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Are You Out There? Challenges of Connecting with Distance Learners

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Are You Out There?

Challenges of Connecting with Distance Learners

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Outline

- Library DL outreach history
 - Environmental scan
 - Major issues
- Survey results
- Changes we have implemented
 - Library efforts to reach out to DL students
- Conclusion – Next steps

Importance of Library DL outreach

Land-grant mission – extend knowledge far beyond the campus borders.

The Access Entitlement Principle*

“All students, faculty members, administrators, staff members, or any other members of an institution of higher education are entitled to the library services and resources of that institution, including direct communication with the appropriate library personnel, regardless of where they are physically located in relation to the campus; where they attend class in relation to the institution’s main campus; or the modality by which they take courses. Academic libraries must, therefore, meet the information and research needs of all these constituents, wherever they may be.”

When we improve library services & access for DL students, everybody benefits!

* **Standards for DL Library Services:**

<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinesdistancelearning>

DL Programs @ ISU

ISU College	Certificate Programs: Undergrad	Certificate Programs: Grad	Degree Programs: Undergrad	Degree Programs: Masters	Degree Programs: PhD
Ag & Life Sciences	2	4	1 *	5	
Business		2		1	
Design				1	
Engineering		11		11	
Human Sciences		6		4	2 *
Liberal Arts & Sciences			1	1	
VetMed		1			

* Hybrid programs, requiring some on-campus activities

Source: <https://www.distance.iastate.edu/programs/programs-by-college/>

How did we start?

- 2006 - DL Taskforce formed
 - Members – library staff from Reference & Instruction, IT, Tech Services, campus DL & Extension staff
- Charges
 - Review current literature & standards
 - Local environmental scan
 - Library policies, services, & staffing

Taskforce Findings

Three critical impediments to Library's DL efforts:

- **Lack of dedicated staffing**
 - No ongoing coordinated plan for DL
 - No established communication
- **Library website**
 - Language on Library website not DL-relevant
 - Remote access login hard to find
 - AskUs – at bottom of web page
 - No information on how to get physical items
- **Lack of communication & outreach**
 - No outreach efforts to DL students or instructors
 - No communication between Library and central campus DL unit
 - No internal communication within Library regarding DL issues

Taskforce Recommendations

Staffing: Hire a distance learning librarian or create a committee

Website: Introduce DL-relevant content

- Create & maintain DL web pages
- Employ intuitive terminology
- Link DL pages prominently on the Library website home page

Communication & Outreach

- Survey ISU DL students & instructors to identify needs & assess library services
- Commit to use & act on the survey results
- Collaborate with central unit in survey design, dissemination & data analysis

Outcomes

Library DL Committee was created in 2006 (no DL librarian was hired)

Committee work on Library website

- Created DL web pages; later created DL LibGuide
- Aligned terminology with campus
- DL link on Library website home page

Committee Outreach work

- Surveys of DL students & instructors
- Collaborate with Registrar's Office to acquire DL student & instructor emails
- Survey results guide Committee's work
- Regular email communications with students & instructors
- Keep Library & campus colleagues informed

Challenges of DL Library Outreach

- **Decentralized** campus DL organization
 - Hard to identify DL instructors & courses
 - Librarian DL outreach difficult as a result
- **Dynamic** student group
 - No guarantee those we reach this semester will be enrolled next semester / year
- **Diverse** learners with different needs
 - Pre-collegiate thru Ph.D. students
 - Certificate programs and Degree programs
- **Disciplinary** differences
 - Gen Ed thru STEM – Social Sciences – Humanities
 - Library research relevance

DL Faculty Survey Results (2009)

< #Recipients: 101 | #Respondents: 32 | Response rate: 32% >

Library research is...	% Agree - StrAgree
important to student success in my DL course(s)	75%
encouraged in my DL course(s)	31%
required in my DL course(s)	19%

Library Resources / Services	Own Awareness / Use	Referred DL Students to Use
Library website	57%	26%
Article indexes	73%	19%
Course Reserves	71%	17%
Interlibrary Loan	82%	14%
Ask Us (reference)	71%	5%

DL Faculty Survey Results (2017)

< #Recipients: 292 | #Respondents: 26 | Response rate: 9% >

Stumbling blocks my students encounter:

Difficulties	%Instructors Agree
Knowing which resources to use	39%
Knowing how to search specific indexes/databases	33%
Login difficulties (Library website subscription resources)	28%
Navigating the Library website	28%
Finding relevant articles	22%

DL Student Survey Results

Response Rate & Demographics

	2011	2013	2016
# Recipients	1145	1200	1319
# Respondents *	353	405	467
Response Rate	31%	34%	35%
% 100+ Miles away	61%	64%	66%
% Grad Students	73%	75%	79%

* Usable responses (over age 18)

15% increase in DL student numbers 2011 to 2016

Top Challenges for DL Students

Challenges	Verbatim Student Survey Comments
Library website	“Library website is terrible. Hard to navigate.”
Off-campus Login	“I don’t like that ISU Library requires a different password from ISU Net ID”
Finding articles	“...it is challenging to find my way to the correct library site to find my journal articles.”
Need Instruction	“Very difficult to figure out how and what to search for and searching capability doesn’t seem flexible...”
Low Awareness *	“I have a hard time getting books I need; I live over 60 miles away and there are [sic] often only 1 copy.”

* Low awareness of DL-relevant services & resources: Interlibrary Loan, AskUs (chat ref), LibGuides, etc.

Top Challenges for Us

Challenges	Changes
Library website	Redesigned; Decentered (LibGuide, Blackboard modules); Transformed authoring & design control
Off-campus Login	Coordinate with other units on DL student onboarding; Use clear language in login instructions; Distinguish from other logins
Finding articles	Online instruction; More communication; Transformed website authoring & library index list
Need Instruction	LibGuide; More online instruction; More communication; Promote instruction to DL instructors
Low Awareness *	Semester emails; Social media; Promoting LibGuide; Increase email communications; Library newsletter

Assessment: Ease of Use | No Use

% Students indicating “Easy-Very Easy”

Library Resources	2011 (N=325-352)	2013 (N=374-405)	2016 (N=458-465)	% Change 2011 to 2016
Library website	46%	54%	64%	39%
Quick Search	28%	41%	62%	121%
Ejournal articles	43%	49%	61%	42%
Article indexes	43%	44%	57%	33%
Not used at all				
Library Resources	2011 (N=325-352)	2013 (N=374-405)	2016 (N=458-465)	% Change 2011 to 2016
DL Library Guide	68%	87%	61%	-10%
Interlibrary Loan	89%	90%	74%	-17%
LibGuides	90%	87%	61%	-32%
AskUs	89%	85%	72%	-19%

Some Next Steps

- **Library website**
 - Implement new A-Z index for Library databases
 - Team involvement in website redesign
 - Continue to advocate for single campus login
- **Communication**
 - More frequent targeted emails to students, faculty
 - Goal to promote 1 DL service / resource per month
 - DL Committee Communication sub-group
- **Instruction outreach**
 - DL Committee Instruction sub-group
 - Leverage new LMS for Library instruction resources
 - Renew / develop more online instruction videos & tutorials

Questions?

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