

Johnson, Ken. "Library Services for Distance Learners at Drexel University's LeBow College of Business." *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship* 7, no. 2/3 (March 2002): 141. Haworth Press (ISSN: 0896-3568)

KEYWORDS. Distance learning| business schools | reference services | remote campuses |business reference

Library Services for Distance Learners at Drexel University's LeBow College of Business.

Ken Johnson

Abstract

Focuses on the extension of the services of the W. W. Hagerty Library to the distance learning programs at LeBow College of Business of Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Discussion of the library services provided; Information on the awareness and instruction initiative of the business librarian; Discussion of issues on funding, time commitment and measures of use in serving distance learning programs.

Introduction

Academic library services to distance learning programs of all types face one major challenge—distance. Libraries that support the distance learning programs of business schools must overcome this challenge in order to provide services equivalent to those provided on campus. To state the obvious, libraries that neglect to extend services to distance learning programs disenfranchise what has become a thriving component of many business schools. This case study will explain how, at Drexel University, the Business Librarian extends services to the LeBow College of Business distance learning MBA program and how the W. W. Hagerty Library (<http://www.library.drexel.edu>) incorporates services to all distance learning programs into the distance learning policy and overall strategic plan. This case study also will address related issues like funding for distance learning support, measures of use, time commitments, and service challenges.

BACKGROUND

The Bennett S. LeBow College of Business offers an MBA degree in both a remote campus and an online environment. For winter term 2001, LeBow has an enrollment of 381 graduate MBA students in two remote campus programs and an online MBA program. The remote campus programs have an enrollment of 146 students and the online MBA program has an additional 235 students. The ability of the LeBow College of Business to provide distance learning MBA programs has become a strong selling point for the college in the highly competitive Philadelphia education market. In the Philadelphia metropolitan area, prospective students have fourteen MBA programs from which to choose (Philadelphia, 2000).

The W. W. Hagerty Library appoints one Business Librarian to act as the liaison for the LeBow College of Business. Part of his responsibility is to provide support and services to the LeBow remote campus and online MBA programs.

Drexel University is an urban campus located in the University City section of Philadelphia and has an enrollment of 13,128 undergraduate and graduate students for the fall quarter 2000. In addition to the LeBow College of Business program, the University offers distance learning opportunities in the College of Engineering and the College of Information Science and Technology.

LIBRARY SERVICES PROVIDED

Hagerty Library provides off-campus access to all traditional services through the library Web site, with the goal to provide the distance learning community with library services equivalent to those services provided on-campus (Hagerty, 1999). To support the LeBow distance learning community, the Business Librarian has embraced an awareness and assistance initiative as a part of his liaison and reference duties. This section also will address service challenges experienced by the Business Librarian.

Awareness and Assistance

Regarding the awareness and assistance initiative the Business Librarian annually conducts a library introduction workshop at the two remote campus MBA programs and at the annual online MBA orientation weekend. During an hour-long workshop, he explains the scope of the library services available to the students and expounds upon the Library's goal to provide services equivalent to those available on campus. Students receive a folder emblazoned with the Library's logo, the business card of the Business Librarian, and multiple handouts tailored to their business research needs. The workshop then proceeds to cover such items as the Research Assistance Web pages (<http://www.library.drexel.edu/research/business.htm>). These pages act as a portal to the Business Librarian and business information resources available through the library Web site.

Following the basic introduction to library services and the Research Assistance portal, the students spend the remaining time covering the major business databases available for research. Most importantly, they learn that all of these databases are available from their home computer using a proxy address and a unique library identification number. The off-campus access procedures will be explained in the next section.

The goal of the workshop is for the students and faculty members to understand that the Library's Web site functions as a service, providing access to business research databases, financial

information, and books, as well as a quick link to the Business Librarian's reference service via e-mail or telephone.

Off-Campus Access

For distance learners, access to the print and electronic book collection, the journals (print and electronic), electronic reserves, and the research databases all begins at the Hagerty Library Web site (<http://www.library.drexel.edu>). Linden's article title best sums up this concept, "The library's Web site *is* the library" (Linden, 2000).

In an effort to meet the goal of equivalent service, the Library employs a book and journal delivery service to all distance learners at Drexel. The Interlibrary Loan (ILL) department acts as the delivery agent by mailing library books to students free of charge. The regular checkout period of twenty-eight days with one renewal applies. Students request books by using the Web-based ILL form (<http://innopac.library.drexel.edu/screens/ill.html>). The only charge to the student is the return shipping cost. ILL also delivers copies of print journal articles that are not available electronically. Of course, students are not required to return copies of journal articles.

Electronic reserves is another example of how Hagerty Library provides equivalent service to distance learners. The electronic reserves system allows professors to place course reading materials and other study materials on the library Web site for easy access by distance learners. The Reserve department staff scans reading materials specified by professors and loads the files onto the Reserve module of the library catalog. Electronic reserves can save a professor and distance learning students much time by placing required reading materials in one location. A distance learning student simply searches the electronic reserves sections for the desired materials, and downloads or prints the files as necessary.

Most distance learning students also need to use the wide array of subscription-based electronic resources available through the Hagerty Library Web site. The procedure to gain access to these services warrants some explanation.

Off-campus access to library resources, especially the subscription-based databases, depends on an authentication system whereby each patron has a unique library identification number, more commonly referred to as the "barcode" number. For on-campus students, this barcode number is attached to the student's photo identification card when issued. The on-campus student must visit the Library's Access Services department to have his or her account activated. An active account allows students to make use of all library services either on-campus or off-campus.

By definition, distance learning students rarely step foot on campus. For this reason, all distance learning students, including those from LeBow, must have their barcode issued at an orientation class or delivered through e-mail. Each term, the Library requires that the professor or an academic department representative furnish a list of all newly-enrolled students to the Access Services department head. The department head then verifies each student as currently enrolled and issues an activated library barcode number. The professor or academic department representative then distributes the barcodes to the students either at the remote campus class or by e-mail.

Once a student holds an activated barcode number, the Hagerty Library considers the student a fully functioning library patron. The student may request books, use the Interlibrary Loan service and, most importantly, make the necessary proxy setting change in their Web browser that allows access to the subscription-based electronic resources.

While making a proxy setting change may seem a complicated process, the setting change only has to be made one time. The proxy setting change allows the Hagerty Library to permit off-campus access to all of its subscription-based databases. Licensing agreements for these databases require that access be limited only to current Drexel students, faculty and staff. By requiring all off-campus

users to complete a proxy setting change, Hagerty Library can provide off-campus access and stay within the rules of the licensing agreements. Hagerty Library uses an automatic proxy configuration that works within a Web browser to reroute requests to the restricted databases through the Library's computer system. Students find instructions on how to set up the automatic proxy configuration on the same Web page that provides links to the databases (<http://www.library.drexel.edu/er/er.html>). By rerouting the requests through the Library's system, a student, faculty or staff member can be validated and allowed into the desired database. The last step is for the person to enter his or her library barcode number. Once entered, the Library's computer system grants access to the database.

Service Challenges

In his experience with the LeBow distance learning MBA programs, the Business Librarian has discovered certain challenges that have affected service quality. These challenges shall be broken down into the categories of access and techno-challenges.

Access Challenges

As discussed earlier in this article, the Hagerty Library requires a unique library barcode number for each student. As described in the previous section, an academic department representative must deliver a list of new students to Library's Access Services department head in order for the students to receive the library barcode number. This effort requires much organization on the part of the LeBow department representative and the Library. The LeBow representatives have proven to be quite organized, but problems often arise. For example, during a recent term, two students who registered for remote MBA courses were included on a class list, but their tuition bills had not been processed. When the Access Services department head checked the enrollment status of these students, they could not be found in the system and a library barcode number could not be issued. Only days later, when the students were officially enrolled, could the Access Services department issue the library barcode number. Solving these sorts of bureaucratic snafus requires much patience and persistence on the part of all parties involved.

Another access challenge, relating to the student's access from home, arose when the Business Librarian addressed one of the remote campus distance learning classes. Some students explained that their employer had furnished them a home computer with Internet access, but that even at home, they found themselves behind the corporation's computer system firewall. Such computer security prevents any computer behind the firewall from making a proxy setting change. Hagerty Library normally addresses the workplace firewall issue by informing the students to change the setting at home because the workplace system is beyond the Library's control. However, these particular students could not escape the corporate firewall because their employer supplies both the computer and Internet access. After much brainstorming by the class, the Business Librarian and the students determined that the best solution was for these students to establish an Internet account with another Internet service provider or test the free Internet service providers to see if one would accept a proxy setting change. Of course, the Business Librarian also distributed the contact number for the Library Systems department.

Techno-Challenges

Anyone who has given a presentation will sympathize with the challenge of presenting in an unfamiliar setting. When traveling to a new location, one must quickly become familiar with the

technical capabilities of each room. Issues such as slow Internet access speed, substandard projection capabilities, and inadequate workstation software could all pose threats to a “live” Web presentation.

To eliminate any surprises, the Business Librarian arrived approximately 45 minutes before class time in order to assess the capabilities of each classroom. As a backup, he brought along a laptop, a projector, and fifty feet of Internet cable. One of the rooms had a fairly new personal computer with adequate Internet speed and screen projection capabilities, but the computer did not have Adobe Acrobat Reader software loaded. In addition, this classroom was located on a corporate campus that was protected by a system firewall. Moreover, the Business Librarian found himself unable to change the proxy setting to demonstrate the databases. Fortunately, he brought along a canned PowerPoint presentation for backup with screen captures of the databases.

The second classroom had only a projection screen and a network jack. The Business Librarian needed both his laptop computer and projector to begin the presentation. In this case, the network had no firewall protection so he could make the necessary proxy change to demonstrate the Web site and business databases.

Certain techno-challenges, like classroom and equipment capabilities, can be handled with proper planning (i.e., get there early). Other issues, such as firewall protection on free corporate computers, only serve to keep librarians humble.

DISTANCE LEARNING AS PART OF THE OVERALL STRATEGIC PLAN

The commitment to serve the entire distance learning community at Drexel University falls under the goals of Hagerty Library’s overall strategic plan (http://www.library.drexel.edu/facts/middlestates/pdf/strategic7_pln.pdf). The administration and staff of Hagerty Library developed and began to implement the strategic plan in 1998 and 1999, and the Library Advisory Committee adopted the current strategic plan in April 2000. The strategic plan sets forth support for distance learning programs as one of the Library’s major service goals. Objectives towards meeting this goal include developing a distance learning policy and appointing a liaison to the distance learning programs. The Business Librarian works within these established goals and objectives to serve the LeBow distance learning MBA programs.

Distance Learning Policy

To prepare a comprehensive distance learning policy, the library administration reviewed the needs of the Drexel distance learning community and consulted the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) guidelines for distance learning library services (Association, 2000). In accordance with the needs of the distance learning community and the ACRL guidelines, Hagerty Library established the aforementioned goal to provide services to distance learners equivalent to those services provided on-campus. The resulting distance learning policy and procedures (<http://www.library.drexel.edu/services/distancelearning.html>), adopted by the Hagerty Library in October 1999, explain the equivalent service goal and list the services offered and requirements necessary for the distance learning community to gain off-campus access to library resources. The procedure for gaining off-campus access to the Library’s services and resources has been explained earlier in this paper.

Chief among the needs of the distance learning community is twenty-four hour access to the library catalog, journals and research databases. The Library meets this need through the Hagerty Library Web site. By making the required proxy setting change in their Web browser, distance

learners have access to all library resources whenever needed. The policy also explains procedures for students to have books and copies of journal articles delivered to their homes.

Liaison Duties

In addition to creating a distance learning policy, the Hagerty Library strategic plan established another objective of appointing a Librarian liaison for off-campus programs. The library administration originally assigned this task to the Business Librarian. Within three months the Business Librarian discovered that the job of serving all distance learning programs at Drexel was too wide-ranging and varied for one person. Consequently, the objective was changed so that each subject librarian now serves the distance learning programs of his or her assigned college. Hagerty Library has six librarians that represent Drexel's six colleges and schools. Currently, only three of the colleges, the College of Engineering, the Bennett S. LeBow College of Business, and the College of Information Science and Technology, have distance education programs. This new arrangement allows the subject librarians to extend their established working relationship with faculty members who now find themselves teaching distance learning courses. Hagerty Library finds this arrangement appropriate for Drexel University.

RELATED ISSUES

Other issues, like funding for library services, time commitments, and measures of use, all have an impact on service to the distance learning programs at Drexel, including the LeBow College of Business. Each issue warrants discussion.

Funding for Library Services

Financial commitments, to support Drexel's distance learning programs, also fall under the administrative goals of the Hagerty Library strategic plan (http://www.library.drexel.edu/facts/middlestates/pdf/strategic7_pln.pdf). In January 1998, Library Dean, Carol Montgomery, received a substantial increase in funding for library services and infrastructure from the Provost. The Provost increased funding to revitalize a library that the University had neglected for years, and to prepare for the upcoming accreditation review by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in 2001. Montgomery applied much of this funding increase towards Web-based access to traditional library research databases, electronic journal collections, and electronic books. Regarding business resources, the library added or improved Web-based access to ABI/Inform, Lexis/Nexis, Business&Industry, General Businessfile, the CCH Tax Research Network, and Standard & Poor's NetAdvantage. For electronic journals, the Library acquired the Elsevier journals through Science Direct, MCB University Press titles, and selected electronic journals from Wiley Interscience, to name just a few. All of these databases and electronic journal collections serve the research needs of the LeBow College of Business distance learning programs.

In addition, Montgomery moved aggressively towards establishing an electronic journals only environment. During 1998, Montgomery gained support for this effort from the faculty members on the Library Advisory Committee. At the same time, she reinstated the faculty copy service that had been discontinued a few years earlier. This service delivers journal articles to faculty members via regular mail, e-mail, or fax. In the opinion of this author, the reinstatement of the faculty copy service helped ease potential fears that the faculty was losing access to their beloved print journals.

To implement this electronic journals plan, all of the Librarians have participated in an intense

evaluation process of print journal holdings to decide if an equivalent electronic version of a traditional print resource exists. The Librarians have operated under the guideline that if an electronic equivalent of the print exists and can be acquired, then the print will be cancelled. In turn, the Library has applied money saved from the cancellation of print titles towards increased access to electronic titles.

Between 1998 and 2000, the Library reduced its print subscriptions from about 1,500 titles down to approximately 800. The Library replaced many of the print titles with the electronic counterpart and cancelled some titles for lack of use. In 2001, the Library expects to subscribe to only about 300 print titles. Over the same time period, the Library built its electronic offerings to over 6,000 unique electronic titles and intends to add more (Montgomery, 2000). One may learn more about Hagerty Library's efforts to create an electronic only journal collection by reading Montgomery's article in the October 2000 issue of *D-Lib Magazine* (<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/october00/montgomery/10montgomery.html>).

Feedback from the Drexel community regarding the Library's allocation of funds towards electronic resources, especially electronic journals, has been mostly positive. In-house users of the Hagerty Library have learned quickly that they can access journals from anywhere on-or off-campus. From the Business Librarian's conversations with business faculty and students, including a few distance learners, the LeBow College of Business has been pleased with the move to electronic journals. In addition, the College of Engineering, College of Information Science and Technology, and the Sciences programs have been pleased with the increased offerings of electronic journals. Other programs, such as the Design Arts and Humanities programs, have concerns that electronic equivalents do not exist for some of their journals, and that these print journals will be cancelled without their input. Montgomery has made concessions to these programs, but remains steadfast in her conviction to convert to electronic journals as quickly as possible and to allocate more funds towards electronic resources for all Drexel programs.

Time Commitment

The Hagerty Library staff shares the responsibility of supporting the remote access needs of the Drexel community. The time commitment necessary to manage the electronic resources requires a full time position. In 1998, a new position, Electronic Resources Manager (ERM), was created for managing all technical and access issues relating to electronic resources. The person in this position handles all licensing agreements with the database vendors and makes certain our contracts allow for off-campus access that is essential for distance learners. The ERM also contacts the vendors directly when problems arise and communicates to the Information Services (IS) librarians any database problems or improvements. In turn, the IS librarians field most reference calls and e-mails regarding the use of these electronic resources. Minor troubleshooting problems, such as setting up the proxy address, are handled by the IS staff.

The Library Systems department, including the Webmaster, supports the Electronic Resources Manager and Information Services librarians by resolving network problems, technical access questions from students, and Web site design issues. Each of these individuals and departments works as a team to support remote access to the library and by default the distance learning community. The Hagerty Library's dedication to support remote access through the behind the scenes efforts of the Electronic Resources manager and the Library Systems department increases the quality of resources and service provided to the entire distance learning community, including the LeBow distance learning MBA programs.

For the Business Librarian, the time commitment necessary to serve the distance learning MBA

programs requires a flexible work schedule. All remote campus MBA classes convene in the evening, and the online MBA orientation meets over a weekend. The Business Librarian believes attending these classes and the orientation weekend an essential job duty, and based on the positive feedback he receives from students and faculty, the effort has paid dividends in increased awareness of electronic resources for business research.

Due to the increased awareness of the electronic resources, the Business Librarian receives about three e-mail or telephone questions each month from distance learning students. He answers these questions within the normal workday. On weekends, he checks his work e-mail account at least once, and responds to questions when possible. Even with traveling to the distance learning sites and responding to e-mail queries over the weekend, the Business Librarian believes the time committed to LeBow distance learning MBA programs falls within a normal work week.

Measures of Use

Librarians may expect that service to distance learners would produce a quantifiable increase in library use statistics. At Hagerty Library, the increase has proven either very small with regards to book requests and reference questions or not quantifiable when measuring the use of electronic resources.

The Business Librarian, as stated earlier, receives about three reference queries each month from LeBow distance learners. The Information Services department, which handles all reference queries, does not keep separate statistics on questions from distance learners, so it is possible that other librarians at the Reference desk handle a few more queries each month. Still, questions from distance learners do not create a noticeable burden on either the Business Librarian or the Information Services department.

The Interlibrary Loan (ILL) department handles requests for books and journal articles from distance learners. ILL has received only one book request and zero journal requests from Drexel's distance learning students since the implementation of the distance learning policy in 1999. This one book request did not come from a business student. To explain why the use of physical print materials has been so low, this author reviewed the available course syllabi for the LeBow distance learning courses, and discovered that course readings are normally provided to the students by the professor. Also, the remote campus MBA programs are all located within one hour of the Drexel campus. Students in these programs may choose to travel to the Hagerty Library and use the library in the traditional manner. However, the Library staff may wish to review the distance learning policy to remove any possible barriers to the students' use of print materials.

Hagerty Library expects that most distance learners use the electronic resources more than any other library service. The Business Librarian believes this to be especially true for business research. Unfortunately, neither the database vendors nor the library's automated system provides quantifiable figures. The vendor's usage reports do show a high volume of use that validates the Library's expectations, especially for the business services like ABI/Inform and the *Wall Street Journal*. Yet, these reports do not provide the detail necessary to assess the volume of use by distance learners. Most often, the reports tally the number of logins, search requests, or individual titles accessed. These figures do not detail the location where students log in.

The Library's automated system (Millennium from Innovative Interfaces) also fails to provide a count of distance learner access. The Millennium system employs the same student categories as assigned by Drexel's student records system called Bannerweb. Bannerweb categorizes students as being either undergraduates or graduates. It does not distinguish distance learners within these student groups. Hence, when a student logs on to a library database from home, the student enters his or her unique library barcode number into the Millennium verification system to gain access.

Millennium proceeds to tally the student as an undergraduate or graduate, but not as a distance learner. Unless Drexel University creates a separate category for distance learners, the Library may never be able to quantify use of its electronic resources by distance learners.

In summary, Hagerty Library cannot accurately assess the amount of use by the LeBow distance learning programs or by any distance learning group at Drexel. For the future, it may be necessary for the Business Librarian to discuss with faculty the kind of business research and resources required for the distance education courses. With this method, the Business Librarian would at least be able to gain empirical evidence of use.

CONCLUSION

Certain aspects of the experience at Drexel may be typical for academic libraries that support business schools offering distance learning programs. Other aspects may be unique. Hopefully, this case study provides a relevant example of a library that provides specialized outreach and instruction to its business distance learning program, and integrates support for all distance learning programs into its overall strategic plan.

To serve the future needs of the LeBow programs, the Business Librarian must continue outreach and instruction efforts to the faculty and students. Working under the assumption that the LeBow distance learning programs will expand, outreach and awareness efforts by the Business Librarian will be crucial to integrate library services into the distance education experience. In addition, the Business Librarian must stay abreast of new electronic resources that improve the business research capabilities of distance learning students as well as all of Drexel's business students.

It cannot be overstressed that libraries which support the distance learning programs of business schools must provide services equivalent to those provided on campus. Without such a commitment, the library may find itself neglecting a significant portion of its population.

REFERENCES

- Association of College and Research Libraries. 2000. "Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services" [Online]. Available at URL: <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/distlrng.html>> [January 23, 2001–access date]. Linden, Julie. 2000. "The library's Web site is the library: designing for distance learners." *College & Research Libraries News* 61, no. 2: 91, 101.
- Montgomery, Carol. 2000. "Measuring the Impact of an Electronic Journal Collection on Library Costs." *D-Lib Magazine* 6, no. 10. Available at URL: <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/october00/montgomery/10montgomery.html>> [February 15, 2001–access date].
- Philadelphia Business Journal. 2000. "MBA Programs," in the *2000 Book of Business Lists* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Business Journal): 122.
- W.W. Hagerty Library. 1999. *Distance Learning Policy and Procedures* [Online]. Philadelphia: Drexel University, W.W. Hagerty Library. <<http://www.library.drexel.edu/services/distancelearning.html>> [February 6, 2001–access date].
- W.W. Hagerty Library. 2000. *Hagerty Library Strategic Plan: Draft 4/13/00* [Online]. Philadelphia: Drexel University, W.W. Hagerty Library, 2000. Available at URL: <http://www.library.drexel.edu/facts/middlestates/pdf/strategic7_pln.pdf> [February 6, 2001–access date].