THE COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Developing Library and
Information Services
for Distance Education

When establishing Distance Librarianship (DL), traditional library standards and procedure can be applied as a guide. Providing post-secondary level DL service is the most challenging, as the information and consultation needs of students and faculty cannot be satisfied just with pre-packaged reading and information.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education (DE) has revolutionised and democratised the delivery and accessibility of education, and has also changed how critical support services, such as library and information service, are provided.

This guide examines distance librarianship (DL) from two perspectives:

- How library services contribute to distance education
- Ways librarians can deliver effective distance library service, and the issues affecting delivery.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND DISTANCE LIBRARIANSHIP

Libraries and librarians are as important to distance learning as they are to face-to-face education. Librarians need to understand the mechanics and concepts of DE to provide effective distance library service.

In DE, learning takes place at the location of the student and not at the institution of instruction. Traditionally, distance learners were rural-based, middle aged and female. Today's distance learner is located anywhere, of any age and gender.

There are many terms used for DE, including asynchronous learning, external studies and individualised learning. Regardless of the terminology used, remoteness between learner, tutor and institution of instruction is constant.

There are two main DE modes:

- Learning totally at a distance from the institution of instruction, peers and course tutors (total distance)
- Learning at a distance with some form of institution/peer/tutor contact (mixed mode).

DE covers the following learning needs:

- First chance learning, e.g. Schools of the Air, Australia (www.assoa.nt.edu.au/othersoa.html)
- Second attempt at basic/secondary education, e.g. the National Extension College, U.K. (www.nec.ac.uk)
- Tertiary level education, e.g. the Indira Gandhi National Open University, India (IGNOU, www.ignou.edu)
- Obtaining professional qualifications, e.g. for Aviation Medicine at the University of Otago, New Zealand (www.otago.ac.nz)
- Life-long learning and continuing education, e.g. Intercultural Studies at Technikon SA, South Africa (www.tsa.ac.za).
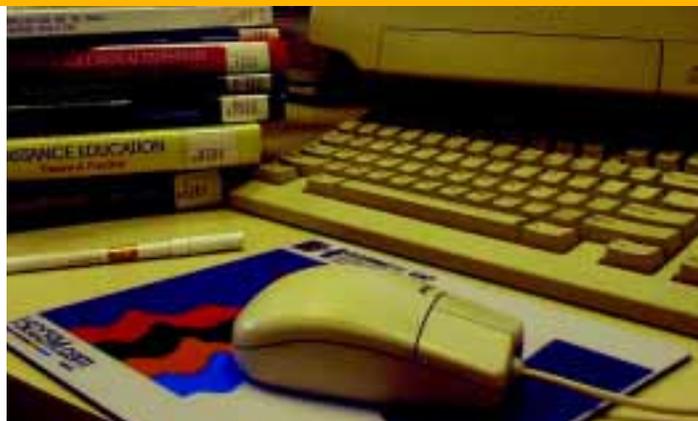
In DE, librarians:

- Ensure that library and information services conform with accreditation requirements
- Develop and maintain quality DE information resources, such as reading lists for students and course developers (educators, team leaders, media production personnel)
- Help distance learners acquire library skills, critical thinking, study and information literacy skills
- Advise distance educators on new and appropriate course materials
- Support the research and scholarship activities of DE faculty
- Identify other institutions that can assist with delivering distance library services to students.

Librarians must be included on DE course teams to ensure that:

- Timely distance library services and professional advice are available to students and faculty
- Library collections effectively support student and faculty information needs.

ESTABLISHING AND MANAGING DISTANCE LIBRARIANSHIP

Library and information service for DE is often an extension of the institution's existing traditional library service. When establishing DL procedure, traditional library standards and procedure can be applied as a guide. Examples of institutions with DL services are in the References section.

DL is used to provide most traditional library services such as consultation, reference and bibliographic searches, and course reading material. Generally, providing post-secondary level DL service is the most challenging, as the information and consultation needs of students and faculty cannot be satisfied just with pre-packaged reading and information.

The basic library and information services distance learners need are:

- Access to information resources, such as texts, supplementary reading and reference services
- Learning how to find the information they need from the information that is available
- Developing ways to apply the information gleaned and to make sound, information-based decisions.
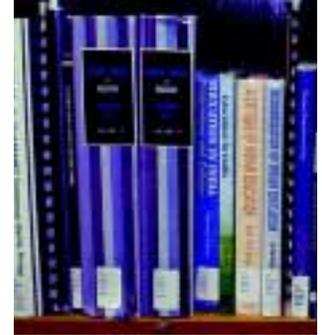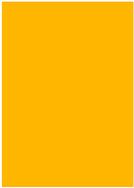
Some guidelines for establishing DL:

- Produce a mission statement that defines clear goals and guiding principles for providing library services tailored to the institution's DE programming
- Assess the library and information service needs of the institution's DE programme, in consultation with DE course teams, faculty and possibly a student survey
- Determine the best media and delivery methods for DL services, such as audio or video tape, print or online material, to be distributed through traditional mail, courier, e-mail or for download from a Web site
- Determine additional costs for the DL component, such as new or additional materials, equipment and staff, and any staff training that may be needed
- Establish the level of funding available for DL from the institution, and explore ways to minimise and share costs through funding grants, collaboration with other institutions, or by forming corporate partnerships
- Establish a review and continuing education process, to ensure that DE student and faculty needs continue to be met
- Initiate a public relations programme to promote awareness of DL services, targeted to students and faculty.

GUIDELINES/STANDARDS
FOR DISTANCE LIBRARY SERVICES

Institutional guidelines or standards for DL service, such as mission statements, help librarians:

- Meet international, professionally accepted and established standards
- Maintain consistent services between institutions
- Gauge the relative standard of their existing services.

Institutional DL guidelines should:

- Guarantee distance learners access to quality library services
- Aim to provide complete user satisfaction
- Pledge supportive, effective and cost-efficient service
- Ensure periodic review of the guidelines, so that they continue to meet changing student and faculty needs
- Include librarians in any decision-making or review process.

The guidelines and mission statements must reflect the institution's specific DE programme and services, so will vary by institution, country and region. Some helpful publications on establishing guidelines are in the References section.

A sample DL service statement is the 1997 Student Library Service Charter of The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ, www.topnz.ac.nz/library/students.html), that promises TOPNZ will:

- Lend material recommended in courses
- Undertake subject searches to support assessment requirements
- Provide bibliographies
- Provide other learning support such as study skills information.

TOPNZ also outlines in the Charter the modes it will use to communicate with its students, provide referrals, deliver services and provide fair access to library materials.

FACTORS IN ORGANISING DL SERVICE

Cost

The overall cost of providing library services at a distance depends on the range and type of services and resources provided, and on whether print, audio, video or electronic formats are used. If the budget for DL is limited, it is important to bear in mind that the print version of a publication generally costs less to purchase than its electronic version. It is also usually less expensive to secure the copyright for print material, than for material in an electronic format or for Web use. Libraries can cover costs by charging service fees to users, or by getting the institution to subsidise the purchase, access and delivery costs of DE materials.

Facilities

In-house library use by distance learners is minimal, so not much additional space is needed at on-campus library locations or at remote library sites for reading tables or conference rooms. Conversely, stack and storage facilities for distance library material should be generous as multiple copies are needed of each publication or resource for wide distribution, and to compensate for the time lag when transferring materials between distance learners and the library location.

Personnel

Many institutions starting DL service begin with one dedicated staff member and add personnel as quality, administrative or service demands rise. Increase the number of staff if you have large DE student enrolment, a wide range of courses and an educational level of post-secondary or higher. If the institution has to hire additional librarians for the DL service, the new staff must be trained in the equipment or technology used, if needed.

The duties of a DL services librarian can include:

- Staffing out-of-hours services
- Staffing remote library points
- Fielding inquiries, mailing and receiving materials
- Administering intellectual property clearances (see following section on Copyright)
- Offering input to DE course teams.

Public Relations

A DL service needs an ongoing, aggressive public relations (PR) programme to awaken and educate students, administrators, educators and others to the benefits of DL and to any new services or issues. PR activities can either be a direct library initiative or part of the institution's broader information and advertising package.

Effective PR methods include:

- Posting DL services information on the institution's website
- Short general flyers on DL services
- Circulars about timely, specific issues in DL
- Sending personalised information mail-outs to target groups of students or faculty
- Conducting personal visits to remote library sites
- Networking with faculty.

ISSUES IN PROVIDING DISTANCE LIBRARY SERVICES

The most important DL service considerations are:
- Timeliness of service
- Maintaining a high level and quality of access to DL materials
- Where possible, personal contact with students and faculty.

Distance, time-differences and inadequate communications often make it harder in DL to satisfy an information query or service, as ongoing client contact over a longer period is often necessary before the need is satisfied.

ACCESS TO MATERIALS AND DOCUMENT DELIVERY

In addition to distance and time-difference barriers, national censorship and religious beliefs in receiving countries affect document and information delivery. In some countries, all e-mail and Internet sites are monitored before individuals can access or download them, or access may be blocked altogether. Electronic information sources (e-mail, e-books, databases, virtual libraries, Web pages) are heavily used in developed countries, but are not readily available or in widespread use in many developing countries.

DL services must be sensitive to these realities and establish non-electronic ways to field enquiries and to deliver services. For example, mail, fax or phone can be used for enquiries. Print copies or audio and videotapes of materials can be sent through regular mail or by courier.

Borrowing and service arrangements can also be made with libraries in other locations. Simon Fraser University Library (www.lib.sfu.ca) in British Columbia, Canada provides library services for distance learners of several other institutions. Librarians must identify libraries with collections and services appropriate to their students' needs before finding out if the libraries are interested in collaboration. A pilot assessment period with student feedback can help determine if the proposed service is accessible to them, and appropriate to their needs. Fees for these "loaned services" can be either charged to the student user, or paid through an arrangement between the contracting institution and the library providing the service.

Pre-packaged information services from commercial vendors such as Questia, XanEdu and ebrary can also be used for DL, through subscription or pay-per-use. For example, the Questia e-library (www.questia.com) claims to have over 70,000 book and journal titles covering multiple topics and subject areas, and it also offers reference services. The library should assess and inform students of any overlap in services provided by the commercial vendor and the DE institution, to avoid students having to pay for services already covered by their tuition fees.

CONSULTATION SERVICES

Consultation can be conducted through e-mail, toll-free telephone services, pre-packaged mail-out information or scheduled remote site visits. Institutions that have a toll-free telephone service should if possible also use it for library consultation. The frequency and duration of remote library site visits depend on the institution's DL budget, as well as how far the sites are from the parent institution. Institutions with large numbers of overseas students may not have the funds for site visits, whereas those with students within a reasonable distance can schedule frequent visits.

REFERENCE SERVICES

In the DE environment, students can use forms to make research queries, either in print or electronically. In the form, "trigger" or "prompt" questions replace face-to-face assistance in helping the student to properly complete a request. Institutions that already have dedicated library telephone services can use them for DL reference inquiries. Some institutions with Web-based services purchase online versions of major reference works to provide students with a convenient access point, such as Athabasca University's Digital Reference Centre (library.athabascau.ca/drc).

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SEARCHES

In some cases, and where enough staff is available, librarians execute full searches for distance learners. Another way is to provide a student manual on conducting bibliographic searches which explains search methods, such as moving from general to specific questions, and lists basic texts, journals and reference sources in various disciplines. More detailed "help" manuals can also be developed on a discipline-by-discipline basis.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION(BI) AND INFORMATION LITERACY (IL) INSTRUCTION

Librarians must help learners access, evaluate and use information effectively and efficiently. For delivering BI and IL instruction at a distance, librarians take on a more active teaching, rather than facilitative, role. Centra eMeeting (www.centranow.com) is an electronic communication utility that has been used successfully to deliver BI at a distance. Deakin University, Australia's Smart Searcher Tutorial service (www.deakin.edu.au/library/findout/learn) uses interactive, web-based IL tutorial software from UNILINC Ltd. (www.unilinc.edu.au). Alternative BI and IL delivery methods include radio, which has been used at the University of South Africa (UNISA, www.unisa.ac.za/library), and computer and video conferencing, which have been used by the Central Queensland University, Australia (www.library.cqu.edu.au).

COPYRIGHT IN DISTANCE LIBRARIANSHIP

As libraries need to distribute multiple copies of the same information to distance learners, librarians must be very familiar with all of the current copyright issues affecting distance library provision, and need to be aware of local and international laws governing intellectual property. For example, present international agreements on broadcasting require an institution to obtain broadcast rights for any video and related formats used in DE.

Libraries providing distance services should have a "rights clearance librarian" or "copyright librarian" to acquire on the library's behalf the legal right to make multiple copies of an information source. Usually these rights are given for a prescribed period, for an agreed fee. When a license expires, the officer is responsible for either renewing the license, or for removing and disposing of the relevant documents/duplicates.

Establishing Copyright Procedure in Distance Education, a Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Knowledge Series title for 2003 (www.col.org/knowledge), has more detailed information on dealing with copyright issues.

TECHNOLOGY USE IN DISTANCE LIBRARIES

The rapid spread of ICT, recent reductions in technology costs and connection services due to economies of scale, and a rise in personal ownership of ICTs are making ICT use for DL seem more attractive. Many libraries in developed countries already use ICT as their main method of delivering information services and resources, through online chat rooms, e-mail services, listservs, fee-based or free online databases and reference services, teleconferencing and toll-free numbers.

Nevertheless, an estimated 95% of the world's population does not have ready and immediate access to ICT. Often, the cost of the technology is prohibitive. If an institution relies primarily on ICT to deliver DL services, a potentially large number of learners, many of them from developing countries, will be unable to participate or benefit fully.

Grants are available to help bridge the technology divide, such as a project by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (www.gatesfoundation.org) to place computers in libraries in developing countries. However, perhaps a more long term, sustainable way to begin and maintain a start in ICT is to partner with other education institutions or an Internet Service Provider (ISP) on infrastructure costs. In the latter relationship, the ISP often offers reduced information technology (IT) connection rates for students at the partner educational institution.

ICT may be used effectively for DL if:

- The institution is committed to providing a high level of library services to distance learners
- The initial and ongoing cost of hardware, software and connectivity charges are within the institution's financial means
- End users (students and faculty) have access to the ICT at their location.

Using Telecentres in Support of Distance Education, one of COL's Knowledge Series titles published in 2001 (www.col.org/knowledge), provides some useful information on the role of technology in distance learning and of how telecentres can be used to deliver distance library services.

DISTANCE LIBRARY SERVICES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Historically, libraries in developing countries have been under-resourced, under-staffed and remote from the distance learner. Generally these libraries were unable to provide the range of services and materials needed, especially to support post-secondary education, and did not have hours of operation that were convenient for the distance learner. These factors remain significant challenges in the developing world, and for the institutions that provide DL services in such locations.

The following methods will help overcome some of these challenges:

- Rotating book boxes and other temporary "libraries" between pre-determined locations, such as community centres
- Collaborative and reciprocal borrowing arrangements between local and regional institutions and public libraries, such as partnerships with British Council Libraries
- Developing pre-packaged primary, secondary and tertiary library resources for circulation
- Establishing "distance library corners" in other libraries, e.g. "IGNOU library corners" throughout India
- Establishing sub-regional groupings of libraries to support distance learning
- Establishing information delivery partnerships with a broad range of institutions
- Using mobile libraries, including buses, book-boats and donkey libraries
- Using commercial delivery services, such as courier services.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR DISTANCE LIBRARIANSHIP

Librarians need continuing education to keep current with developments in DE and DL. While there are no formal DL courses, many stand-alone conferences, seminars and workshops have a DL component. Distance librarians should attend DE conferences as well as library conferences, to network with distance educators, keep up to date on trends, developments and issues in DE, and to sensitise distance educators to the benefits of DE library support services. There is also professional literature on DL, and online librarianship and DE-oriented sites. More information is available from the References section.

SUMMARY

Distance educators and administrators must appreciate the critical role that libraries play in providing support services for DE, and institutions must provide financial backing for staff, facilities and resources. Librarians, in turn, need to stay in touch with the changing needs of DE students and faculty. As Mark G. R. McManus puts it, "libraries must be active, political and effective builders of learning knowledge structures" if they are to provide effective, quality library and information services for DE.

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Canadian Library Association. 1993, Rev. 2000. *Guidelines for Library Support of Distance and Distributed Learning in Canada.* Ottawa: Canadian Library Association. www.cla.ca/about/distance.htm

Information Resource Centre, The Commonwealth of Learning. www.col.org/irc

The International Centre for Distance Learning (*i*CDL) of The Open Learning Centre, U.K. www-icdl.open.ac.uk

Reference and User Services Association, Machine-Assisted Reference Section (MARS) User Access to Services Committee. *Current User Research Bibliography.* staff.lib.muohio.edu/~shocker/mars

The University of Tennessee Office of Information Technology listserv. offcamp@listserv.utk.edu

ADDITIONAL COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTIONS WITH DEVELOPED DL SERVICES

Massey University, New Zealand. library.massey.ac.nz

Monash University, Australia. www.lib.monash.edu.au

Northern College, Scotland. www.norcol.ac.uk/units/library

The Open University of Hong Kong. www.lib.ouhk.edu.hk

Sheffield Hallam University, England. www.shu.ac.uk/services/lc

University of South Africa. www.unisa.ac.za/library

University of Northern British Columbia, Canada. lib.unbc.ca

University of the South Pacific, Fiji. maya.usp.ac.fj/~library

ADDITIONAL LEADING COMMERCIAL E-LIBRARY FIRMS:

Britannica On-line. www.eb.com

Jones e-global library. www.e-globallibrary.com

NetLibrary. www.netlibrary.com

SOME PREMIER, DEDICATED DL CONFERENCES

Off-Campus Library Services Conference. ocls.cmich.edu/conference.htm

Libraries Without Walls. www.mmu.ac.uk/h-ss/cerlim

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). www.ala.org/acrl

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DEVELOPING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

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