EDITORIAL

The quality and availability of support services for distance learners is an important issue in distance education. Little has been written, however, about the need for or the provision of library services to distant students. In this issue of DEOSNEWS, Thomas Abbott of the University of Maine-Augusta describes research that ties an active library use instruction (information literacy) program to students' overall involvement in the educational process.

OFF-CAMPUS LIBRARY SERVICES PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION AND STUDENT PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS AT A DISTANCE

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INTRODUCTION

In national studies of first year college students, UCLA Professor of Higher Education Alexander Astin concluded that students who were more involved in the activities of their college experience not only learned more but exhibited greater personal development.

Astin's original, early 1970s, sample and analysis included 243,156 students and a follow-up of 101,000 of them after their graduation. The Cooperative Institute Research Program (CIRP) continues Astin's work today, having studied over five million students and 1200 institutions. Its "Freshman Studies" are annually reported in the "Chronicle of Higher Education."

In his original effort to identify why students did not persist in college, Astin found through cluster analysis that many of the reasons fell into one of several categories of students' involvement (or lack of it) in the learning process (Astin 1984).

His basic conclusion--rather simplistic but now backed by irrefutable data--was that "students learn and develop by
being involved" (Astin 1986).

As Dr. Astin developed his Theory of Involvements, a means of addressing success for college students, he argued that "for a particular curriculum or educational program to be effective, it must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about learning and development."

Alternately stated, "the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportionate to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (Astin 1984).

This research was designed to confirm as well as propose an explainable model for Astin's findings about involvement's role in personal development or maturity of college students. Self reports were collected from 348 college seniors on their level of involvement according to Astin's eight factors (clusters) of involvement. Also used was a maturity rating derived from Douglas Heath's Perceived Self Questionnaire (PSQ), a self-reporting maturity measure (Heath 1968,1978).

Astin's Involvement Factors are
1. Place of Residence--on or off campus
2. Involvement with Faculty
3. Familiarity with Professor in Major Field
4. Verbal Aggressiveness
5. Academic Involvement--study time, attitude
6. Involvement with Research
7. Involvement in Student Government
8. Athletic Involvement

Astin's research concluded that students not involved in these areas were more likely to drop out. In a related and secondary finding, Astin uncovered a relationship between involvement as generally expressed by these clusters and a variety of personal development or "affective-psychological" aspects of student change. These findings that more involved students show greater personal development in college are supported by Chickering (1969) and others. The starting point for the author's research was Astin's conclusion that the magnitude of "affective-psychological" change was directly related to the magnitude of involvement across the eight clusters.

FINDINGS

Usable responses from 348 college seniors at a highly respected private university were subject to tests of multiple regression and path analysis. Results indicated that significant and important relationships existed between several involvement measures and maturity or personal development factors.

The major findings were:

1. Involvement with faculty, one of the eight involvement factors, is related to two of Heath's personal development measures.

2. Involvement with faculty is related to the students' overall maturity score.
3. Being female contributes to the level of maturity.

4. Academic preparation (high school academic average and SAT scores) in general is positively related to involvement.

5. No significant relationship exists between college grade point average and total maturity score.

6. High personal development scores are related to greater satisfaction with the college experience.

7. Total involvement scores are significantly related to total maturity measures.

THE OFF-CAMPUS LIBRARY SERVICES MODEL DESIGNED FOR THE EDUCATIONAL NETWORK OF MAINE

The Off-Campus Library Services Program of the Community College of Maine (recently renamed the Education Network of Maine), was designed in 1987 by a task force of UM System Librarians working under the author's leadership.

The Task Force's primary responsibility was to devise a model of off-campus library services suited to highly rural, sparsely settled, and resource-scarce Maine, as well as to the Community College plan for the state. Today educational and support programming is delivered to 83 interactive television "receive" locations across Maine.

The Off-Campus Library Services program is built with four basic components at its foundation:

1. A philosophy of active involvement by the library in each student's education

2. Staff dedicated to providing service to off-campus students, who are integrated into all UMA campus functions, as well as University of Maine System library functions.

3. Local library contact points for all students regardless of their location

4. Easy access to library materials and delivery through a functional distribution system

PHILOSOPHY AND ATTITUDE

The mission and commitment of the University's Off-Campus Library Services program and staff are to integrate the goals of library use instruction (information literacy) into the learning process for all students. Awareness of studies that have indicated that only 20% of a campus's students account for 50% of all library borrowing and that many faculty do not understand that the library has an active role to play in the education of students made the project challenging, if not daunting (Knapp 1959). At the same time, the library staff could not pass up this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to design new programming and to invite faculty and students to raise
their expectations of how a library can support the learning process.

To meet this objective, library staff (the OCLS staff as well as the Director and other librarians) had to work closely with faculty serving distant learners to develop individualized support for their courses as well as to develop easy-to-use programs and systems of support for faculty and students.

The library staff at the Education Network of Maine plays a much more active role in students' education than is common at most institutions. They have developed and continue to teach a nine hour library-use module on ITV as part of the three credit "Introduction to the College Experience" course, and they meet with most faculty who teach on ITV while their courses are being prepared.

Additionally, in support of the library's effort to redefine the library as a more active participant in the instructional process, the Arts and Humanities Academic Division has agreed with a request by the Library Director to move an important campus function to the library. Effective fall 1992, the University's Writing Coordinator now has her office in the library, where she can work collaboratively with the librarians on student learning and information literacy.

In a similar move, the new ITV Faculty Instructional Design Center, funded by an Annenberg grant to the Center for Distance Education, will be housed within the library. Working with the staff of the Center, librarians will again acquire another opportunity to become more involved in the instructional development process.

LIBRARY STAFF DEDICATED TO OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS

Early in the program's development, the University hired a Coordinator of Off-Campus Library Services (now Assistant Director of Learning Resources) based at UMA. Her work includes a variety of administrative and teaching responsibilities, as well as responsibility for managing the OCLS program and travelling to centers, high school sites, and communities to meet and develop working relationships and contracts with local librarians. She works with students and faculty to encourage the integration of library services and programming into all academic coursework provided to distant classroom sites. She coordinates resources and responds to needs by providing bibliographic instruction, requested books and articles, reference support for students, as well as course instruction. She also provides materials support for faculty and training and technical support for remote access to the on-line catalog.

LOCAL LIBRARY CONTACT POINT

Through the Assistant Director of Learning Resources, the University has been active in developing a library presence for students at each of the locations of the Educational Network of Maine. Included in varying degrees from community to community are reading resource rooms at the Centers, local library contact points, contracts with local public libraries for services, ready reference collections at Centers, and toll-free telephone access to campus for reference and instructional support.
ACCESS TO MATERIALS

Access to the University of Maine System on-line public access catalog (URSUS), which operates as a single database of the entire University of Maine System holdings (nine libraries and the state library), is available from computer terminals at each Network location and from students' homes via modem and PC or terminal. Students may search the catalog or library, locate an item, and, with a valid identification card and bar code, electronically request the item without further staff intervention. Material is delivered to the center or high school receive site by facsimile transmission, courier, or U.S. mail in three to eight days, depending on availability.

On-line access to a variety of journal indices with codes indicating who owns each item was added to the system beginning in the fall of 1992. Eventually the same requestor function used with the book collection will provide immediate access to periodical materials.

PROMOTING OFF-CAMPUS LIBRARY USE FOR DISTANT STUDENTS AS A MEANS OF PROMOTING FACULTY-Student INTERACTION

Three years ago, when the interactive television system began operation, skeptics claimed that learning would not happen unless it occurred in the classroom on a face-to-face basis. The greatest concern articulated by faculty was that technology inhibited faculty-student interaction. Students would not have the same ability or inclination to participate in class if they had to deal with a portable telephone and large classes and the lack of focus created by many students scattered across the state. Other early concerns included the lack of library services. It did not seem possible—or cost and staff effective—to provide adequate library support to all corners of the state.

Today, there is technical and staff support as well as extensive faculty training opportunities which encourage a variety of applications promoting faculty-student interaction for students at a distance; additionally, the library support system is nationally recognized and operating effectively. Many faculty teaching on the Network have successfully created faculty-student interaction and, in most courses, the library is involved.

The Off-Campus Library Services model program, created and operated by the University of Maine at Augusta and the Education Network of Maine, has been a successful contributor to the effort to promote and enhance the faculty-student interaction that is especially important in a distance learning environment. The Off-Campus Library Services program may even have an edge over library contacts with students in on-campus "face to face" classes because of its role as creator of new expectations in this more controlled environment. The OCLS program began on "day one" with the entire model for education and service in place. The library and Network staff promoted library use among students and faculty alike and, today, library use and the goal of information literacy is accepted as a natural and integral component to all distance education programming.
Students now have the ability to do research papers, annotated bibliographies, and other basic research from any of the 83 locations statewide. In the process, students consult with faculty on the type of article, book, report, or document to read to fulfill the assignment and, eventually, on the grading process. The level of interaction is significantly higher in this and similar library projects than with the traditional objective quiz or final exam.

Such faculty-student interaction evolving from the library’s new educational role is also important because it helps compensate for the lack of on-campus, face-to-face contact and related personal development opportunities students enjoy in the on-campus environment.

The most important role of the Off-Campus Library Services program, however, is in fulfilling the promise to the faculty to provide full student library support regardless of mode of instructional delivery or location of the class. Over the years, as the number of off-campus instructional programs increased, often driven only by economic crises, little planning and few support systems were created to supplement them. Faculty required by administrative directives to teach off-campus, where resources were limited or non existent, responded by “adjusting” standards--no longer requiring research papers or outside reading and expecting less of assuming more about the adults they were teaching. In a short time, good intentions came back to haunt these institutions. Reputations failed and word spread that the off-campus courses were watered down and required little work; if one could stand it, he or she could earn a degree with limited effort.

Today, thankfully, a comprehensive system of support staff and technologies provide academic support for faculty teaching on the Education Network of Maine and at many other fine institutions. Instructional designers, graphics staff, library educators, and television production specialists are now available to assist faculty. On the technical side, toll-free numbers, electronic voice mail, a complete array of library access services and, soon, a computer conferencing system all serve to promote the effective delivery of college level instruction and support to the students at 83 locations across Maine.

Such a model is not limited to a Maine application; it can be applied, with appropriate adjustments for resources and needs, to other distance education environments. Additional pre-planning with faculty before classes begin and assumption by library staff of an active educational and consulting role to faculty is necessary for success. At the University of Maine at Augusta and the Education Network of Maine, ITV faculty training programs always include discussions and consultations with the librarians about the Off-Campus Library Services available and on how to plan and implement library use and information literacy components into their courses effectively. Library staff make extensive on-air presentations to students on the use of the university library services (Abbott and Lowe 1991) and about accessing resources available locally for each student. Special materials are regularly purchased to address reserve material needs at local access points, and support for research projects is made available to all students on the Network.

Today, with the advent of a more focused and financially
and philosophically supported mission of serving those who cannot come to college, the University and the Education Network of Maine are setting a new standard for quality and for expectations among students and faculty alike. The off-campus library staff has made it possible for the Network faculty to maintain the same high expectations for students who take their courses at a distance as they have for students in the on-campus classrooms. The opportunity to promote individualized and interactive learning through library and research projects adds a dimension to the lecture and discussion format not otherwise available. Faculty-student discussions about research or library projects can again become routine. Students are proud to be part of the enterprise and faculty treat the off-campus library staff as if they are collaborating colleagues who are integral parts of the instructional process.

This new active partnership between librarians and faculty is paying dividends both for the students and the institution. Recent successes have lead to national recognition. In an article surveying five off-campus library models in "Library Trends," Lessin (1991) describes the Maine program:

> Although as yet largely untested, the Community College of Maine model pays serious attention to virtually every aspect of off-campus services as outlined by existing ACRL (Association of College & Research Libraries) guidelines...The program is likely to reach its stated goal of national leadership if it can implement its well-defined objectives.

**SUMMARY**

The Off-Campus Library Services Program of the Education Network of Maine has provided a medium for faculty and student interaction. The active, educationally oriented off-campus library services model encourages faculty, students, and librarians to participate in a collaborative process of seeking and applying information. All three groups have the opportunity to interact on a research topic of personal interest to the student and pursue individual avenues of motivation and interest otherwise unavailable in the classroom lecture format, especially with large classes on ITV.

The limitations of distance and the reluctance to speak up on the "callback" telephone are reduced when the student and faculty member are working on a library project. Additionally, faculty trepidation about using the library are diminished when they feel the full support of the library staff when they assign a research project and raise their expectations for students taking their classes at a distance.

Librarians play the role of conduit and resource for students and faculty members. As the goal of a college is to move students from specific content knowledge toward becoming skillful users of information and thinking on their own, the faculty member’s ability to be the sole source of education for the student diminishes and the value of the information experts in the libraries grows. Providing that librarians are willing to support, both actively and collaboratively, the educational efforts of the faculty as colleagues and allies and, conversely, that faculty members are
willing to seek their assistance, the OCLS program can work and the students will show gains in learning and, perhaps, even personal development.

The research of Astin, the author, and Heath all support the argument for greater faculty-student interaction. Astin found a direct relationship between involvement in college activities on eight clusters and students' learning and affective-psychological development. He concluded that the more students are involved, the more they learn and develop. This author has confirmed these findings and observed that student involvement with faculty was significantly related to the maturity measures from Heath's Perceived Self Questionnaire. While no cause and effect relationship can be proven in this study, strong indicators exist that high levels of college involvement, especially between faculty and student, may promote greater levels of personal development or maturity among students during their college years.

Based on this research, as well as Astin's, an effective library support program for students learning at a distance could result not only in improved faculty-student interaction, but also in increased student learning and personal development.

REFERENCES


