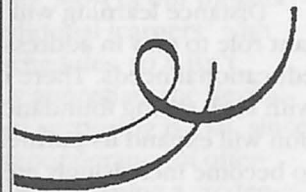# DISTANCE LEARNING LIBRARY SERVICES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

by Anne Haynes,
Indiana University,
Bloomington, Indiana

INTRODUCTION

This article evolved out of a presentation given at the 2002 Indiana Library Federation (ILF) Conference in Indianapolis, as my contribution to the panel discussion, "Distance Learning: Challenge or Opportunity," sponsored by the ILF Continuing Education Committee. The presentations by the other librarians on that panel – from a public library, a high school, and a community college – certainly expanded my awareness of the various kinds of exciting endeavors that other types of Indiana libraries are engaged in that are made possible by distance technology. The kinds of distance education (DE) services offered by an academic library system reflect its need to provide seamless library service to students and faculty, regardless of their location, to meet the specific needs of teaching/learning and research. And among academic institutions, each views and organizes DE differently, according to its academic mission. The library's services for DE students must be responsive to the mission of the institution.

The terms "distance education" and "distributed education" are sometimes used interchangeably. However, "distributed education" generally refers more broadly to all technology-enhanced instruction, including on-campus instruction, whereas "distance education" is used in relation to courses or services received away from campus. The latter definition is primarily what this paper is concerned with, since students living on or near campus have the physical use of the libraries.

DE presents a number of challenges and opportunities for academic libraries. These challenges, some of which I will describe here, not only create opportunities for librarians to collaborate, experiment, and learn from but also to examine all the services we provide – not only for students away from campus, or at a distance, but for all faculty and residential students as well, increasingly more of whom use our libraries from their offices and homes.

STANDARDS AND MODELS OF SERVICE

It is important to give some background on standards, guidelines, and models of service that exist for DE library services in colleges and universities. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Guidelines, the North Central Association (NCA) Best Practices, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Good Practices, and those written by other professional and accrediting agencies guide the provision of library services for distance learners. These guidelines in general ask institutions to take responsibility for providing library services for our own distance, or off-campus, students, as we provide library services for our residential students. During the last decade, as library reference services, document delivery services, and many texts and databases have been made available remotely, it has become technologically possible to offer more and better off-campus services than ever before, provided the students have the requisite equipment and connections. Document delivery, the primary means by which libraries supply distance students with journal articles, can be done electronically regardless of the location of the student. Thus, the equitable provision of services to DE students mandated by these aforementioned standards is now possible in ways that it never before has been. Equitable service, however, does not always mean equivalent services. For example, providing books from other libraries by interlibrary loan is generally not offered for students living away from campus, but mailing books to them from their own institutions' libraries is a widely accepted practice.

There are various models of service described in the literature on distance learning services that universities use in their approaches to serving distance students. These models vary with the institution. For example, some libraries such as the IU-Bloomington (IUB) Libraries use the model of an integrated approach in which DE library services are offered as an extension of the existing library services for on-campus students and faculty. These services may or may not be coordinated by a librarian or library staff member providing oversight. Other models may utilize a separate office, in or outside of the library, perhaps independently funded and staffed, which provides DE library services. Slade and Kascus describe additional models (Third Annotated Bibliography xx-xxii).

INDIANA UNIVERSITY'S SITUATION

In the IUB Libraries, this is how we currently define the recipients of our DE services, as presented on our Web site for Distributed Education (see fig. 1):

"IUB Libraries Distributed Education Services are available to students who: are enrolled in IU Bloomington off-campus courses, or are PhD candidates who are enrolled for dissertation credit and do not reside near the Bloomington campus."

The organization of DE library services is closely tied to the role that DE plays on the campus, and it follows that the campus determines the kinds and amount of support available for DE services. I will name some of the challenges librarians face in providing library services to distance learners at IUB and how we have begun to meet those challenges.

Indiana University is in the process of defining its academic mission in terms of DE. Up to this point, there has not been a stated role for DE as part of the Bloomington campus' overall academic mission, although the campus has been offering courses at a distance for several decades, under the names of Continuing Education, Professional Development, and others. There are currently university- and campus-wide committees charged with deciding the future role and structure of DE at Indiana University. Many distance courses and some complete degree programs are currently offered within several IUB schools and departments, including, but not limited to, the School of Education; School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation; Division of Labor Studies, and the School of Continuing Studies (Indiana U. Office of Distributed Education Web site). Various delivery methods are used for these courses, including correspondence, videotape, Web-based instruction, videoconferencing, and IHETS (Indiana Higher Education Telecommunications System). Some courses are taught to both on-campus and distance students at other IU campuses or any-where in the world.

The IU-Bloomington DE library services program began in 1996 as a librarian's position, based in the Undergraduate Library. When that librarian left for a position in another library, this program became the responsibility of a graduate student assistant. DE services subsequently were moved into the Reference Department and became part of my assignment in December 2000. My role is to coordinate the services that various departments in the IUB library system
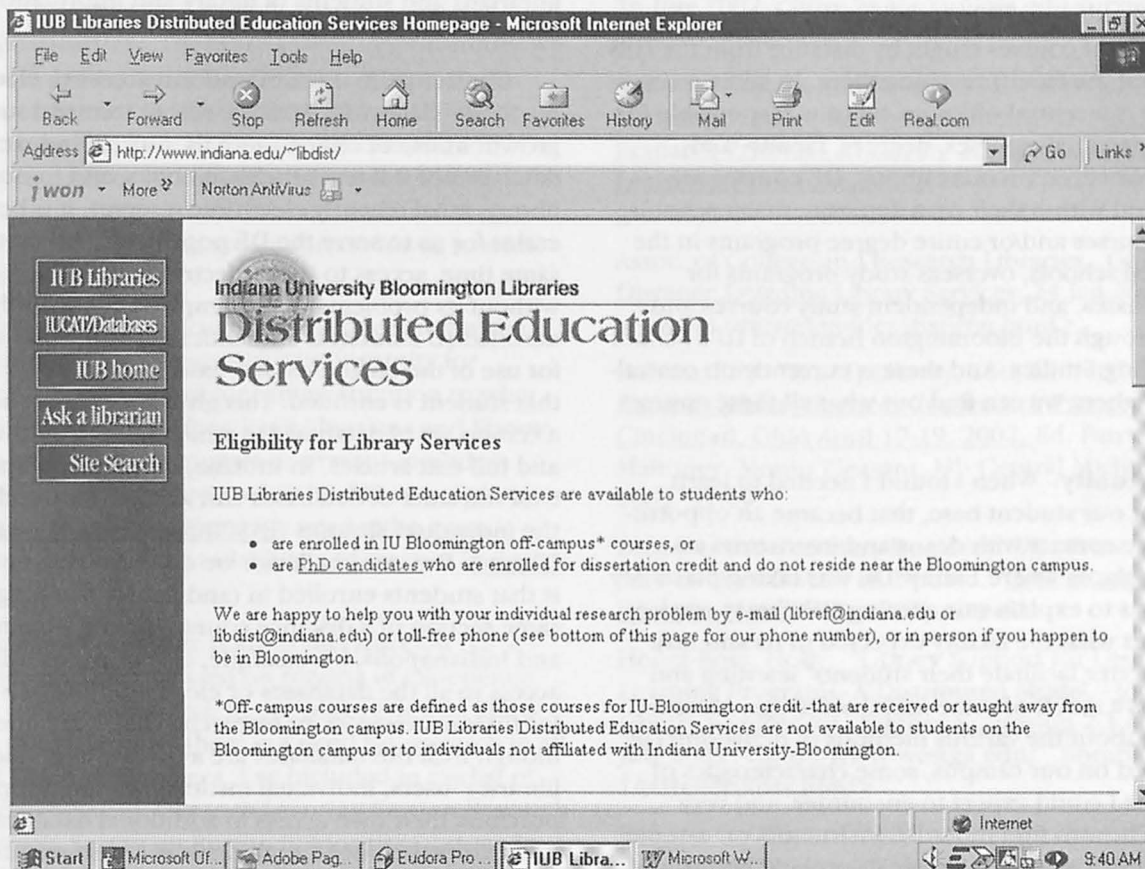

Figure 1. Indiana University Bloomington Libraries Distributed Education Web site.

provide to distance learners. These are primarily reference, document delivery, and circulation services, and are supplied by our Main Library or campus libraries. Our Web front page is our most visible means of getting DE students introduced to the use of our catalog, electronic databases, document delivery forms, and other Web resources, as well as our individualized (telephone and e-mail) reference assistance.

Our Reference Department has a long history of answering queries and providing research assistance by phone or e-mail for our users (Bristow and Buechley). Included in that population are students who are enrolled but temporarily living away from campus. So taking on DE library services did not introduce a new concept into our department; rather it is an extension of what we are used to doing. We are also currently investigating Web-based "chat" reference, which is a service of potentially great value to DE as well as on-campus students. There would be enormous benefit for DE students in being able to connect with a real person in the library! These students are often seeking a way to feel "connected" to the campus and to identify a contact person who can help them navigate the electronic information maze of the campus and libraries.

Some DE-related challenges and the opportunities that have arisen out of those challenges include:

Challenge 1: Finding out who the distance students and faculty are. This means trying to determine the entire list of courses taught by distance from the IUB campus, and the faculty teaching them. In some universities there is a central office on campus responsible for coordinating all DE courses, degrees, faculty, and students. However, on our campus, DE courses are administered within their own departments or schools. We offer courses and/or entire degree programs in the professional schools, overseas study programs for undergraduates, and independent study courses and degrees through the Bloomington branch of IU's School of Continuing Studies. And there is currently no centralized place where we can find out what all these courses are.

Opportunity: When I found I needed to learn more about our student base, that became an opportunity to make contact with deans and instructors on campus in places where I knew DE was taking place. My purpose was to explain our existing DE library services and find out what the faculty expected of us and how we could better facilitate their students' learning and research. As a result of these initial meetings, I learned something about the various methods of delivering DE courses used on our campus, some characteristics of the students I could expect to encounter, and very important, how to find other DE instructors on campus. I offered to visit televised classes to provide library instruction sessions specifically designed for those

classes, and several opportunities then opened up for me to visit classes, develop a Web page tailored to a class's needs, and write articles for departments' student newsletters.

Challenge 2: We know by anecdotal evidence in the literature and research that DE students are often reluctant to use the library services we provide for them. They often prefer to use their local public libraries, finding them more comfortable places, which tend to support lifelong learning (Barsun 43-44). I believe this is a challenge for us to address, just as the academic library community as a whole is looking at new paradigms for delivering services to students.

Opportunity: An opportunity here is to try to find out why students would rather use their local, usually public, libraries, and to try to better publicize our services and tailor them to the students' needs. Are we doing enough outreach? Is our publicity to faculty adequate? Are we doing the right things to attract these students and make them comfortable using our online services and resources? Are they using our databases, but reluctant to call or write and ask us for help? Are we available in the evenings and on weekends when many distance students need to do their course work? Should we work with local librarians in Indiana cities to forge relationships that will be mutually beneficial? These questions provide great research opportunities for librarians and students of library and information science.

Challenge 3: Lack of uniform access to electronic resources statewide. With the recent tremendous growth in use of online journals, journal indexes, databases of full-text articles, e-books, and in our library, most recently electronic reserves, it is becoming easier for us to serve the DE population. But at the same time, access to these electronic resources is not without its problems. For example, any currently enrolled IU student is authenticated by a proxy server for use of the databases purchased by the campus where that student is enrolled. This gives the student access to a certain set of databases in which to search for citations and full-text articles. In Indiana, this includes the INSPIRE suite of databases and also others purchased by the individual libraries (INSPIRE: Indiana Virtual Library). But one challenge we discovered early last year is that students enrolled in (and faculty teaching) the same section of a distance course in both Bloomington and Indianapolis, for example, do not necessarily have access to all the databases or electronic journals needed for their coursework or research. This is because even though INSPIRE databases are available to all Indiana libraries' users, individual institutions and campuses purchase their own access to additional databases. The instructors then need to find a way to use resources that everyone in the class can access, or to make the articles available in some other way.

Opportunity: The opportunity here is certainly for us to make electronic access more universal across campuses. And there is an effort being made on the part of our administration to address this situation at the statewide level. Fortunately, the IUB Libraries also this year began a pilot project for electronic reserves, which makes it possible for instructors to place electronic copies of many texts and articles on reserve for their distance students. This very successful project has shown very high use statistics so far and is another example of an opportunity for us to succeed in serving our distance users.

Challenge 4: DE librarians can easily feel isolated. We are usually the only person working with all the aspects of DE services in our libraries. Our colleagues may not have a full understanding of what we do and what challenges and concerns we face. A 1995 survey of DE librarians conducted by Newsome and Rosen showed that 70% of respondents "reported feelings of professional isolation." In addition, DE services are minimally represented in the curricula in schools of library and information science. Alexander Slade, in his 2002 paper on research in DE library services, finds that, at least as of 1994, few schools of library and information science included distance learning in their curricula or emphasized it as an area of research (Slade 4).

Opportunities: There are several opportunities we can identify here. One is to work with others in our libraries or districts to inform them about DE library services. I am fortunate to have on my campus an advisory committee of librarians who work with me. I'm able to inform them about DE issues and have their input on areas they think are important for us to work on together.

Serving on campus committees concerned with DE provides another very important opportunity for exposure on campus and for calling attention to what the library has to offer. Practicing librarians and library staff can offer to teach courses or present modules about DE library services in schools of library and information science. Perhaps we need to be more forthcoming about our availability and interest in doing this.

While there is a large body of literature on DE library services that is based on reports of experience, there is very little research in the peer-reviewed litera-ture on this subject, so there is a need for research in all areas of DE library services. I've included in my list of references the ACRL Distance Learning Section Research Committee's Survey on Research Priorities ... done in 2000. This is a rich source for ideas about areas in need of research.

CONCLUSION:

It is evident that for each challenge encountered, we can create opportunities to meet that challenge and improve the quality of services we provide for DE students. We have traditionally served our residential students when they come to the library and find us, and increasingly now reach out to those same students remotely by means of a rapidly expanding universe of electronic resources. We do that very well with our residential students; but with the growth of DE in institutions like IUB and the tremendous upswing nationally and internationally in DE programs in the last decade, and furthermore in this time of easy access to online sources by many, fewer students are seeking out their librarians (Lipow 1-3). If we don't reach out to all our users, as we do for DE students, and promote our services to students and instructors, students will not learn how to integrate library resources into their coursework and research to their greatest advantage. Publicizing our library services not only to DE faculty and students, but to all our users and administrators is becoming increasingly important in academic libraries.

WORKS CITED

ACRL Library Data Tables 2000. Summary Data: Trends in Distance Learning Library Service. Institutions Granting Associate of Arts Degrees (Carnegie code A). 16 July 2002 <http://www.virginia.edu/surveys/ACRL/2000/trends.html>.

Assoc. of College and Research Libraries. Distance Learning Section. Research Committee. Survey on Research Priorities in Library Services for Distance Learning, April-June 2000. 16 July 2002 <http://gateway3.uvic.ca/dls/summary.html>.

Assoc. of College and Research Libraries. Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services. 24 Jan 2002 <http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/distlrng.html>.

Barsun, Rita. "It's My Library, Too, Isn't It?" Tenth Off-Campus Library Services Conference Proceedings, Cincinnati, Ohio April 17-19, 2002. Ed. Patrick B. Mahoney. Mount Pleasant, MI: Central Michigan U., 2002. 41-49.

Bristow, Ann and Mary Buechley. "Academic Reference Service Over E-Mail: an Update." College and Research Libraries News 56.7 (1995): 459-62.

Heller-Ross, Holly. "Library Support for Distance Learning Programs: A Distributed Model." Journal of Library Services for Distance Education 2.1 (1999) 16 July 2002 <http://www.westga.edu/~library/jlsde/vol2/1/HHeller-Ross.html>.

Indiana U. Office of Distributed Education. School of Continuing Studies. 16 July 2002 <http://www.indiana.edu/~iude/>.

INSPIRE: Indiana Virtual Library 23 July 2002 <http://www.inspire.net/>.

Institute for Higher Education Policy. Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education (2000) <http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/Quality.pdf>.

Lipow, Anne G. "Serving the Remote User: Reference Service in the Digital Environment." Information Online & On Disc 99: Strategies for the Next Millennium. Proceedings of the Ninth Australasian Information Online & On Disc Conference and Exhibition Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Sydney Australia, 19–21 January 1999. 18 July 2002 <http://www.csu.edu.au/special/online99/proceedings99/200.htm>

Newsome, Jim, and Vicki Rosen. "Isolation or Affiliation: How Distance Education Librarians Stay Connected." Seventh Off-Campus Library Services Conference Proceedings: San Diego, California, October 25-27, 1995. Comp. Carol J. Jacob. Mount Pleasant, MI: Central Michigan U, 1995. 317-328.

North Central Association. Best Practices For Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs. 16 July 2002 <http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/resources/electronic_degrees/Best_Pract_DEd.pdf>.

Slade, Alexander L. "Research on Library Services for Distance Learning: an International Perspective." Information Services in an Electronic Environment. Ed. G.E.Gorman. International Yearbook of Library and Information Management. 2001/2002. London: Library Association Publishing, 2002. 187-233.

Slade, Alexander L. and Marie A. Kascus. Library Services for Off-Campus and Distance Education: the Second Annotated Bibliography. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1996.

—. Library Services for Open and Distance Learning: the Third Annotated Bibliography. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2000.

Western Assoc. of Schools and Colleges. Good Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs. 18 July 2002 <http://www.wascweb.org/senior/Good_Practices_in_DEd1.pdf>