

Bridging the Distance: Pace University Library and Remote Users

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SUMMARY. This article outlines Pace University Library's commitment to address the needs of the university distance education populace. Discussion focuses on one of the programs offered by Pace University, e.MBA (Executive MBA). Pace University Library offers many services to meet the research needs of its remote users. These include remote access to electronic resources, Interlibrary Loan, a toll-free number, and an online form for submission of reference queries. To improve document delivery services, the library subsidizes SUMO Uncover, and also uses Digital Sender to e-mail or fax documents to students. Pace University Library continuously looks at new methods to effectively serve its distance education populace. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

While universities across the United States are increasingly providing courses and awarding degrees in distance education, libraries are feeling more and more pressure to apply new methods to serve this new group of students in non-traditional settings. The buzz of distance learning/education, distributive learning, or other similar terms, is zapping through academe. Pace University <<http://www.pace.edu>> is participating in this phenomenon, providing courses and degrees through its distance education program.

This article describes the process I used to respond to a last-minute request for library service for a business class. It also discusses the procedures the library put in place to meet faculty needs for library service in the distance education programs, with an emphasis on building lines of communication between faculty and the library.

Pace University currently offers two online programs, the e.MBA (Executive MBA) and the National Coalition for Telecommunications Education and Learning (NACTEL). Pace University Library promotes and supports distance learning programs and services. The mission of the library has been modified to extend that of the university to meet the unfolding educational needs of its populace. Services provided to students in the traditional setting are equally available to distance education students. Adjustment of service has been made in order to effectively serve faculty and students in distance education programs.

To accomplish such challenges, Pace University Library formed a Distance Education Committee in the Fall of 1999. The Distance Education Committee is comprised of members from each department of the library. Through the committee, policies, procedures, and resources are discussed to determine how best the needs and services of students can be met. At the university level, the Provost's Council on Distance Education is comprised of deans, faculty, librarians and representatives from the Division of Information and Technology. To fully serve and coordinate the needs of distance education programs for the library, a full-time librarian has been appointed. Similarly, other institutions such as SUNY-Plattsburg and John Hopkins, offer full service to their distance education programs, and have appointed a full-time person as a point of contact to ensure that the library receives support to carry out the task of serving distance education programs (Kirk and Bartelstein, 1999).

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE e.MBA- EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAM

The e.MBA Distance Education program was launched in Spring 2000. Although Pace University Library has the infrastructure to support new methods of delivering library services, the library needed to decide how best to reach distance education students and provide them effective services without making compromises. Challenges the Pace University Library faced at the time centered on registration of users and authentication (for example providing library barcodes to distance education students for remote access to the electronic resources, and the identification of students as distance education students for Interlibrary Loan services). Additional issues such as reference services to distance education students were also addressed.

e.MBA Faculty Request

The faculty involved with the program contacted the Head of Information Services and Resources requesting library orientation to the resources available to distance education students in the e.MBA program. The faculty was in dire need, as the students were soon arriving for their eight-day residency orientation. I was given this assignment, and I had no more than two weeks to work on this project and create a Web page.

How the Library Met the Faculty Needs

In any institution, organization, or corporation, success is obtained through collaboration. I met with various department heads, Reference, Interlibrary Loan, Circulation, and Systems and members of the Library Distance Education Committee, to obtain information on policies, and how these policies could be adjusted to meet the needs of students in the distance education programs. Students from New York, New Jersey, California, Connecticut and other parts of the United States were to visit Pace University for an eight-day orientation. The library component was only one aspect (two hours) of that orientation. I met with the faculty before the orientation to discuss how the orientation was going to be conducted, indicated why business information was pooled into a separate Web page rather than accessing it from the library's home page, and most important, to obtain feedback and additional information about the research needs of the students. At the beginning of our meeting, the faculty requested that I use two companies, Cisco Systems

and Qwest, in my examples, as students will be concentrating on these two companies in the program. I demonstrated to the faculty the Web page I put together "e.MBA@PACE" that is accessible at <<http://www.pace.edu/library/instruct/emba/>>, to the faculty. Unanimously, they were very pleased and excited about it, making only minor suggestions in the layout.

Rather than directing the e.MBA students to the library home page and attempting to give instructions on how and where they could access business information and resources available at Pace University, I took a different approach. The resources available at Pace University Library and at other sites were pooled together under one umbrella, e.MBA@PACE. At the time, only one thought crossed my mind, and that was easy access. Distance Education students are not like the traditional students. They do not have the privilege to seek assistance at the Reference Desk and participate in a reference interview. Therefore, performing library orientation only through the library's home page, which covers information for all the disciplines, would not have been as effective as performing an orientation to library resources through a Web page channeling only business resources. Another important aspect that I took into consideration was the fact that I had only two hours of physical contact with them. Eventually, the students would return to their place of residence and begin their intensive program. The e.MBA students needed to have a certain level of independence in accessing information relevant to their research needs. To increase that level of independence, the library orientation was not conducted in the library using the Electronic Classroom. The faculty specifically wanted the students to feel comfortable using their laptops (each student was given a laptop), and to use the opportunity during their eight-day orientation to seek assistance with any technology problems they may encounter.

During the meeting with faculty, while the Web page was being demonstrated, I mentioned to them what was available to distance education students, what was being discussed at the Library Distance Education Committee, and what would be implemented soon. They were quite thrilled that the library had taken such an active role, and immediately indicated that they wanted me to be the liaison to the program. From that point forward, I have passed on any new information to the faculty. For example, the toll-free telephone number for students to use for reference questions, and responses to remote connection queries, has been passed on to the faculty members who, in turn, inform their students. Students have called and e-mailed me directly with research questions and remote connection issues. Many remote issues concerned connection

from AOL. Communication went on with faculty via e-mail and some of their concerns were about interlibrary loan services and the issuing of barcodes.

Providing Library Barcodes

The issue of providing library barcodes to students as quickly as possible was one of the faculty concerns. This was resolved by having a graduate assistant from the Lubin School of Business (who also assisted students during their orientation) collect the students' identification cards after they were issued, and bring them to the library with the information slips (indicating name, address, social security number, telephone, and e-mail address) already filled out by the students. This worked as a stopgap measure for the first class. The system has been refined so that now distance education students, including the new class of e.MBA students for spring 2001, can obtain their library barcodes by sending an e-mail to barcodes@pace.edu.

Meeting the Need for Interlibrary Loan Services

The Library Committee decided that distance education students would have Interlibrary Loan services. To determine the most cost effective means, taking into account delivery time, a comparison of three delivery services was made. It has been decided to use United Parcel Service (UPS). FedEx will be used only if an emergency has been determined.

The library needs to know how to distinguish distance education students from the rest of the student body. At the time, it was decided that students could identify themselves by writing e.MBA@PACE after their name when placing an Interlibrary Loan request.

An ideal situation would make it possible to identify students utilizing a unique identification code that is universal to the Registrar's Office, the library and other pertinent offices. The university personnel are looking into the matter, and we are hoping it can be resolved. Then students do not have to identify themselves in the "Other Information" box, mentioned below, as distance education students; they would be identified as such in the Innopac system itself.

At the moment, students identify themselves as distance education students in the "Other Information" box when filling out the Interlibrary Loan form, and must also include information about the courses they are enrolled in, their social security number, e-mail addresses, mailing

addresses, and telephone numbers. Books, articles, or other sources owned by the Pace University Library can be requested through the library's online catalog. The materials are sent directly to students' home addresses. Articles, regardless of length, are scanned and e-mailed to students through the use of the Digital Sender.

However, for sources that Pace University Library does not own, students will use the Interlibrary Loan service to request the materials. As mentioned above, students identify themselves as distance education students, and Pace University Library will mail requested materials from other libraries to students' home addresses. When books are borrowed from the Pace University Library collection as well as from other universities or colleges, students are required to insure the book for one hundred dollars (\$100). All the necessary forms to return the material are included.

Interlibrary Loan Service can take up to ten (10) business days. As a result, students are encouraged to use their local public libraries or other libraries in their neighborhood that will grant them access to their resources. Moreover, students are advised to start their research early to ensure that they will receive needed sources in a timely manner.

Full-text articles to citations that students have can be e-mailed directly to them if e-mail addresses have been provided. This in itself will minimize cost to the library if these articles are obtained online through the databases. Articles from other media, microfilm for example, will also be faxed to students utilizing the Digital Sender. Students requiring a few pages of a book can also receive these via fax as well.

Besides sending articles through e-mail and fax, Pace University Library recently purchased another service, SUMO Uncover (Subsidized Unmediated Ordering of Research Documents) that delivers documents. Through SUMO, research documents from scholarly articles and research journals that are not available at Pace University Library's print serials collection or its full text online databases can be ordered. Currently, this delivery service is subsidized by the library and made available only to faculty, graduate students, distance education students and staff. Traditional students do not have access to this service. A user profile has to be created in order to use the service. This enables the provider, Uncover, to send the requested articles or documents directly to the patron via fax. Rather than having students read through two pages of instructions, the library will create accounts for users when the initial request is made. Of course, it is expected that requests made through the SUMO Uncover service be limited to a reasonable number.

Pace users who are not entitled to the current subsidized arrangement can still use the service with the option of using their credit cards to pay for the documents. SUMO Uncover provides another means for faculty, graduate students, and distance education students to obtain research documents that are not available in Pace University Library, and are usually obtainable mainly through Interlibrary Loan Services. However, the service has been programmed to abort if users attempt to request research documents or articles through SUMO Uncover which are available through Pace University Library databases.

REMOTE ACCESS

Access to Pace University Library electronic resources is restricted to current Pace students, faculty and staff. Traditional students have access to these databases on campus without the need of authentication. However, to ensure that access to these online resources is equally available to traditional and distance education students, remote access has been provided. Kirk and Bartelstein indicated that less than half of institutions surveyed do not have a plan for information technology, and less than one third have a plan to utilize the Internet for distance learning (Kirk and Bartelstein, 1999). Institutions have to keep abreast of the information age and be proactive rather than reactive. Pace University Library has set up an easy and simple system where students, faculty and staff need only enter the last six digits of their library barcode to access the databases remotely. To access, students will enter the library's home page, <<http://www.pace.edu/library>>, click on the button Databases, and then will be prompted to enter the last six digits of their library barcode on the Remote Database Access authentication screen.

The procedure to obtain a library bar code is also very simple. The library bar code is provided online to distance education students by students sending an e-mail request to barcodes@pace.edu. Students identify themselves as distance education students by providing their names, addresses, social security numbers and the courses in which they are enrolled. Students will receive their barcodes within 48 hours. Students in the e.MBA program obtained their library barcodes in person during their eight days of orientation, in April 2000. At that time, the e-mail barcode request system was not yet in place. Traditional students, faculty and staff request their library barcodes at the Circulation Desk and show their Pace University identification cards that verify that they are current Pace members. A small registration form requesting

name, address, social security number and telephone number is completed and within three minutes a library bar code is issued. The goal was to create a parallel system for remote users that would be simple and speedy.

Solving Remote Problems

Students need to learn how to login to gain access to electronic resources. Unfortunately, students do come across authentication problems. When this happens, students, faculty or staff are provided guidance. A link to solutions has been provided in the Remote Database Access page. Students in the e.MBA program who used the Internet Provider AOL frequently encountered remote access problems. The system librarian has informed librarians of the various scenarios and how they can be rectified. Authentication problems can stem from a number of reasons such as, (a) the barcode is not yet entered into the system and as a result, the patron record server does not have the barcode; (b) if the barcode has been entered into the system, the expiration date has to be checked for currency—authorized remote access is for current students only; (c) a delinquent borrowing record will affect access even if the students' barcodes and records are current. Any of the three problems can occur. However, another dilemma can occur as well, and that relates to *cookies*.

Access to the databases remotely may be successful, but upon the selection of a database, students, faculty or staff may be prompted to enter user identification and password. When this happens, users may have to change the settings of their browser preferences/options (if they are using Netscape or Internet Explorer) by enabling "cookies." By enabling cookies through preferences/options, the authentication requirement from the vendor side will be removed. This vendor authentication occurs on campus as well as remotely, and will be resolved by checking the browser setup through preferences/options.

There are instances when a vendor's server is down. In these situations, systems and technical support in the library will contact the vendor to find out how soon it will be rectified. If the problem stems from Pace University servers, the system librarian and technical support, together with The Division of Information and Technology, collaborate to rectify the situation in a timely manner. When this happens, students, both on site and remotely (students phone in), are brought up-to-date and are encouraged to attempt connection to the databases later.

RESEARCH ASSISTANCE TO DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS

How would students' research questions be addressed? Students need help in making database selections, searching databases, and in deciding which resources are relevant to their research needs. "They do not want to read manuals" (Niemi, Ehrhard, and Neeley, 1998). Before the design of the Distance Education Services Web page, students in the e.MBA (Executive MBA) program had direct contact with the librarian liaison. Questions were asked about troubleshooting remote access, and providing research assistance for specific information, as well as refining search strategies. However, distance education students who had research queries sometimes needed to reach a business reference librarian.

Pace University Library resolved this problem by making available a toll-free telephone number that distance education students could use to call for assistance. To speak with a business librarian during normal library hours, a student can call 1-877-974-BOOK (2665) with questions regarding research assistance, library services or any other library issues. An online form, RefQuery, is also available that students can use to e-mail research questions to the library at any time of the day. Response time to answer queries through the toll-free telephone number and the online form will be immediate during normal working hours. However, during weekends and holidays, response time will be 24 hours to 48 hours. A Web page specifically designed for the distance education population, both students and faculty, includes information about library services. Access is at <<http://www.pace.edu/library/links/disted/>>, or from the library's home page, <<http://www.pace.edu/library/>>; click Distance Education Services in the left blue column.

Research queries from students, via the toll-free telephone number, will be shared between the two major libraries at Pace University. Days of shared responsibilities are alternated between libraries, and librarians from the designated library will be responsible to answer students' queries for a specific time.

Currently, public relations of the library services are done through direct contact with distance education faculty, and *Information Edge: A Newsletter of the Pace University Library* that is published semi-annually. The most effective public relations efforts have been through direct contact to distance education faculty via e-mail and telephone. Faculty channels the information to students either through e-mail, CourseInfo, or WebBoard, whichever is appropriate. Any changes or

additions to services are immediately passed along to faculty who always indicate high levels of appreciation.

Pace University Library Instructional Services Team has developed many online guides to assist the general student population with their research needs. Research guides have been created for specific classes and subject areas and these are accessible online through "Research Assistance" from the library's home page. In addition, database guides for most of the databases have also been created and have been made available online.

ReVeaL: Research in the Virtual Library, is a step-by-step research guide that has been developed specifically for distance education students at Pace University. The purpose of ReVeaL goes beyond assisting students to complete class assignments. ReVeaL is designed to enable students to develop research skills that they will apply beyond the classroom setting. The goal is for students to acquire a life-long learning tool. An Instructional Services Librarian is in the process of completing an interactive research guide, Apollo, which will replace ReVeaL. ReVeaL is accessible through "Research Assistance" from the library's home page.

OTHER REMOTE USERS

Pace University Library faced similar requests to that of the e.MBA request: to create Web pages that identify library resources for the NACTEL (National Coalition for Telecommunications Education and Learning) program and the DPS (Doctorate in Professional Studies program). Students in the NACTEL program are one hundred per cent remote. That is, they do not physically have to come to Pace University for orientation or for any other matter. Associate Degrees are obtained through this program. Students in the DPS program come to campus on weekends to attend class. I met with the Associate Director of the program and other members involved with the NACTEL program to discuss the creation of a Web page. Another librarian developed the DPS Web page. In this way, pages about library resources aimed at specific programs are created, rather than sending remote students to the entire collection of electronic resources available from the library.

Pace University and especially, Pace University Library, is looking into the future to provide access to information beyond the normal

scope of distance education students to include remote access to information to physically challenged students. This is another type of student population who will benefit greatly from distance education programs and remote access to information.

CONCLUSION

Many institutions are gravitating to distributive learning. Some will encounter problems; others will be successful from the start, due perhaps, to careful planning. Librarians who are in the process of developing distributive learning services, or who have encountered similar problems in providing distributive learning services, may find the procedures and solutions mentioned above serve as a guide to help them get started in this exciting area.

Pace University Library took a proactive role and approached faculty and deans involved with distance education programs, thus demonstrating and reinforcing the library's ongoing usefulness and relevance in distance education. By offering access to resources and information remotely, and indicating willingness to continue to meet the various program needs, the library remains central to the educational process. This is an excellent opportunity to have the rest of the institution see the value of the library. To date, besides the general information to library resources for remote users, the library has developed Web pages specifically for certain distance education programs, namely e.MBA (Executive MBA) and NACTEL (National Coalition for Telecommunications Education and Learning).

The library will continue to work with the Center for Instructional Technologies and the Pforzheimer Center for Faculty Development, with the Assistant University Librarian for Distributive Learning as liaison, to improve services to faculty and students. This will open avenues to exchange ideas and initiate new programs.

The Library Committee for Distance Learning meets after the University Distance Education Committee has met, to discuss policies, issues and new services. Representatives on the library committee, who are also members of the Pace University Distance Learning Committee, bring to the library committee concerns, ideas, and needs the institution's committee has raised. The committee met often over a short period of time, because of an impending deadline, to have certain services in place before the beginning of the distance learning programs.

Pace University Library concentrates first on providing necessary services to distance education students, as well as to its other students.

Effective ways of implementing new ideas and meeting new needs as they arise are examined regardless of budgetary constraints. If money becomes the primary concern, then many great ideas may not come to the table.

The future of distributive learning lies in the creation of partnerships "among academic and public librarians, computing professionals, college and university administrators, faculty, publishers, and vendors" (Kirk and Bartelstein, 1999).

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