Evolution or Integration: What is the Current State of Library Services for Distance Learners?

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Background

Research question:
Are services that were once intended to be exclusively available to the distance learning population, now typically available for all users in a university community?
Outline

• Case study: WMU
• Website analysis
• Staff surveys
• Results and analysis
• Recommendations
• Discussion
About WMU

• 24,000 students enrolled
• 147 undergraduate programs
• 73 masters and 30 doctoral programs
• Historically has offered programs away from main campus
• Exclusive off-campus programs
  – 12 undergraduate, 28 graduate and 5 certificates
Services at WMU

• 1992 began filling requests for off-campus students via mail or fax
• 1997 Off-campus Librarians began travelling to regional sites
• 2003 electronic delivery of articles to faculty
• In 2004 Chat Reference was implemented
Services at WMU

• 2010 offered LibGuides

• 2011 intercampus book delivery to faculty

• 2015 Off-campus Librarian position eliminated
Literature Review

• Zai & Wesley 2013 – embedded librarian program mainstreamed

• Is there be a distinction between distance and on-campus students with respect to library services? (Barron 2002)

• Differences between on-line and on-campus learning has narrowed (Ritterbush 2013)
Literature Review

• Streamlined library services provide more efficiency and save resources (Schoonover, et. Al. 2013)

• Yang (2015) studied ARL libraries and as far as dedicated librarians to distance users
  • 21% had full-time dedicated librarians
  • 35% had librarians who dedicated part of their time
  • 44% did not have a dedicated librarian
Methodology: Website Analysis

• Unobtrusive website analysis of 100 academic libraries

• Randomly selected from the Carnegie Classifications of the Institutions of Higher Education

• Selection was based on criteria similar to WMU and included our peer institutions
Methodology: Website Analysis

• A web-page devoted to distance learning
• A dedicated staff person for distance users
• Types of services offered:
  – Subject/class guides
  – Reference
  – Instruction
  – Borrowing materials
  – Delivery of materials (physical delivery of book or electronic delivery of materials from print)
  – Remote access information
  – Electronic resources
  – Other services (tutorials, drop in labs)
Methodology: Survey

• A email survey was sent to the same libraries included in the website analysis
• Survey also sent to OFFCAMP-L
• Questions asked were similar to the information gathered from the websites; the exception being the survey asked if libraries market their services to distance user and how they market to this population
Results

• Website analysis found 57 of 100 schools did have a page specifically for distance learners
• An individual staff member / librarian was listed as a primary contact for distance learners at 29 of 100 schools
## Evidence of Services Offered

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<th>Service</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undetermined</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Guides</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delivery of Materials</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote Access Instructions</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic Resources</td>
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Evidence of Services Offered Face-to-Face

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Support</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Labs</td>
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<td>97</td>
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</table>
## Distinct Services for Off-Campus

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<th>Undetermined</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of Materials</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
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<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Results

- All respondents indicate they provide services to distance learners
- Asked if there is a difference in services 45/55% said yes
- Institutions that report no dedicated staff member for distance learners: 58/44%
- Asked if they market services to distance learners 72/81% said yes
Survey Results

- Carnegie Institutions
- Off-camp Institutions
Analysis and Interpretation

• Integration of library services into overall services
• Disconnect between web site information and survey information
• Reference and research services are streamlined
• Delivery of materials may be the only distinction
Recommendations

• Website should reflect what is offered
  – Difficult to find information on what is offered to whom
• Investigate historical data, longitudinal study?
• Improve marketing for distance learners
• Follow-up survey of distance learner needs
• Reaffirm customer service philosophy
Questions? Discussion?

• Have services for distance learners at your institution become integrated?
  – If so, is it because of loss of positions, or is it because services are designed to be more comprehensive and include all populations?

• Do you market to distance learners? Why or why not?
  – Whose responsibility is marketing?

• What alternative delivery methods for instruction are being used for distance learners and how successful are they?
  – How do students know what their options are?
Selected References


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