

Distance Learning: Information Access and Services for Virtual Users

Hemalata Iyer, PhD
Guest Editor

The Reference Librarian
Number 77



The Haworth Information Press
An Imprint of
The Haworth Press, Inc.
New York

Distance Learning: Information Access and Services for Virtual Users

The Reference Librarian
Number 77

CONTENTS

- Introduction 1
Hemalata Iyer
- The Challenges and Benefits of Asynchronous Learning Networks 3
Daphne Jorgensen

As the world has been ushered into an information age in which technology plays a major role, societal institutions have been affected on all levels. The educational institution has especially been impacted as educators, administrators, and policy makers have sought to make the most effective use of the tools of technology. One changing paradigm is the role of distance learning in education, and in particular, the evolution of asynchronous learning networks. The changing complexion of the college student population, from full-time students in their early twenties to that of more mature students who negotiate school responsibilities with those of jobs and families, justifies universities' transitioning to the asynchronous method of course delivery. Students reap the benefits in terms of convenience, but some question whether asynchronous computer-mediated learning is an effective replacement for face-to-face collaboration and if student learning is compromised with this mode of instruction. This paper will briefly discuss the cost of instituting online courses and then explore how these courses can be used to foster a rich collaborative learning environment and classroom community.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, learning networks, digital reference services, online educational courses

- What Distance Learners Should Know About Information
Retrieval on the World Wide Web 19
Margaret R. Garnsey

The Internet can be a valuable tool allowing distance learners to access information not available locally. Search engines are the most common means of locating relevant information on the Internet, but to use them efficiently students should be taught the basics of searching and how to evaluate the results. This article briefly reviews how search engines work, studies comparing search engines, and criteria useful in evaluating the quality of returned Web pages. Research indicates there

are statistical differences in the precision of search engines, with AltaVista ranking high in several studies. When evaluating the quality of Web pages, standard criteria used in evaluating print resources is appropriate, as well as additional criteria which relate to the Web site itself. Giving distance learners training in how to use search engines and how to evaluate the results will allow them to access relevant information efficiently while ensuring that it is of adequate quality.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, search engines, Web sites, evaluation methods

Yahoo! Do You Google? Virtual Reference Overview

31

Nancy Cannon

The Internet is fast becoming the world's largest public library. Reference librarians are using Web resources rather than print to answer many reference queries. This article provides an overview of topics relating to virtual reference services: search engines, subject directories, virtual reference desks, the invisible Web, electronic journal publishing, virtual reference services, and reference librarian skills.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, virtual reference services, search engines, on-line journals

The Growing and Changing Role of Consortia in Providing Direct and Indirect Support for Distance Higher Education

39

Jane M. Subramanian

Consortia and cooperative efforts in the library world have had a long history, and their importance has been recognized even from the start. As the twentieth century has progressed, consortia have become even more important, and the extent of their roles has broadened considerably. In the last few years, they have become large players in helping libraries build shared online catalogs and assisting libraries in affording purchases of electronic resources, both important elements of support for distance learners. As the number of distance learners increases at colleges and universities throughout the country, consortia will be increasingly important to library support of distance learners in their information needs.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, consortia, electronic resources, virtual reference services

Instructional Services for Distance Education

63

Robin Kinder

Instructional services in libraries need new technologies and new models for assisting distance learners. This article presents ACRL guidelines for library instruction and services for distance education; the lack of service issues addressed in digital library discussions; distance students' characteristics; the central role the library liaison will play to distance students; and remote service as a primary service to distance users.

KEYWORDS. Distance learners, library instructional services, ACRL guidelines, library instruction

Carol Anne Germain

Gregory Bobish

Instruction librarians are developing Web-based instruction tools, including interactive tutorials, to teach remote users and students enrolled in distance education programs. This mode of teaching requires a different approach than the traditional in-class bibliographic instruction, since face-to-face interaction is absent. Special attention is required during planning stages to compose quality library instruction Web resources.

This article outlines strategies librarians can incorporate to develop effective and functional Web-based tools. Topics that are addressed include page design and layout, technical and copyright issues, usability and evaluation, and site maintenance. Examples from the University at Albany's User Education Department are used to highlight these themes. The Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT), a model interactive information literacy Web-based tutorial, is also reviewed.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, Web sites, virtual reference services, Texas Information Literacy Tutorial

Information Literacy at Ulster County Community College:

Going the Distance

89

Robin Walsh

In 1996, the reference librarians and faculty at Ulster County Community College developed an award-winning online information literacy course. The course is now offered through the SUNY Learning Network and is part of the OASIS distance education program at UCCC. LIB111 evolved through an extensive information literacy initiative starting in 1992 and is based on the 1-credit classroom course that had been taught at UCCC since 1994. It is a pre/co-requisite for all second semester English courses. Faculty development and maintenance of the course are continuing responsibilities. Retention and assessment are issues that are now being addressed.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, SUNY Learning Network, faculty development, virtual reference services

Implications of Culture in Distance Education

107

Cecilia Salvatore

As technology for distance education continues to advance, new and different ways of delivering instruction are developed which compel new and different pedagogy for distance education. These in turn compel new studies and research. One area of study is the place of culture in distance education. The ways in which cultural factors shape interaction and perceptions in distance education are described. These provide librarians and other information professionals with further understanding about distance education and its implications to their work. In having this understanding, librarians and information professionals will be better situated for

developing and implementing library and information services to instructors, administrators, and student participants in distance education.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, culture and education, virtual reference services

Assessing Outcomes with Nursing Research Assignments and Citation Analysis of Student Bibliographies *Holly Heller-Ross*

121

What are the library and information research requirements in a typical undergraduate nursing program? Do distance-learning library services provide undergraduate nursing students with the research materials they require for their academic work? In order to determine how the broad range of reference, instruction, and access services offered by Feinberg Library at Plattsburgh State University of New York are used by students, the author reviewed selected nursing course syllabi for research requirements and the resulting student research bibliographies as an outcome assessment. The review included 441 bibliographic citations from 78 student research papers from 1998-1999. Results indicated no significant difference between on- and off-campus student bibliography citations with regards to currency, format or number of citations. Results also indicated that the reviewed undergraduate nursing research assignments were indeed designed to promote research integration into nursing practice, and that student access to information was sufficient to allow them to complete their academic assignments.

KEYWORDS. Distance learning, virtual reference services, reference for nurses, research on needs of students

SPECIAL REPORTS

Availability of Internet Training Programs for Elderly Public Library Patrons *Lynne M. Webb*

141

The elderly could benefit greatly from learning to use the Internet as an information seeking tool, but they often require specialized training to become successful users. Public libraries are interested in providing services that meet the needs of their users, but often inadequate staffing and funding levels and competing services hinder their ability to meet the needs of all their patrons. A questionnaire about the availability of Internet training programs for elderly patrons, and existing barriers which impede delivery of the training, was sent to a random sample of one hundred public libraries in New York State and completed by 60 libraries. Seventy-eight percent of the public libraries who participated in the survey reported that they are not providing Internet training specifically for elderly patrons. Fifty-three percent reported the existence of one or more barriers to providing training including lack of staff and inadequate funding. Sixty-three percent view the need to provide training as "moderately important."

KEYWORDS. Library service for the elderly, specialized elderly services, state of elderly library services

Availability, Accessibility, and Promotion: A Study
of Reference Services in Ulster County, New York
Public Libraries
Jennifer L. Simmons

153

With the advent of multiple information technologies and off-site capabilities, reference services in public libraries are in a state of flux. This study looked at 11 of the 17 public libraries in Ulster County, New York, assessing the availability, accessibility and promotion of reference services within the Mid-Hudson Library System. The survey sent to library directors identified diminishing resources, technology issues, varying demand, and resident needs as critical factors in delivering reference services to citizens, with some of these factors varying according to the size of public libraries.

KEYWORDS. Reference services, public libraries, Ulster County, availability, accessibility, reference service promotion, New York

Computer Troubleshooting Tips for Librarians
Peijun Jia

167

The computer has penetrated every facet of library services and has affected how we interact with library services and how libraries are perceived. As modern information professionals, we are increasingly required to manage not only information itself, but also its supporting technologies. The tips presented cover computer maintenance, computer lock-up, illegal operation messages, various booting problems, and errors reading from the floppy drive. The important thing to remember is there is always a logical reason for a computer not working, and it is not difficult to find out the solution and solve the problem on your own.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference services, computer skills, computer problems, solving hardware problems

Factors Influencing Competence and Performance
of Reference Librarians in Academic Libraries in Nigeria
Joseph O. Omoniyi

173

Reference service embraces a variety of activities which bring the reference librarian in direct contact with those who patronize the reference section of the library. Reference service is, indeed, a demanding, an intellectual, and brain-tasking aspect of library services to clientele. The performance of the reference librarian can make or mar the effectiveness of reference services.

KEYWORDS. Nigerian reference services, African libraries, training Nigerian reference librarians