



Getting Started: A Guide for New Distance Learning Librarians

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Welcome to the field of Distance Library Services! Whether you're new to librarianship, or have just made a career shift into this arena, we're sure you'll find this to be a challenging and rewarding area of librarianship. The abbreviation DLS will be used to refer to library services for any off-campus course, whether synchronous or asynchronous, live or via a technological medium. Depending on your campus setting, you may provide services to students who are distributed widely or at a few discrete locations. The *Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services* will give you additional information on the administration of DLS programs; this pamphlet will offer you some practical tips to help you to begin to fulfill those *Guidelines*.

Where to begin?

Remember: Services off-campus must always be equivalent to those on-campus. That doesn't necessarily mean *exactly the same*, but it does mean that distance learning students should have access, somehow, to library/learning resources and services, designed to support the specific programs offered. These services/resources should meet the same standard of academic quality as the same courses offered in traditional settings. That means that your library should either: a) own the resource itself and provide appropriate, direct services; b) provide electronic access; or, c) have formal agreements in place for provision of materials and services by other organizations.

Get a sense of the program as it stands

- What courses/degrees/programs are offered?
 - Resources: Course schedules, bulletins, Web site, administrators, faculty
 - Many times you will be in contact with a variety of departments
- How, where, and when are the courses delivered?
- Who takes these courses?
 - Resources: Surveys, faculty interviews, focus groups
- What library services are in place?
 - Reference, Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery, Satellite Libraries, Courier Service, etc. (see "services," below)
 - Resources: Library documentation, library staff

Begin making a strategic plan

- Where do we want to go?
 - What services are missing? What services are under- or over-utilized?
 - What services and materials are offered for these courses on the main campus or at other sites or in other programs of your institutions?
 - Survey (briefly) and talk to your students and/or faculty

- Find out about institutional projections for the future and become involved in curriculum planning
- What do we have to do to get there?
 - Develop an action plan describing the strategies and steps you will take to implement your program, including the resources available and/or required

Outcomes of strategic planning

- A clear and succinct mission/vision statement
- Assessment of internal and external factors that effect your services
- List of goals you wish to achieve

Evaluate services

- How well have you met your goals?
- Analyze statistics
- Conduct surveys, focus groups and other evaluative measurements

What services and resources should my program offer?

Whether services are provided through a dedicated DLS department, or distributed throughout the library will vary from program to program. However, all libraries will need to provide students with:

Collections & facilities that meet student needs

How?

- Document Delivery & Interlibrary Loan: Delivers the full text of articles and books to library users, whether from other libraries, or the institution's own.
 - Format: Paper or electronic, depending on item
 - Delivery mode: Courier Service (Between campus sites or between libraries within a system, including public or other academic libraries) U.S. Mail, e-mail, or other electronic
 - Concern: Promptness. Turn-around time should be minimized.
 - These two services may be separate or combined, and integrated into services on-campus or not, depending on the structure of your organization.
- Agreements with other libraries: Make agreements with other libraries for student use of facilities and materials
 - Reciprocal borrowing agreements
 - Fee-based agreements
 - State or system-wide borrowing cards
 - Know the policies of libraries that your students are likely to use; you may not need a formal agreement to get them services. Document these as you would agreements.
- Satellite libraries

- Collection development for these facilities is like that of any library, concentrating on the needs of that location, within budgetary limits.
- Where physical collections do not exist on branch campuses, space for consultations, etc. should be set aside, with library information available to walk-in users
- Reserves
 - Electronic reserves
 - Other libraries are often willing to hold course reserves for regional students
- Online, full-text and bibliographic resources
 - Remote access to online materials is a must, preferably through a proxy server
 - Always think of yourself as the advocate for off-campus users. When collection development decisions are made on campus, remind colleagues that electronic materials are accessible 24/7 both on and off-campus, with no waiting time.

Reference Assistance

How?

- Telephone (many have 800 or local numbers)
- E-mail
- Virtual Reference/Chat services
- On-site, by appointment
- On-site at satellite libraries
- Web pages

Library instruction teaching information literacy skills

How?

- On-site
- Online tutorials and user guides
- Printed handouts, user guides, etc.
- Web pages

Communication and marketing

Because of the nature of the programs and students we service, distance librarians must be more pro-active than their traditional library counterparts.

- Create a marketing plan
- Have a great Website
- Publicize all services
- Publicize all contact information: phone, e-mail, etc.
- Contact faculty teaching in your programs
- Contact administrators of off-campus programs
- Contact students in the programs
- E-mail distribution lists, paper flyers, web pages, mailed materials are all avenues of publicity

- Be in touch with all stakeholders as often as you possibly can
- If you can make the time, join committees that have nothing to do with DLS—you'll be surprised at how many connections across campus that you can make this way, and how useful they will be later on

Documentation: Keep all of these for accreditation and annual reporting purposes

- Printed user guides and copies of online guides
- Statements of mission/purpose, policies, regulations, and procedures
- Statistics on use
- Statistics on collections
- Assessment measures
- Organizational charts
- Budgets
- Professional vitae
- Position descriptions
- Formal agreements
- Instructional materials and schedules
- Evidence of involvement in curriculum development and planning

Recommended Readings:

ACRL Distance Learning Section Guidelines Committee. (2000) *Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services* (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/distlrng.html>)

Goodson, Carol. (2001) *Providing Library Services for Distance Education Students: A How-To-Do It Manual*. New York: Neal-Schuman.

Off-campus Library Services Conference Proceedings. (1986-2000) The Off-campus Library Services Conference Proceedings Mt. Pleasant: Central Michigan Univ. (ordering information available <http://ocls.cmich.edu/ocls2002pubs.htm>)

Slade, A.L. *Library Services for Distance Learning: The Fourth Bibliography* (2002) <http://uviclib.uvic.ca/dls/bibliography4.html> (See also the first through third printed bibliographies: Englewood CO: Libraries Unlimited).

OFF-CAMP listserv. See <http://listserv.utk.edu/archives/offcamp.html> for subscription information and archives.