

**Work in Progress**

## **Integrating Library Service and Instruction into Electronically-Delivered Classes**

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### **Abstract:**

As online courses become more and more ubiquitous, the need for supporting services becomes more acute. To meet the needs of students in online courses for library services and instruction, means to deliver materials, reference services, and instruction electronically were developed or purchased by the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. The needs of one particular class brought the problem into focus, so a team of librarians worked with the instructor to provide tools for the students to learn how to access information from a distance, and how to use it. This was accomplished by providing a class web page created to help the students locate specific journals in their fields, and a tutorial based on the Texas Information Literacy Tutorial, which was developed by the University of Texas at Austin. From this experience, a list of resources, procedures, and materials was developed to guide the library practitioner in providing library services for distance learners.

### **Introduction:**

In traditional learning situations, students came to campus for classes, and went to the brick and mortar library to improve their understanding of their course material, to learn how to do research, and to find recreational reading. However, as Distance Education becomes more and more prevalent, and as the number of courses that are taught completely online grows, the need for online support services also becomes increasingly important, especially library services. Not only are library services and instruction necessary for completing assignments and doing research in many courses, they are essential to the empowerment of students with life-long learning skills. In Distance Education the ability to visit the brick-and-mortar library may not be an option, since many of these students reside hundreds or thousands of miles from the home campus and its library. With the increasing number of electronically available books, indexes, and journals, however, the library can move online. Thus librarians are challenged to deliver instruction and services to these students.

To support a growing Distance Education program, the librarians at the University of North Texas Libraries developed several ways of supporting the Distance Education community and meeting their needs for library instruction and reference help. This paper

outlines and discusses the evolution of these services, describes a catalytic situation wherein more specific online library instruction was needed, and then generalizes from what was learned to form a model for providing information literacy instruction and library services to online distance education students.

### **Background at the University of North Texas**

The University of North Texas has a distance learning program that has grown steadily over the last five years, more than doubling in enrollment since the Fall Semester of 2001. During the Spring, 2004, Semester, 344 online courses were taught. The number of unique individuals enrolled in these classes was 7060 (of approximately 31,000 students attending the University during the semester.) The number of student “seats” in these courses was 9155, and the number of students taking **only** online courses was 4,527, approximately 14.6 percent of the student body.

([http://www.unt.edu/cdl/about\\_cdl/graphs.htm](http://www.unt.edu/cdl/about_cdl/graphs.htm))

UNT's Center for Distributed Learning offers seven graduate certification programs, one endorsement program, and six master's degree programs entirely online, from the School of Community Service, the School of Library and Information Sciences, School of Merchandising and Hospitality Management, and the College of Education, as well as many undergraduate courses. They also provide support and consulting services for faculty who are developing online courses. More information is available at the UNT eCampus website, <http://UNTeCampus.com>. The course management system in use is WebCT, although the migration to Vista is in progress, and is expected to be completed by Fall, 2006.

In addition to courses taught totally online, UNT's Center for Distributed Learning also offers blended learning courses and videoconferenced classes to remote locations in Texas, and to specific locations in Minnesota, Nevada, and Connecticut. Not all of these locations are served every semester.

### **Background at the University of North Texas Libraries**

Several years ago, the decision was made by the Libraries to consider each student as a potential distance learner. This altered the focus of acquiring resources to include and emphasize electronically available indexes and journals, and electronic books. Many of the indexes contain full text articles, and, among the electronic books ordered, some titles the Libraries own in hard copy are duplicated, most notably books used in the School of Library and Information Science and the Department of Computer Science. These are the two largest programs in distance education at UNT.

Additionally, numerous services geared toward distance learners were implemented, including e-mail reference service, an Online Reference Help Desk chat service (Antonelli, 2000), and a toll-free telephone number that is nationwide in scope. Campus-

based students also use these services. Other services that were already in place were interlibrary loan and a service called Reference by Appointment, for students who are close enough to come to campus occasionally. There is a form for requesting materials on interlibrary loan specifically for distance learning students. On the Library Home Page (<http://www.library.unt.edu>) is a link called “Library Services for UNT Off-Campus Users”, a page with links to several help pages for distance learners as well as campus-based students who want to access the library remotely. It includes a link called “Library Services for Distributed Learners”, (<http://www.library.unt.edu/instruction/distlearners.htm>) which is intended specifically to help out-of-state or out-of- area students.

These formed a sound infrastructure of services already in place for Distance Learners. Then, in the summer of 2001, a professor from the School of Merchandising and Hospitality Management, Dr. Joan Clay, contacted the library liaison to that department, Martha Tarlton, to explain that she was teaching a course entirely online and needed the Libraries’ help. Martha contacted the liaison to Distance Learning, Frances A. May, and the two worked together to solve Dr. Clay’s problem. This was the catalyst that drew the numerous services together and added a further component in arriving at a solution.

### **Description and Background of the Class**

Dr. Clay’s class was entitled “Issues and Trends in Merchandising and Hospitality Management,” and was intended to familiarize the students with the literature in their field, and help them build the habit of reading journals and trade publications to keep abreast of developments. The students were graduate students working on a Masters’ Degree in hospitality management or merchandising. Many already worked in the industry, some were managers, and were going back to school for their Master’s in order to move up in the industry. For many, it was the first class in the program they had taken, and for others it was their first class taken entirely online. For all of them, research had changed drastically since they were last in college. It was also the first time the teacher had taught an online class. She had offered it in a face-to-face environment several times, and was teaching another section at the same time that met on campus. She believed that her students needed to develop critical skills, including fact-finding, analysis, and evaluation skills.

Dr. Clay’s objectives for the class included: to discover the myriad ways they can find information on issues and trends in the field; to use sources to examine trends impacting the field; to evaluate the findings of others; to stay on the cutting edge of gathering information important to their profession; and to adapt to changes in information gathering.

Their assignments were to identify ten sources they could use for information, including trade or practitioner publications, academic journals, and Web sites. This dictated the format of the class page that was developed for them, as will be shown.

A further concern developed as Dr. Clay was reading papers that were turned in to her in conjunction with a face-to-face section of this class taught in an earlier semester. The students were using information from spurious Web sites. She found herself asking, "Where did you get this information? Who was the author of the Web site?" Most of the students had never even thought to ask. If it was on the Internet, they thought it was factual. So this added another dimension to the library assistance needed.

The class was taught entirely online, and there was no textbook, so the need was even greater for the students to find articles in their fields online, since the class entailed learning about the literature in the field, and finding out how to utilize it in their work.

A further condition existed: that everything had to be accessible through WebCT, the software that the University of North Texas uses for its online courses. (No matter what software an institution uses, an adaptation of these approaches will provide a starting point for library services for online distance learners.)

A three-fold, stratified approach was devised to meet the needs of Dr. Clay's class. It can be adapted to offer differing levels of service to Distance Learning students who are taking classes across the Internet to receive library instruction.

The strata were comprised of the following: 1) A tutorial in basic use of the library and its resources, which answered the need for information literacy for the students. 2) A detailed tutorial in evaluating Web sites, which focused solely on that topic, provided the needed criteria and process for evaluating information found on the Web. 3) The use of Subject Guides for more subject-specific direction was used, and, for specific classes, Class Pages were developed in collaboration with the teacher, to deal with specific needs and assignments endemic to the class.

## **The Tutorials**

The University of Texas at Austin has developed an excellent information literacy tutorial called TILT: Texas Information Literacy Tutorial, and made it available to other schools through an Open Publication License. Its URL is <http://tilt.lib.utsystem.edu/>. This was used as the basis of the tutorial. TILT consists of three modules and an introduction. The introduction gives a definition of information literacy, discusses the impact of technological advances, and addresses common misconceptions about the Internet. Module 1 discusses different information sources, where to find them, and how to choose the best ones for research. The second module focuses on skills for searching databases and the Web. It includes choosing keywords and combining terms. The third module covers criteria for assessing the credibility of sources, and how to cite print and online information. The modules were moved into a WebCT class called Libtutorial. The students in the SMHM WebCT class were added to the Libtutorial class, and the quizzes for the TILT modules were loaded into the SMHM WebCT course, so the quiz results would go to the teacher.

Since Module 3 in TILT included evaluation of all types of information formats, from book to Web, another module was designed that focused exclusively on the evaluation of Web sites. At present, there is no quiz to go with it, but one is under development. When the quiz is completed, it will be loaded into the course as well. As time goes by, other tutorials will be added, some for specific tools, like PsycInfo or MLA Bibliography, which can also be used by WebCT courses in those subjects.

On the home page in WebCT for the course SMHM 5350, a link was placed entitled “Library Resources.” This opened to a page (see Figure 1, below) that linked the students to the Library Tutorial, the Library Tutorial Quizzes, the Library’s Home Page, the class page developed for SMHM 5350, and a page that directs the students to the different help services the Library offers.



**Figure 1: Library Resources Page for SMHM 5350, Issues and Trends in Merchandising online course.**

## Subject Guides

Subject Guides are developed by the library liaisons to the various academic departments. They are fairly general, covering the entire subject discipline. They include books, periodical indexes, handbooks, manuals, directories, etc., and may include bibliographic and biographical sources and some Web sites—all the things found on the more traditional paper pathfinders. These are recommended to the teachers of online classes as useful to the students, and it is suggested that they make a link to the pages from their WebCT class home page. During bibliographic instruction sessions or one-on-one instruction, the Subject Guides (<http://www.library.unt.edu/subjects/default.htm>) are

pointed out to on-campus students as good starting places for them to find the electronic indexes best suited to their fields.

### **Class Pages**

Class pages are much more detailed. While they may duplicate some of the information on the Subject Guides, they usually reflect specific class assignments. There is a general listing of class pages available from the Library Web site (<http://www.library.unt.edu/classes/default.htm>), but there are direct links from within the WebCT course to the class page developed for that class.

The page (<http://www.library.unt.edu/classes/smhm/smhm5350.htm>) developed by Martha Tarlton, the library liaison to the School of Merchandising and Hospitality Management, very specifically reflects the assignment Dr. Clay gave her students. First of all, it has a link to a page giving instructions on connecting to online library resources from Off-Campus. Then follows a section on resources that is broken down into Periodicals, Electronic Databases & Indexes, and Style Guides, with links to internal anchors within the page. The Periodicals section is divided into three sections: Periodicals for the Practitioner, Academic Periodicals, and General Business Periodicals. This reflects the assignment where the student is to become familiar with the trade publications and the academic periodicals. The General Business Periodicals section was included because many times these resources will include articles on the different fields of interest to the students. Where possible, direct links to the electronic journal are included. When the journal was a part of a large package, such as EbscoHost's Business Premier or ABI Inform, it was somewhat complex, since the Library's LAN department had to assign direct links to the periodicals or the IP address validation would not work. Titles available in hard copy at the Library that were applicable to the subject, but which were not available electronically, were also included at that time, since students might be able to locate those titles at college or university libraries near their home. The page has changed somewhat, reflecting wider availability of electronic versions of the periodicals.

Next followed a section with links to annotated electronic indexes specifically recommended for the class. When the student clicks on any of these links, a pop-up box, which is automatically generated by the university proxy server, asks for their individual ID and password. Another section follows that gives the students access to online style guides for APA style.

Finally, there is a help section, which gives them links to the online reference help desk, the e-mail reference form, and contact information for the librarian, Martha Tarlton, including e-mail and telephone, in case the student wants to make an appointment for a consulting session, or just ask her a question directly.

### **Comments from students:**

- “This is my first master’s degree class. I have been out of school for a while. Research has really changed during that time. The library tutorial enabled me to feel more comfortable.”
- “This was my first class at UNT. Library tutorial helped me know what resources were available at UNT and how to use them.”
- “Tutorial was good because it was a structured required way for me to learn. Probably wouldn’t have done it on my own.”
- “I found two instruments to be extremely useful. The first is the link to the list of periodicals that the UNT library actually possesses at their facility. This link also provides a listing of those periodicals that are accessible via the Internet. Second is the ability to contact a reference librarian Monday through Friday from 10-5 via the Internet and chat in real time and have my reference questions answered immediately.”

### **Comments on the on-site Web page evaluation class:**

Dr. Clay asked the students, “What was the best thing you learned tonight?”

- Meaning of domain designations and which were more likely to be reliable
- Most said they’d never paid much attention to the author of the site
- Students were more cautious, less ready to use the information on Web sites
- More critical thinking

One problem surfaced, though. One of the Web sites that was part of the exercise was “Feline Reaction to Bearded Men”

(<http://www.improb.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html>). One of the students thought it was an excellent example of a scholarly paper, pointing out the description of the methodology, the findings, the bibliography, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to make certain the students understand it is a hoax site. Criteria for evaluating web sites are at <http://www.library.unt.edu/genref/internet/evaluate.htm>.

### **What We Learned**

One of the most important things to do is to set in place a strong infrastructure of services and policies beforehand. Services to have in place where possible include:

- E-mail reference service with reasonable turn-around time.
- Online chat service. This provides real-time reference help that can be accessed by students residing in other countries. It has the added benefit that many students are familiar with the technology. It also provides personal contact with a reference librarian. There are numerous packages available at various costs, so you can choose the features you deem most necessary and affordable.

- Toll-free telephone number. This provides real-time reference help that can be national or statewide in scope. It allows for direct contact with a reference librarian for those who are uncomfortable with the less personal electronic formats, or where it's proved to be hard to elucidate the question (or answer) through e-mail or chat.
- Policy and procedure for supplying materials owned by library to distant students—very important to hammer out beforehand.
- Tutorials or instruction pages on using specific databases.
- Interlibrary loan service.

Electronic Resources are an important component of the materials needed to serve distant students. Most colleges and universities already have their catalog available online, and this is a necessity for students to be able to find and request books. It follows that an online interlibrary loan package that is also available electronically, preferably one that integrates easily with the catalog, is a necessity.

Electronic reserves capability is another important factor for providing access to materials that are not available electronically. Many catalog packages make this service available. The article or book chapter is scanned and the electronic file is placed on the server, protected by another password which the teacher defines and gives out only to the class.

Electronic books are also important. They have the advantage of easy availability to the distant student, and usually the library has the ability to set the length of the loan time. These may duplicate titles owned in hard copy, focusing on programs where many classes are taught online. If there is much usage of the title, it may be necessary to acquire more than one copy of it. Often a 24-hour checkout period is adequate for these resources. Some of these books can be placed on reserve, with an even shorter checkout time.

Electronic periodical indexes, preferably with many full-text journals, are an important component of library materials for distant students. If financial considerations limit the number of electronic indexes, be sure to subscribe to some good general databases, such as EbscoHOST, ProQuest, and FirstSearch, later adding more specific indexes as need develops and finances allow. Databases should allow search of library catalog for availability of journals, whether hard copy or electronic.

Other online journal sources, such as ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and Project Muse, are also useful resources to have.

Another consideration where possible is to have a librarian who is the liaison to the Distance Learning department, who can act as a facilitator for subject liaisons when there are requests for library services from teachers of online courses. They should ideally be familiar with the program used to deliver the online courses, such as WebCT, Vista, Blackboard, etc. They can also oversee the development of class pages for distance learning classes. They may be asked to travel to distant locations on a regular basis to provide off-site services when there are classes taught at off-campus sites. It may be

necessary for the distance learning librarian to find appropriate collections in individual students' locales and contact libraries to arrange for access for students. This librarian may arrange to take part in a chat session with the class, to answer questions and make suggestions to the students for research projects. If it is a big class, it may be advisable to have another librarian, perhaps the subject liaison, participate.

### **Recommended Resources for Distance Learners**

These should be available from the online course homepage:

- Link to library home page
- Online subject guides or pathfinders for different subjects
  - More general; covers entire subject area
  - May include books, hard-copy periodical indexes, handbooks, etc.
  - May include bibliographic & biographical sources
  - Should include suggestions for pertinent online databases
  - Always include links to an online source for help, such as a chat service, e-mail reference, or an Ask a Librarian page
  - May include Internet resources
  - Example: See Subject Guide Pages at <http://www.library.unt.edu/subjects/default.htm>.
- More detailed class pages geared toward material needed for a specific class, possibly reflecting a specific assignment
  - May include the same types of resources as found in subject guides, but more specific to the individual class
  - Always include links to an online source for help, such as a chat service, e-mail reference, or an Ask a Librarian page
  - May include Internet resources
  - May teach information gathering skills
  - Examples: see SLIS 5000 class page at <http://www.library.unt.edu/classes/slis/SLIS5000.htm>, How to Find a Specific Article at <http://www.library.unt.edu/instruction/findspecific.htm>, and How to Find Review Articles at <http://www.library.unt.edu/classes/slis/reviewarticles.htm>.
- Provide general information literacy tutorial when possible, such as TILT tutorial (Texas Information Literacy Tutorial)
  - Load quizzes in teacher's class
  - Include a module or series looking at how to evaluate web sources

### **A Final Word...**

After you have all these wonderful services and programs in place for your distance learners, **PUBLICIZE THEM!** Unless the teachers and students know they exist, they will remain unused. Use e-mail, flyers, announcement facilities within the program

(WebCT, Blackboard, etc.), and that most powerful communication tool of all, word-of-mouth. Attend any meetings of distance learning teachers, but don't stop there; any teacher may become a distance learning teacher, and in any case may know someone who is. Arrange to take part in any on-campus visits that the students are required to attend. You have to promote yourself, your library, and your services. If they know you are working to supply help to distance learning students and teachers, they will call on you.

## References

Antonelli, M., & Tarlton, M. (2000). The University of North Texas Libraries' online reference help desk. In R. Lankes, (Ed.), *Digital reference service in the new millennium*, New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 197-206.

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