

## What Do Distance Education Faculty Want From the Library?

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**Abstract:** Distance education is a quickly growing phenomenon in higher education. In 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 56% of all Title IV-eligible, degree-granting institutions were offering distance education courses, an amount that had nearly doubled in the three years since the previous survey. In accordance with the Association of College and Research Libraries' Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services and the mission of the library and university, the Mansfield Library at the University of Montana integrates library services into the instruction efforts of faculty both on and off campus. In December 2004, the Mansfield Library conducted a survey of University of Montana faculty who teach courses at a distance. The goals of that survey included: 1.) identifying what distance education faculty need from their library to supplement their instruction; 2.) what services would faculty like to see the library offer to their students and 3.) how can the library best meet the ACRL Guidelines and its own mission. The results of the survey were used to strengthen the design and development of outreach services to distance faculty and students. This poster session outlines the development of the survey, the results of the survey, and the conclusions reached.

### **Survey:**

We designed a brief, ten-question survey to measure how aware faculty were of the library's offerings, and what services they would ideally like the library to offer. Questions were all multiple choice. The survey was deployed over the web via SurveyMonkey.com, a site providing free and low-cost survey hosting. We sent the survey to 35 faculty and received 16 responses (a 46% response rate).

### **Results:**

We discovered:

- Faculty are asking their distant students to do research to complete assignments.
- Faculty feel they are aware of what the library offers to support them, but
- Faculty aren't so sure that their students know what's available from the library.
- Faculty feel the best way to educate students about library resources is a stand-alone library skills course.
- Faculty also favor a customizable BlackBoard course module or linkable subject guides for library instruction.
- Faculty don't want librarian-led discussion threads within their BlackBoard courses.
- Faculty are not linking to the library website from their BlackBoard course shells.

## **Conclusions:**

We have designed and begun to offer a one-credit Research Skills course online for distant students to take. We plan to promote it heavily in the fall to on-campus and distant students, via mailings, on-campus postings, and messages to other instructors.

A customizable BlackBoard course module, capable of being added to any online course, is in development and should be launched in Spring 2006. This module will house a link to the library website, tutorials on searching various databases, and resources on the subjects taught in the class to which the module is added.

We are researching similar surveys at other institutions to see if there are any commonalities that can be applied to distance education library services as a whole. We also plan to re-assess our faculty in 2006 to see if their views have changed and if they feel our service additions and improvements have made a difference.

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*Thanks for stopping by my poster session! If you have questions or comments, or would like a copy of my report or survey questionst, please contact me at [Samantha.hines@umontana.edu](mailto:Samantha.hines@umontana.edu) or 406.243.4558.*