

**DISTANCE EDUCATION: THE RURAL ROLE OF THE URBAN LIBRARY  
AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROGRAM**

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Paper presented at the 1990 Annual American Library Association Conference in Chicago.

**The University**

Wayne State University is an urban university--located in the Cultural Center of Detroit--near the heart of the city, across from the Detroit Public Library and one block from the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Detroit Historical Museum. Thirty-two thousand, four hundred forty-seven students were enrolled at Wayne State University in Fall 1989. It ranked, by enrollment, 31st in the United States. Ninety-three percent of the students come from Michigan; two plus percent came from other states; five percent are international students; and thirty percent of the student body are minority.

The Library Science Program mirrors the University in some areas. Ten percent of the 350 students are international and minority students. Part-time students compose approximately 80% of the student body in library science. The average age is 38, and approximately 90% are Michigan residents.

Wayne State University is committed to serving the traditional and non-traditional student. The Library Science Program endeavors to serve qualified individuals who are not able to attend a traditionally-delivered, full-time, on-campus program. Problems most often cited by non-traditional students include commitment to jobs/careers, family responsibilities, and distance from campus, which make it difficult or impossible to participate in higher education programs in residence.

### Accredited ALA Library Education

Michigan's two American Library Association-accredited master's degree programs in library science are located within 90 miles of each other (The University of Michigan and Wayne State University), leaving a great number of Michigan residents without regional library education opportunities. In the past, the Library Science Program at Wayne State University offered a wide-range of evening classes, weekend classes, intensive classes, and extension classes (within 20 miles of campus) to address the needs of the state for qualified professionals.

An important factor to recognize regarding library schools is that, although they appear regional in nature, their goals and objectives are state-wide and national and the program offered must meet standards enforced by the ALA-Committee on Accreditation. Many schools offer off-campus and on-campus classes.

To address the educational needs of the state, the Library Science Program at Wayne State University offers distance education courses. Classes in metropolitan Detroit have consistently had excellent enrollment. Classes scheduled in Traverse City in Summer 1989 and Fall 1989 have had good enrollment. The offering of classes in Western Michigan, in Grand Rapids, is also proving successful. Traverse City is approximately 261 miles from campus. Grand Rapids, is 154 miles. Both are in areas surrounded by small towns, many with libraries without MSLS-degree librarians. The area, except for the actual site of the cities, may be classified as "rural."

### Objectives

In developing Wayne State University's distance education program the following objectives were identified:

- \* To respond to inquiries and requests for professional education from library directors and employers located in the Grand Rapids and Traverse City areas (the generation of the distance education program).

- \* To provide graduate library education for students geographically disfranchised from Michigan's ALA-accredited programs.
- \* To offer M.S.L.S. courses off-campus to address the need for professional librarians in the geographic areas of Western and Northern Michigan.
- \* To graduate individuals prepared to work in library and information centers located in Western and Northern Michigan.
- \* To provide leaders in the library and information field for the state of Michigan, and, across the nation and in foreign countries.

The Wayne State University distance education program addresses the needs of non-traditional learners in accessing quality ALA-accredited library and information science education. The program addresses the needs of individuals qualified to do graduate work in library and information science, but constrained by the barriers of time, geography, physical disability, personal responsibilities, and professional commitments generally not faced by the traditional Detroit metropolitan student. Since graduates receive an ALA-accredited M.S.L.S. degree, the distance education program also addresses the renewed (geographically selected) shortage of librarians. The program produces graduates educated and prepared to meet the library and information needs of the nation.

### **Planning Factors**

The distance education curriculum includes components of on-campus and off-campus courses, campus-based lecture/colloquia, and other curricular activities. Examples of these activities include: program colloquia, fall and winter orientations, the Library Science Alumni Association and Library Science Program sponsored Annual Alumni Updates, student recognition receptions, career information sessions, and campus addresses and workshops.

There are numerous reasons for offering courses off-campus--and there are many problems which need to be overcome if courses are to be offered. Some of these include:

- \* Faculty--do the full-time faculty teach off-campus and on-campus? Off-campus courses require considerably more time in faculty preparation, travel, expenses, student contact, and (often times) generate more faculty

and student complaints. Faculty research may be sacrificed to accomplish away-from-campus-instruction.

- \* Resources--off-campus resources are very often not on the same level nor in the same volume as on-campus. Close cooperation with libraries in the area is needed to overcome some deficiencies.
- \* Facilities--are often not the school's own. The school's faculty are visitors and coordination is required to assure that the buildings and classrooms are open, for example on Saturdays, when facilities of the off-campus institution are normally closed; that electricity and air-conditioning are working--because there generally will be no local staff available to ask questions of, or to request services.
- \* The application, admission, and advisement processes--entail long-distance patience and greater dependence on the mail system. FAX access/installation may be required. An off-campus coordinator may be essential for local contact, liaison, and scheduling of courses. The coordinator often becomes instructor and clerk/staff, as well as the complaint department.
- \* Textbooks and Reserve Materials--require special handling and advanced planning to arrive in time prior to course instruction, in the expected number, and with payment made to the appropriate office.
- \* Interlibrary Loan--becomes essential to accomplish research. The purchase of special materials or historical works and backfiles of materials also require consideration.
- \* Creative Scheduling--weekends, longer Saturday classes, Friday/Saturday weekend classes, and extended class hours and often required to limit and reduce faculty travel and expenses.
- \* Marketing--is essential. Publicity creates enrollment, or at minimum, inquiry.

- \* Off-Campus Registration--who does it, and to whom mailed, requires additional mailings, clear instructions, extended registration dates, and prompt follow-up.

### **Quality Assurance Factors**

Quality courses are offered by assuring that quality faculty teach. ALA Committee on Accreditation standards continue to play an active role in the operation of off-campus offerings. Off-campus part-time faculty are required to visit the campus for interviews with the full-time faculty, the Director, and Dean. Instructional meetings, prior to teaching, are required of all potential off-campus faculty. These meetings involve discussions of required items to be covered in syllabi, grading policies, attendance policies, the place of the courses to be taught in the curriculum, and a review of the syllabi, to assure similarity of on-campus and off-campus courses.

### **Students**

Students enrolled in the Grand Rapids and Traverse City courses must also be admitted to the M.S.L.S. or certificate programs, and must meet existing program and university criteria for admission. Visitor status may apply, providing the class has not reached its student limit. Concern is given to the socialization of the individual student into the "Profession" and integration of the student into the program. Students are encouraged to "cluster" enroll in on-campus classes to reduce the costs of travel. The need to offer longer on-campus classes during weekends requires additional furnishings for the student seminar room and lounge (microwave, drink dispenser, etc.)

The best recruiters are enrolled students. Because off-campus students have an intrinsic desire to have their classes continue, they are willing to assist in the recruitment of other students, as well as assist with facilities and resource management. Patience must be exercised in beginning off-campus courses, as individuals desiring to enroll often take a "wait-and-see" attitude to course enrollment. The second semester of class offerings may be larger than the first due to the fact that the program may have to prove its stability to students.

### **The Institution's Commitment**

Although addressed last, the one concern which must be determined early in the development of distance education programs is the commitment of the administration of the institution to support the off-campus efforts of the library school. Some universities have decided to offer courses only on-campus, committing limited resources only for on-campus teaching in a effort to reduce costs. Emphasis for some "research" institutions is now centered on those efforts which enhance the reputation of the university and the library school through publications, grantsmanship, and other faculty "research" efforts.

At institutions which are willing to support distance education, the concern may be focused upon providing courses as long as the program is profitable, or at least "breaks-even." With rising tuition costs, 'down-sizing' of faculty, and limited budgets, off-campus programs will face increasing pressure to limit faculty costs, to maximize student enrollment, and to minimize expenses involved in off-campus travel, per-diem, and resources. Expectations of a national declining budget picture for the near future will force library schools and institutions to carefully plan for the maximization of budgets, possibly at the expense of off-campus programs. Although difficult, given careful planning and scheduling, it is possible to provide on-campus and off-campus instruction while the faculty are actively involved in university expectations of teaching research and service.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, it is often perceived that an off-campus/distance education program is easily established, operated, and maintained. Most of these perceptions are held by librarians (often, library directors\_ who are disturbed when their public thinks the same of the operation of their libraries. It is not "easy" to provide quality library education to students away from campus sites. Much planning, thought, organization, and communication must occur prior to the final commitment by the institution and the library school to engage in the offering of courses off-campus.