LIBRARY SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM: GUIDELINES AND POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper streamlines the role of librarian and library services in distance education system. Some principles and guidelines have been given for establishing outreach library services. Recent technological, innovative ways as well as traditional means for imparting library services to remote users have been highlighted. Documentary method has been employed for data collection.

INTRODUCTION

In distance education system, learning takes place at the location of the student and not at the institution of instruction. Distance education system has revolutionized and democratized the delivery and accessibility of education and has also changed library and information service. 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 distance education system to provide effective distance library service. Providing post-graduate level off-campus library 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[1].

Recent innovations in the field of information technology have made the outreach library services possible and effective[2]. In distance education, librarians:

- Ensure that library and information services conform to accreditation requirements.
- Develop and maintain quality distance education information resources, such as reading lists for students and course developers (educators, course coordinators, 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.

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- Support the research and scholarship activities of distance education faculty.
- Identify other institutions that can assist with delivering distance library services to students.
- Must be included in distance education course teams/committees to ensure that timely distance library services and professional advice are available to students and faculty and library collections effectively support their needs[3].

OUTLINE FOR ESTABLISHING DISTANCE LIBRARIANSHIP

Library and information service for distance education is often an extension of the institution's existing traditional library service such as consultation, reference and bibliographic searches and course reading material. The basic library and information services the distance learners need are the access to information resources, such as texts, supplementary reading and reference material and the learning how to find the available information needed and readers' advisory service.

The outline for establishing distance librarianship encompasses to:
- Produce a mission statement of clear goals and guiding principles for providing library services tailored to the institution's distance education programmes.
- Assess the library and information service needs of distance education programmes, in consultation with course teams/ committees, faculty and possibly a student survey.
- Determine the best media and delivery methods for distance library services.
- Determine additional costs such as new or additional materials, equipment and staff and their training.
- Establish the level of funding available from the institution, and explore ways to minimise and share costs through grants, collaboration and resource sharing with other institutions, or by forming corporate partnerships.
- Establish a continuous review process to ensure that student and faculty needs are met.
- Initiate a PR programme to promote awareness of distance library services, targeted to students and faculty[4].

ACRL GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE LEARNING LIBRARY SERVICES

The Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) "Guidelines" assume the following precepts:

Management

The chief administrative officers and governance organizations of the originating institution bear the fiscal and administrative responsibilities, through the active leadership of the library administration, to fund, staff, and supervise library services and resources in support of distance learning programs.

Finances

The originating institution should provide continuing, optimum financial support for addressing the library needs of the distance learning community in accordance with the appropriate ACRL Standards and with available professional, state, or regional accrediting agency specifications.

Personnel

Personnel involved in the management and coordination of distance learning library services include the chief administrators and governance organizations of the originating institution and the library administration and other personnel as appropriate, the librarian-coordinator managing the services, the library subject specialists, additional professional staff in the institution, support staff from a variety of departments, and the administrator(s), librarian(s), and staff from the distance learning site(s).The originating institution should provide, either through the library or directly to separately administered units, professional and support personnel with clearly defined responsibilities at the appropriate location(s) and in the number and quality necessary to attain the goals and objectives for library services to the distance learning program.

Facilities

The originating institution should provide facilities, equipment, and communication links sufficient in size, number, scope, accessibility, and timeliness to reach all students and to attain the objectives of the distance learning programs. Arrangements may vary and should be appropriate to programs offered.

Resources

The originating institution is responsible for providing or securing convenient, direct physical and electronic access to library materials for distance learning programs equivalent to those provided in traditional settings and in sufficient quality, depth, number, scope, currentness, and formats.

Services

The library services offered to the distance learning community should be designed to meet effectively a wide range of informational, bibliographic, and user needs. The exact combination of central and site staffing for distance learning library services will differ from institution to institution.

Documentation/Statistics

To provide records indicating the degree to which the originating institution is meeting these "Guidelines" in providing library services to its distance learning programs, the library, and, when appropriate, the distance learning library units, should have available current copies of all the relevant documentation/statistics.

Library Education

To enable the initiation of an academic professional specialization in distance learning library services, schools of library and information science should include this growing area of specialization within librarianship in their curriculum courses and course units[5].

WAYS TO DELIVER DISTANCE LIBRARY SERVICES

Following are some possibilities for remote access to library services, and libraries are beginning to take advantage of them:

Telephone and Teleconferencing

The telephone is the most traditional way of providing reference and information service, etc to remote users. In today's jargon, the telephone is a real-time interactive audio application. Telephone reference is tried and true, tested and proven. Telephone reference will continue to play a role in serving remote users[6]. Teleconferencing is the use of audio, video, or computer systems, linked by a communications channel, to allow widely separated individuals to take part in a discussion or meeting. A librarian may demonstrate concepts and provide answers to reference queries in teleconferencing[7].

WWW, OPAC and Online Databases

World Wide Web (WWW) is an Internet (a network of networks) server that offers multimedia and hypertext links[8]. Many libraries have launched their websites and online public access catalogue (OPAC) on www accessible via Internet[9]. Database is a shared collection of logically related data, designed to meet the information needs of multiple users at a time[10]. A database (may be full-text) is designed to permit retrieval of information to satisfy a wide variety of user needs[11]. The library may create its own database or subscribe to commercial

database(s) and may provide its users with online/offline access with/without a password.

Electronic Mail (Email) and Voice Mail

Libraries began using electronic mail in reference service in the late 1980s and the service is now fairly commonplace and uncontroversial. A link with an e-mail address and a form can be placed on a library's homepage. E-mail reference differs from telephone and traditional desk reference in at least three ways: answers to questions are in written form, answers may be distributed by listserv allowing all reference staff to view, and communication is asynchronous instead of in real time. Written answers may benefit users who can save the answer for review at a later time or print the answer out if it contains instructions or a referral. Since questions are not answered in real time, reference staff can, if necessary, take the time to provide a detailed answer to a question[12]. Email can also be in the form of audio (voicemail), video and multimedia. Voice mail is a computerized store-and-forward system for prerecorded voice messages[13].

Internet Chat and Instant Messaging

Internet chat is text-based real-time communication. Users on one end of a networked computer type message through a computer keyboard and message recipients at the end of another network computer see the message on their monitors and respond in kind. Chat does not require users in a computer lab or users at home to use a telephone, and answers to questions can be communicated immediately, unlike e-mail. Text-based Internet chat is a blending of telephonic and e-mail communication, which would seem to be particularly useful for a library service such as reference which is often defined as "the process of answering questions."

With the advent of the World Wide Web and Java-enabled browsers that permit chat programs to be integrated into web pages, the user would be able to click on a link on library's web page, type a message in an interactive form, and be able to establish a real-time connection with library personnel. Chat is now one of the most popular features of the Internet: of the 107 million people who use the Internet, 40 to 50 million use chat. Chat is currently being used by educational institutions in distance learning[14].

Pager/Paging and Talkback

TalkBack is a software application used by the State University of New York to offer real-time reference service. It is simple to use, web-based, it does not require the user to download any software, it does not have advertising, and it is free. TalkBack is a paging programme that works in conjunction with server software. A link on a web page connects the user to a TalkBack form. The

remote user types a message into the form and then clicks on a button to send the message. When the message is sent, a window pops up on the machine where the software is installed allowing the message to be read. A reply can be sent back to the remote user. The process can then be repeated if necessary. TalkBack is not exactly an Internet chat application; its author describes it as a "world wide web interactive pager." Paging and instant messaging programmes are becoming increasingly popular on the Internet as alternatives to chat rooms[15].

Audio and Video Conferencing

Audio/video conferencing is a method used to allow people at remote locations to join in conference and share information, all online[16]. A video camera and a speakerphone are linked to a PC at each site, and the PC is in turn is linked to the network. It will be called audio conferencing without video cameras at both ends. There have been a number of experiments with video conferencing in reference service in the past few years. With new collaborative software programmes, however, video is one option out of many for real time collaboration, thereby increasing the possibility that the interaction will be successful. For example, if a user does not have a video camera or does not want to be seen, the user may still communicate in real time using chat. A librarian may also communicate with chat and demonstrate concepts with whiteboard and application sharing[17].

Collaborative Softwares

The collaborative software programmes include **Daedalus, GroupWise Web Publisher, Norton Connect Net, Microsoft NetShow, Microsoft NetMeeting,** and **Reilly Web Board**. These programs besides others are also designed for groups to hold conferences at a distance. They saw the possibility of applying this software to reference by attempting to simulate traditional reference exchanges for remote users with a combination of chat software and audio and video applications. Microsoft's **NetMeeting** was the most appealing program because its features are most adaptable to a reference transaction, the program is free, and may be supported by maintaining a server that affiliated users may use to connect with each other. Features include chat, whiteboard, application sharing, file sharing, and audio and video sharing. Whiteboard is a window in which a librarian and remote user may write text, draw lines, highlight text, or point to images. For example, the image of a library's home page may be pasted into the whiteboard and a librarian can then point to or highlight a link for the user. Application sharing allows a librarian and remote user to view the same application. For example, if a remote user has a question about searching an online catalogue or database, a librarian may demonstrate the search and the remote user may view the search as it is taking place. Similarly, the librarian may observe a remote user executing a search and advice if necessary. File sharing allows two users to share files and is probably more useful for two librarians collaborating on a paper than for a librarian and remote user involved in a

reference transaction. Audio sharing allows remote users to communicate with each other in real time using audio. A sound card, speakers, and a microphone are required. Video sharing occurs in a small window in NetMeeting: participants need either a video-capture card and camera or a video camera that connects through the computer's parallel (printer) port[18].

Radio and Television

Both radio and television can also be used for library services, especially the reference service. Different instructional programmes regarding library services may be broadcast at specific timings with pre-told schedule. Library users may take part in these programmes in the real-time environment using postal mail, telephone, fax, email, or by sitting in another nearby TV studio for watching, hearing and talking to librarian through a host at central studio. The librarian may guide/serve the users accordingly.

Videotext and Teletext

Videotext/Teletext is a system for transmitting text and displaying it on a screen, covering information transmitted either by TV signals (teletext) or by signals sent down telephone lines (viewdata). A library can also use this system for sending information/study material in the form of signals to its remote clientele[19].

Regional and Mobile Libraries

Many distance education institutions have countrywide and even abroad their regional/branch campuses. These branches may also have approachable libraries for the students and resource persons of their jurisdiction. These libraries must be self-sufficient in resources to better serve its community. Mobile library service on train, bus/truck/van and boat can also be provided to remote users with pre-advertised schedule[20]. Animals can also be used where the automobiles cannot reach[21].

Electronic Bookmobiles

Mobile applications of library technology are leading to the development of the electronic bookmobile, which is changing the nature of outreach services in dramatic ways. These include online circulation, optical discs, fax machines, cellular telephones and new hardware as under:

Online Circulation

Online circulation is ultimately the most rewarding level of service. It requires a telecommunication medium: currently libraries are using packet radio, cellular telephone or hookups to telephone poles to link the bookmobile microcomputer to the main library computer.

Packet radio employs FM radio waves to transmit online computerized data. A typical setup requires radiomodems, which are attached to the main computer and each remote terminal, and antennae.

Cellular telephones can be used in a similar way for online access. Cellular service, which utilizes microwaves for wireless telecommunications, also requires special modems at the main computer and remote terminals.

The third online option involves hooking up the bookmobile computer to a telephone pole for connection to the main computer[22].

Optical Discs and Reference Service
The opportunity to provide reference sources and to test demand is now available on CD-ROM and other space-saving optical disc media. To date, several libraries have employed CD-ROM library catalogues on their bookmobiles with great success. Others have small reference collections on board and have installed small, lightweight copiers, all popular services with customers. For bookmobiles traveling remote and rural routes, the bookmobiles copier may be available to residents of the area. Electronic reference collection, e-databases and e-zines recorded on CD-ROM may also be sent to library users offline [23].

Fax Machines
Chesapeake Public Library System (Virginia) began using a fax machine on their bookmobile in 1991 and has been able to provide information from the main library quickly for their patrons. Fax can be a key element in providing full reference service to outreach patrons.

Cellular Telephones
Bookmobiles have had a cellular telephone on board; most have used it primarily for emergency calls, while others have made greater use of the phone, calling the library to obtain routine circulation information and answers to reference questions. Libraries unable to add any other kinds of automation to their bookmobiles find a cellular telephone to be an important first step in connecting the mobile unit to the resources at the library, with both employees and patrons benefiting from the convenience of an onboard telephone.

New Hardware
Among developments worth tracking is **mobile satellite service** (MSS), which provides two-way messaging and position tracking services. **Teleports** are also being developed that will use satellites to provide advanced, high-speed telecommunications services to regional areas. Until these services become available to libraries, improvements and cost-reductions in the technologies will help expand the successful use of automation on bookmobiles[24].

Postal and Courier Services

A library can also send study material (electronic reference collection, e-database, e-zines recorded on CD-ROM and hard copies of journal articles, etc.) to its remote patrons by post/courier with/without charges. Many such services are available as Pakistan Post (UMS, airmail, etc.), TCS, OCS, DHL, SMS, and so on.

Resource Sharing

As a matter of fact, no individual library can be self-sufficient in its resources due to many known reasons. It is therefore more imperative to share resources of other libraries. The distance learning institution may make an agreement for services and resource sharing with such libraries of any type situated at the remote locations where the institution's branch campus/library is not available but students/resource persons are there.

CONCLUSION

Distance education system is getting popularity day-by-day and spreading rapidly worldwide. This system is mostly without face-to-face contact/ interactivity. For making this system more effective and qualitative, it is desirable that distance education and library services should grow together. The implementation of above-mentioned techniques may make the qualitative benefits of this valuable system of learning manifold.

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