships with fifteen faculty members. The level of service and collaboration varies with each faculty member. Only one other Florida SUS librarian has developed this many relationships. Thirty-eight percent do not collaborate with faculty and 38 percent collaborate with one to five faculty members. The response from one institution explained that collaboration was dependent on subject liaisons.

**Figure 3**  
**Number of Faculty Collaborations**



Librarians collaborate with online faculty in a number of ways. Thirty percent incorporate tutorials into the course management system. Other collaborative efforts include setting up course reserves (20 percent), designing assignments with faculty (20 percent), providing chat reference in the course management system (10 percent), and providing direct links to relevant material (10 percent). One librarian selected other and explained that he/she was brand new in the position and was attempting to establish collaborations. FIU's collaboration with online faculty is comparable to the other SUS institutions. The distance learning librarian focuses on online tutorial/handouts and chat reference and instruction. She has not had much luck with direct linking and designing assignments for library research.

**Figure 4**  
**Collaboration Projects**



The final question was whether the librarian was involved in a university level committee on distance education issues. Only one librarian answered that they were on a university level committee. The FIU distance learning librarian is not currently on any university-wide committee for distance education issues. However, she is a member of the Teaching and Learning with Technology Committee. This committee deals with more than online learning but does include online learning initiatives. Admittedly, this committee is not very active and has not met in more than six months. It is the goal of the FIU distance learning librarian to become more involved in university-wide committees related to distance learning.

## Conclusions

The state of distance learning in Florida's SUS is growing and developing. All eight who responded to the survey offer online classes. Seventy-five percent have full programs and/or degrees online. The Florida trend is similar to the national trend in that ninety-six percent of the largest institutions in the country offer some type of online education.[22](#)

Online enrollment grew to 3.2 million students in 2005.<sup>23</sup> As the population of Florida increases, the need for online education will continue to grow. Distance education is not just for remote students; students choose to take classes online even if they live near a university. Some students opt to learn at their own pace from the comfort of their home. However, are some students forced to take online courses because they are closed out of face-to-face classes? Or perhaps the only option for the required class is online? A little disheartening is the fact that twenty-five percent of the institutions surveyed charge extra fees for online classes. The survey did not ask how much the fees were but each online course at FIU costs students upwards from \$299 in additional fees.

What implications do additional fees have for the future of higher education? In the state of Florida, higher education is consistently under-funded. Additional fees for online classes mean added revenue for universities and academic departments. However, Florida consistently scores a D or lower on the national report card for college education affordability.<sup>24</sup> The report card measures the ability of families to pay for a college education. Although Florida has relatively low tuition rates, the state received an F in 2006 for several reasons, including the additional fees charged by institutions. This is coupled with the low median income of many of Florida's families. Although this issue is not in the purview of this study, it would be interesting to examine the real cost to students of online education.

The Florida SUS libraries provide a number of distance learning library services. However, none of the institutions who responded have fully centralized online learning. The lack of centralized online learning creates a number of challenges and opportunities for library services. Should a single person within the library be dedicated to distance learning? Or should each subject liaison learn the ins and outs of the educational software used? Is it the subject liaison's job to provide library instruction online? According to the findings of this research, it seems that in some instances, there is a distance learning librarian and in other instances the subject liaison is responsible for each of the subject areas.

FIU has recently transitioned to a centralized system of online learning that requires the librarian to determine who is teaching online. However, currently there is not a central location for identifying faculty and students teaching and taking classes online. The distance learning librarian searches for WebCT courses. She then searches the FIU phonebook for instructors' e-mail addresses and phone numbers. This is an extremely time-consuming task. Hopefully, with the growth of online learning there will be a centralization of online services so this information is easily obtained.

Overall, most of Florida's SUS libraries have someone with the title of distance learning librarian, but that person is a blended librarian in that he/she does more than



just distance learning library services. The person responsible for distance learning library services reports to someone in public services and doesn't have a budget for providing distance learning library resources to faculty and students. As distance learning grows, it will be interesting to note trends in the libraries' role. Conceivably, the librarian responsible for distance learning library services could have a dual reporting structure (to the library and to online learning services). Also, it will be important to establish a budget for library services to distance education. As the number of individuals taking online classes continues to grow, the need for equal library services as laid out in the Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services will require a budget and strategic planning.

Nearly all of the libraries surveyed define distance education students by some criteria. The biggest percentage uses a geographical distance from the university. Will this trend continue as the number of online students increases? Currently, FIU does not have a way to identify or define distance education students so all students who contact the distance learning librarian are treated as distance learners.

Some of the services provided to distance learners and faculty include book mailing, a toll-free phone line, tutorials, information literacy chat sessions, reference help, and direct linking to database articles. FIU Libraries offers some of these services. Overall, FIU offers more services to assist the faculty than to students. The main reason is because distance learners cannot be identified. Additionally, there is no budget for distance education services. FIU Libraries needs to provide a toll-free phone line for distance learners and provide more prominence to the Distance Learning Library Services webpage. Services offered to distance learning faculty and students, such as book mailing, are difficult to locate on the webpage, are not advertised, and unsurprisingly, have never been used. To correct this, the FIU Distance Learning Librarian needs to propose a budget for a toll-free phone number, book mailing, and an updated webpage.

Sixty-three percent responded that their distance education web page links to the distance learning library web page. Currently, FIU Online doesn't link to the distance learning library web page. FIU Libraries need to update the Distance Learning Library Web page and market this resource.

FIU Libraries fare better in regards to the services they provide to faculty. FIU uses a variety of methods to contact distance education faculty and does so twice a semester. At the beginning of the fall semester, the distance learning librarian creates a list of faculty using WebCT to teach. Currently, this entails the time consuming need to go through the course catalog to find the courses and instructors using WebCT. Once the instructors are found, their contact information is obtained from the FIU online phonebook. Using this information, each of the instructors is called at the end of the

summer semester (for the start of the fall semester). This phone call serves as an introduction and provides the faculty member with contact information for distance learning library services. The phone call is followed up with an e-mail. The e-mail serves as an extended introduction offering a number of services, including the availability of online information literacy sessions, opportunity for specific online library handouts, scheduling weekly online research help, and one on one help for students. Phone calls are made once a year, but an e-mail message is sent twice a year. Additionally, the FIU distance learning librarian attends the annual Online Learning Symposium. She has presented twice at this event but more importantly this event serves as an excellent opportunity to network and make new connections. Many times it is the first opportunity to meet many of the faculty worked with throughout the year. Each of the three means of contacting faculty has varying degrees of success. The last time phone calls were made, three contacts were made. Two of the three instructors noted that they would include the availability of distance learning library services in their WebCT course. The third contact was a request for a face-to-face library instruction session (not the intent of the call but nonetheless beneficial to the libraries!). Because of the time-consuming process of calling over 250 faculty members and receiving a low return rate, the FIU Librarian is considering discontinuing this service.

Another method of contact used at FIU is e-mail. Once a semester, an e-mail message is sent to online faculty offering library services. The response rate on this practice is much better than that via telephone. Not only is e-mail faster than phone calls but also, the last time an e-mail was sent out, the distance learning librarian received seven responses. Of those seven responses, new contact was established with two faculty members. One faculty member asked for a handout and one faculty member scheduled a voluntary chat session for students to learn how to navigate the library resources. The other five responses were from already established relationships.

Attending the annual Online Learning Symposium has resulted in a number of connections. Two faculty members met at the Online Learning Symposium fully use distance learning library services. Both schedule multiple chat sessions between the librarian and students, have a tutorial/handout on library services in the WebCT course, and refer students to the distance learning library services for all library related questions. Both faculty members require the use of library resources including online books, peer-reviewed articles, and electronic course reserves. Additionally, one of the faculty members has spread the word within her department. Relationships have been developed with two other faculty members in Public Health.

The FIU distance learning librarian is not currently on any university-wide committee for distance education issues. However, she is a member of the Teaching and Learning with Technology Committee. This committee deals with more than online

learning but does include online learning initiatives. However, this committee is not very active and has not met in more than six months. It is the goal of the FIU distance learning librarian to become more involved in university-wide committees related to distance learning.

In sum, the FIU Libraries is doing fair in comparison to its sister institutions. One of the strategic goals of FIU is to increase its offerings in distance learning. With this as one of its strategic initiatives, the distance learning librarian intends to request a budget for distance learning library services. The budget will include a toll-free phone line and money for mailing books. Additionally, the FIU Distance Learning Library Services website will be updated and marketed. Finally, the Distance Learning Librarian plans to get more involved in university-wide committees on distance education.

## **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study. One limitation was in research question number two on the staffing model used. The intent of the staffing model question was to ascertain whether there was one person who was the go-to person for distance learning library services. However, examining the response to the staffing question and the follow-up question, it is clear that the question was misunderstood. Zero responded that they had a specific person responsible for coordinating distance learning library services. The library web pages of the institutions indicated four people had a title equivalent to distance learning librarian.

Another limitation of this study is that it didn't include a question on the types of courses/degrees offered online. Service levels and student needs are different at the undergraduate and graduate level. It would be interesting to know if the university is focusing on distance education in a particular program and/or level of education. Finally, the survey only asked about collaborative efforts with faculty. It lacked a question about collaboration with online learning support or other individuals responsible for online learning. It is possible that the distance learning librarian does the majority of marketing and outreach through online support staff.

## **Next Steps**

The author plans to propose a budget for distance learning library services. In this budget there will be a request for book mailing and a toll-free phone line. The author will follow-up with the respondents to find out the details of their book mailing service. How widely is it used? Is it marketed to distance education students and faculty? Are materials returned on time? Are students given additional loan periods? The follow-up information will be used to justify the budget proposal.

The author intends to follow-up with the two librarians who have a list of distance education students. Many of Florida's SUS institutions switched to PeopleSoft for their student and financial software. If the two institutions are using PeopleSoft, there may be a way for FIU to get a list of online students.

This research was a small introduction to the state of distance learning library services in Florida. Additional research needs to be done on the distance learning library websites of each of the Florida's SUS libraries. Usability, findability, and marketability studies can be conducted on each of the websites. Questions to ask include: where is the link to the distance learning library website? Does it link from the top page? How useable is the site? Does it market the services available?

Another idea is to compare the results of this study with the three ARL studies that were used to design the questionnaire. How do the SUS libraries compare with the ARL libraries when it comes to distance learning library services?

Finally, future studies on Florida's distance learning library services would be remiss if they did not include non-SUS libraries. Nova Southeastern located in Davie, Florida, is an institution that focuses on distance education and reaching remote users. Future surveys can include all academic libraries in Florida and compare their distance learning library services.

## Notes

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