Knowing Your Users and What They Want:
Surveying Off-Campus Students About Library Services

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ABSTRACT
In order to have a successful library program for off-campus students, librarians must understand who their students are and what they want. This presentation will address the issues involved in conducting a user survey for off-campus students. The presentation will cover details on developing a survey; it will discuss the logistics of sending and receiving; and it will examine one method of evaluation. The presentation is based on a student survey conducted by the University of Iowa Libraries during November 1998 and March 1999.

Communication with students should be a two-way street. In our teaching roles, and as the information experts within the academic setting, librarians tend to focus on disseminating the information that we think our students need. We talk at length to students about library services; we give presentations to them about all kinds of information resources; and we develop web pages full of information just for them. Although we certainly should emphasize our teaching duties, occasionally we need reverse roles, listen instead of talk, and let the students tell us a few things.

The user survey is a well-established research methodology for librarians. The first library surveys were conducted in the 1920s (Gothberg, 1990), and over the years, the survey has become a standard method of learning about academic library users. Although the large majority of the surveys conducted by academic libraries have focused on on-campus students (Clougherty, 1998) (Berger, 1994), a couple of recent studies reported at the 8th Off-Campus Library Services Conference focused on off-campus students (Cassner, 1998)(Rose, 1998) (Schafer, 1998). In addition to the published evidence supporting the usefulness of user surveys, distance-education librarians are also advised by their guidelines to survey off-campus users regularly. In the ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services (1998), the tenth "Management" recommendation suggests that librarians regularly survey distance learning library users in order to "monitor and assess both the appropriateness of their use of services and resources and the degree to which needs are being met." This presentation will address the issues recently faced by one institution, the University of Iowa Libraries, as it conducted a survey of its off-campus students.

The University of Iowa (UI) did not begin from scratch when it considered conducting an off-campus user survey. The UI survey instrument was based on a previous survey conducted by a sister state institution, the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) (Rose, 1998). UNI completed its off-campus survey in 1992, and shortly afterwards, cooperative efforts by the three Regents universities in Iowa (UI, UNI, & Iowa State University) culminated in the formation of the Inter-institutional Library Committee on Distance Education. During committee meetings, the three institutions shared information about their distance education activities, including information on the UNI user survey. Representatives from UI and ISU easily recognized the value of the information gained from UNI's survey. The committee ultimately recommended that UI and ISU follow up by conducting similar surveys, thus allowing for a comparison and sharing of data between the three Regents universities. During the summer and fall of 1998, UI library staff modified the survey instrument for our needs. We attempted to keep it as similar as possible to the UNI survey, but several questions were revised to better reflect technological advancements since 1992 (such as the growth of the Internet and its importance for distance-education library services). The revised survey instrument was pre-tested on a group of graduate students, and a few minor revisions were made. According to Hafner (1998), pre-testing the survey is quite important. It helps clarity some questions, provides a preview of the kind of answers one can expect, and supplies the researcher with experience in tallying the results.

Since the survey would require the use of human subjects, the UI Libraries had to obtain permission from the University's Human Subjects Office. Many universities require such a review in order to protect the welfare and confidentiality of the respondents. Since this review can take time and may require adjustments in the survey, it is recommended that contact with the Human Subjects Office occur as early in the planning process as is possible.

For any survey, sample size is of course critically important-- the larger the size of the sample, the more accurate the picture of the target population. Although recommendations vary, many researchers consider a ten-percent sample to be a minimum (Clougherty, 1998). For the UI survey, the logistics involved in determining the sample size and mailing of the surveys required the cooperation of many people. Library staff members worked with a variety of personnel from the Center for Credit Programs and the School of Management in order to work out the details. The School of Management supervises the UI off-campus MBA program, and the Center for Credit Programs manages all other off-campus programs. The Center for Credit Programs developed a random sample that included fifty percent of the students enrolled their degree-granting programs, resulting in a sample total of 506 individuals. The School of Management developed a random sample that included twenty-five percent of the students enrolled in the off-campus MBA program, resulting in a sample total of 200 individuals. The total survey sample, therefore, consisted of 706 individuals.

The mailing consisted of the survey instrument (see Appendix A), a cover letter (see Appendix B), and a stamped return-envelope addressed to the Coordinator of Library Services for Distance Education (me). Due to financial and time constraints, we decided not to attempt to follow up on students who did not respond to the survey. Following up on non-respondents helps increase the ultimate response rate and the overall relevancy of the data. However, it also increases the cost and time involved, while decreasing the privacy of both respondents and non-respondents. Believing that we would be able to get useful information from a one-shot mailing, we decided to send out the survey with no follow up for non-respondents. In our cover letter (see Appendix B), however, we could assure each potential respondent, "Your participation in this survey is completely confidential. No names are associated with individual responses."

Staff concluded that two separate mailings were necessary-- one mailing for students enrolled under the Center for Credit Programs and one for students enrolled under the School of Management. In November 1998, the survey instruments were mailed to all individuals enrolled under the Center for Credit Programs, and in March 1999, the survey packages were mailed to students enrolled in the MBA distance-education program. Responses were received throughout the spring semester, with the last response being received in June.

For any survey, the response rate is critically important-- the larger the response rate, the more accurate the picture of the target population. Although recommendations vary, many researchers consider a forty-percent response rate to be a minimum in order to judge that the results are accurate (Clougherty, 1998). In the UI survey, 272 students returned the instrument, resulting in a response rate of 38.5 percent, just shy of the forty-percent minimum. If we had just ten more respondents, we would have broken the forty-percent barrier. Since we had no method of following up on our non-respondents, however, we were actually fairly pleased with the 38.5 percent rate of return. In our view, that figure is essentially forty percent, and therefore, we believe that the results of the survey can be judged to be a legitimate reflection of our students.

There are several statistical packages on the market that one can use to tally the results of surveys: SAS and SPSS are probably the two most popular. For the UI survey, we used "SPSS 8.0 for Windows." With SPSS, data entry was fairly simple, although time-consuming. Data manipulation, however, was both quick and easy. By June 1999, all of the returned surveys had been processed, and we were ready to manipulate the data. The written comments to the survey's two open-ended questions (21 and 22) were compiled and analyzed separately.

Analysis of the data revealed some interesting results for UI librarians to ponder, such as:

Personal Characteristics
30 percent are thirty-years-old or younger, while 70 percent are older than thirty.
80 percent are unwilling to drive more than fifty miles for library services.

Coursework and Library Use
90 percent have been required to write a research paper for at least one class..
65 percent have used library resources for their class projects.
70 percent use public libraries for some of their information needs.
30 percent use public libraries as their primary information source.
50 percent use academic libraries as their primary information source.

Connectivity
85 percent have convenient access to the World Wide Web
85 percent have access to email
75 percent have convenient access to a FAX machine.

Library Services
      Probably the most useful information obtained from the survey concerned a list of library services. Students were given the option of checking all services that they believed were important, and they were asked to rank their top three choices. The overall rankings were as follows:

1. Web and/or e-mail reference services   71.3 percent
2. Remote access to full-text databases   65.1 percent
3. Home delivery of books and articles   60.7 percent
4. Access to Internet resources   54.8 percent
5. Toll-free number for reference   49.3 percent
6. Remote access to UI, ISU, UNI catalogs 49.1 percent
7. Interlibrary Loan/Doc-Delivery service   43.8 percent
8. Remote Access to Electronic Indexes   43.3 percent
9. Borrowing Agreements with Libraries   37.9 percent
10. Guides to doing library research   30.9 percent
11. Computer-assisted instruction   27.9 percent
12. Librarian-provided instruction   20.2 percent

Generally, reference services, electronic services, and document delivery services were ranked high, while user education services were ranked lowest.

Open-Ended Questions
      The Survey also had two open-ended questions. The first question asked, "In you own words, what library and/or informational needs do you have for University of Iowa courses that are not being filled currently?" The final question asked for "Comments?" Ninety-six students answered the first question, and seventy-three replied with comments. Responses to both questions varied considerably, but a general trend could be ascertained. Approximately one-third of the respondents were concerned about obtaining more access to electronic resources, and one-third were concerned about document-delivery services.

      The statistics reported in this presentation have concerned the total sample of all distance-education programs at the University of Iowa. Through SPSS, we easily produced statistics for the student sample from each of the degree-granting programs, and that information was useful for understanding the needs of the individual off-campus programs. For instance, MBA students were far more concerned about obtaining access to Internet and electronic resources, while Library Science students were far more concerned about document delivery services. The differences between the programs were not great, however. There were no radical divergences of opinion. Summaries of the compiled statistics were shared with the Center for Credit Programs, the School of Management, the relevant departments, and relevant library staff. In some cases, the survey results were put to use immediately.

For example, the survey results were used to develop a new document-delivery service for distance-education students. Even though students were informed that there might be a fee involved, sixty-percent of the students ranked document-delivery as an important library service (third among the twelve services listed). In response to this obvious demand, a library working-group was established during the spring of 1999 to investigate the possibility of establishing a special document-delivery service for distance-education students. Using the survey results and other information, the working group recommended that students be given the ability to request that books be delivered by UPS and articles be delivered by fax or mail. The working group recommended a general fee of three dollars for each request, with the article request having an additional charge of ten-cents-per-page for pages eleven and higher. Later, when the library administration and the campus provost considered the proposal, it was clear that the supporting evidence provided by the survey results were key in their deliberations. The proposal was accepted in August, and the document-delivery service was launched at the beginning of the fall semester 1999.

The survey results were also used to implement a library-sponsored toll-free telephone reference service. At the time that the survey was distributed, the library was piggybacking on another department's toll-free telephone service. The Center for Credit programs has had a toll-free number for many years, and in November 1998, the Center agreed to let the library use that number when helping distance-education students. The shared service always required call transfers, however, and this occasionally resulted in some confusion for the students and staff. After the survey revealed that fifty-percent of the students ranked a toll-free telephone number as an important library service (fifth among the twelve services), the library administration supported the establishment of a separate toll-free number for distance-education library services. The new telephone number was operational by July. It was promoted through letters, handouts, web pages, etc., and during the fall semester of 1999, it proved to be a popular method for obtaining reference assistance.

Several new library initiatives have been supported by the survey results that showed a large desire for more Internet resources. In addition, since the survey shows that eighty-five percent of our students have convenient access to the World Wide Web, a significant portion of our distance education students have the potential of benefiting from any improvement that we make to our web-based resources. In one of the new initiatives, over the summer of 1999, library staff developed a "Library Services for Distance Education" web site in order to better support library services for off-campus students (see Appendix C). For each degree-granting program, the "Library Services for Distance Education" home page provides a subject link to a list of the most relevant electronic resources, and in addition, the web site also provides access to special document-delivery, reference, and consultation services. In addition, for some of the degree-granting programs (especially business and nursing), the survey results are being used to support the co-funding of special, subject-oriented resources. Finally, the survey also showed clear support for more full-text databases. In response to the obvious off-campus and on-campus demand for full-text information, the UI Libraries recently purchased access to EBSCO-HOST. As other electronic resources are investigated, library staff members will seriously consider the information gained from the distance-education survey.

The usefulness of each survey is limited by time, however. It is only a snapshot of the views held by particular distance-education students at the time that the survey was distributed. Things will ultimately change, of course, and in this technological age, things can change very quickly. In order to keep informed about student opinions, the survey should be revised and repeated as frequently as possible. The UI Libraries are committed to conducting a survey of distance-education students at least every two years. Although surveys being repeated closely will no doubt show some continuity in student concerns, there will probably be some changes as well.

Distance-Education Librarians should recognize that library staff members are empowered by the knowledge gained from surveys. Significantly, surveys will give us statistical information that we can use whenever we appeal to library and university administrators for new resources and services. Even more importantly, each survey will enlighten us about our students and reinforce our understanding of their evolving concerns for library resources and services. From the survey, we learn who our students are and what they want. How we react to that knowledge, however, is up to us.

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Appendix A
University of Iowa Libraries, Survey of Distance-Education Students
Survey Instrument & Summary of Results for All Programs

272 responses from 706 surveys mailed out, 38.5% returned

Personal Characteristics

1. Student Status | Percent
    - Graduate | 56.3
    - Senior | 17.6
    - Junior | 20.6
    - Sophomore | 2.2
    - Freshman | 3.3

2. Gender | Percent
    - Male | 34.2
    - Female | 65.8

3. Age | Percent
    - 18-21 | .7
    - 22-30 | 28.5
    - 30+ | 70.7

4. Degree Seeking | Percent
    - Yes | 100

5. Degree Program | Percent
    - BLS (Liberal Studies) | 36.4
    - BSN (Nursing) | 7.4
    - BSW (Social Work) | .4
    - MBA (Business) | 28.0
    - MLS (Library Science) | 4.4
    - MSCS (Computer Science) | 1.1
    - MSECE (Electrical Engineering) | 1.5
    - MSN (Nursing) | 3.7
    - MSW (Social Work) | 13.2
    - PHD (Pharmacy) | 4.0

6. Willing to Drive Distance
    for Library Resources | Percent
    - Less than 50 miles | 86.5
    - 50-100 miles | 11.2
    - 100-200 miles | 1.2
    - 200+ miles | 1.2

7. Willing to Drive Distance
    for ICN site (fiber optic TV classroom) | Percent
    - Less than 50 miles | 82.7
    - 50-100 miles | 15.8
    - 100-200 miles | 1.2
    - 200+ miles | .4

Coursework

8. How many courses have you taken from the UI in recent years that have been taught in an off-campus setting?

Courses Taken from UI	Percent
0	2.2
1	17.8
2	13.4
3	11.9
4	9.7
5	4.5
6	9.3
7	3.0
8	4.5
9	3.7
10+	20.1

9. How many of your University of Iowa off-campus courses have required the preparation of papers/reports/presentations?

Courses Requiring Paper	Percent
0	9.7
1	19.0
2	16.4
3	10.4
4	7.5
5	5.2
6	6.7
7	3.4
8-9	7.5
10+	14.2

10. How many of your off-campus courses have required the use of library materials?

Courses Requiring Library Use	Percent
0	34.7
1	13.4
2	13.1
3	9.3
4	6.7
5	4.1
6	3.7
7	3.0
8-9	4.1
10+	7.8

If you answered "0" to this question, please go to question 15.

11. For those courses that have required the use of library materials, which libraries or types of libraries have you used (check as many as apply)?

Use of Libraries	Percent
U of Iowa Libraries	34.7
UNI Libraries	2.8
ISU Libraries	4.0
Other Academic Library	62.5
Special Libraries	22.2
Public Libraries	68.2
Personal Library	47.7
Instructor Materials	33.5
Area Education Agency	5.7

12. Which type of library have you used most frequently to complete the requirements for an off-campus course?

Type of Library Used Most	Percent
Academic	47.2
Public	29.0
Special	10.2
Personal	13.6

13. How satisfied have you been with the adequacy of the <u>collections</u> of the library you have used the most?

Satisfaction with Collections	Percent
Very Satisfied	24.0
Somewhat Satisfied	56.6
No Opinion	7.4
Somewhat Dissatisfied	8.6
Very Dissatisfied	3.4

14. How satisfied have you been with the adequacy of the <u>services</u> of the library you have used the most?

Satisfaction with Service	Percent
Very Satisfied	33.7
Somewhat Satisfied	46.9
No Opinion	9.1
Somewhat Dissatisfied	8.0
Very Dissatisfied	2.3

Library Services for Distance Education

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15. Most useful services   **Rank 1, 2, 3**
Which of the following library services do you believe would be most useful as a student enrolled in off-campus courses? Please check any services you feel are important on the left and rank your top three choices on the right.

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1. Web and/or e-mail reference services
   71.3
   1. 15.1
   2. 17.3
   3. 9.6
      42.0

2. Remote access to full-text databases
   65.1
   1. 22.4
   2. 11.8
   3. 11.8
      46.0

3. Home delivery of books, photocopied articles, or other information materials (may involve a charge to students)
   60.7
   1. 9.2
   2. 11.4
   3. 8.1
      28.7

4. Access to Internet resources
   54.8

1.	10.3
2.	9.2
3.	5.1
	24.6

5. 800 number for reference service
   49.3

1.	7.0
2.	5.1
3.	7.0
	19.1

6. Remote access to the UI, ISU, or UNI library catalogs
   49.1

1.	5.9
2.	7.0
3.	8.1
	21.0

7. Interlibrary loan/document delivery services
   43.8

1.	4.8
2.	5.1
3.	10.7
	20.6

8. Remote access to electronic indexes and abstracts
   42.3

1.	4.0
2.	6.3
3.	6.6
	16.9

9. Borrowing agreements with libraries where courses are taught
   37.9

1.	2.6
2.	4.0
3.	4.8
	11.4

10. Guides to doing library research in a subject area
    30.9

1.	2.6
2.	2.6
3.	6.6
	11.8

11. Computer-assisted instruction (in conducting library research)
    27.9

1.	1.5
2.	1.8
3.	2.2
	5.5

12. Librarian-provided instruction (in person or over the ICN)
20.2

1.	2.2
2.	2.9
3.	.7
	5.8

Connectivity

16. Access to Electronic Mail   Percent
        Yes   85.2
        No   14.8

17. Do you have Convenient Access to the Following?:

Access to World-Wide Web   Percent
        Yes   83.8
        No   16.2

Access to Sending FAX   Percent
        Yes   73.8
        No   26.2

Access to Receiving FAX   Percent
        Yes   73.8
        No   26.2

Please check off the software and hardware noted below that are available on the workstation that you use for completing assignments.

Windows 95 or better   Percent
        Yes   83.4
        No   16.6

MacOS 7.5 or better   Percent
        Yes   4.8
        No   95.2

Windows 3.1   Percent
        Yes   13.7
        No   86.3

High Resolution Color Monitor   Percent
        Yes   66.8
        No   33.2

CD-ROM Drive   Percent
        Yes   75.3
        No   24.7

Keyboard   Percent
        Yes   93.4
        No   6.6

Mouse	Percent
Yes	91.9
No	8.1

28.8 or higher modem or Direct Internet Access	Percent
Yes	76.4
No	23.6

18. How helpful would it be to have information describing library services, resources, and policies for

off-campus students?	Percent
Very Helpful	33.7
Somewhat Helpful	46.9
No Opinion	9.1
Probably Not Helpful	8.0
Not Helpful at All	2.3

19. Best Format for Information

on Library Services	Percent
Print	45.2
Electronic	49.4
Both	5.3

20. Interest in On-Campus

Orientation by Librarian	Percent
Yes	29.8
No	70.2

Library Needs

21. In your own words, what library and/or informational needs do you have for University of Iowa courses that are not being filled currently?

22. Comments?

Dear Student:

You will find a survey packet from the University of Iowa Libraries enclosed with this letter. The purpose of the survey is to assess the effectiveness of the information services that are currently available to distance-education students, as well as the potential for improving those services. **We are aware that you are very busy with your academics and other matters, but we hope that you take time to respond.**

Your participation in this survey is completely confidential. No names are associated with individual responses. You were chosen to participate in this survey through the use of a random selection process, and each off-campus student had an equal chance of being selected. **Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, but it is crucial to the success of our project. Your response will give us an idea of how well we are currently meeting your information needs, and it will help us improve future services.**

The University of Iowa Libraries is committed to creating a learning environment that encourages quality research and scholastic achievement. Your participation in this survey provides us with the type of feedback required to achieve this goal. In addition, should you later have a question about library services or need assistance with any library matter, please feel free to contact me. My university address, telephone number, and e-mail address are provided below.

It will take you approximately five-to-ten minutes to complete this survey. Please return the completed survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed in this mailing.

Thank You,

Stephen H. Dew, Coordinator
Library Services for Distance Education
100 Main Library
University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242-1420
Tel: 800-272-6430
FAX: 319-335-5900
Email: stephen-dew@uiowa.edu

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS

Student ID Card Required.

The University of Iowa Libraries offers Distance-Education Services to all students enrolled in the degree-granting programs directed by the Center for Credit Programs and to all students enrolled in the off-campus MBA programs directed by the School of Management. In order to qualify for these services, students must obtain a "**University of Iowa No-Picture ID Card**." They can obtain forms to request the ID cards from the Center for Credit Programs and the School of Management.

Distance-Education Library Services Homepage.
http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/disted
This Homepage provides access to library resources and services that support distance education. The Homepage includes links to the following:

Short-Cuts to Electronic Resources by Subject.
For each degree-granting program (business, computer science, education, electrical engineering, liberal studies, library science, nursing, pharmacy, and social work), the Homepage provides a link to a list of the most useful electronic resources and databases. Some databases provide lists of articles and books by subject, keyword, author, etc., while other files provide information, such as full-text articles, statistics, or business information. In order to access some databases, your web browser must be configured to work with the Libraries' Proxy Server. Links are provided to online instructions describing how to configure it properly. In addition, for access to restricted databases, you will be prompted for a "Login/Password." In such cases, on the first line of the "Login/Password" box, type in your student identification number (usually your social security number), and leave the password line blank.

Access to OASIS.
The Homepage includes a link to OASIS, providing users with access to the University of Iowa's online library catalog as well as several other electronic resources. The other resources in OASIS include several subject indexes (such as **ERIC**, the education database) as well as the online catalogs of a number of different libraries, including the Big Ten universities, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa. In addition to web access, OASIS also can be accessed by telephone modem (**319-335-6200**) and by direct telnet (**oasis.uiowa.edu**).

Document-Delivery Services
- **Articles**: Distance-education students have the option of having articles mailed to any address that they provide or faxed to any fax number that they provide. For articles of ten pages or less, the charge is **three dollars** ($3) for each article. For articles over ten pages, there is an additional charge of **ten-cents-per-page** (**for pages eleven and higher**).
- **Books**: Students also have the ability to request that books be sent by UPS to any address that they provide. The charge is **three dollars** ($3) for each book. Students are responsible for returning books to the Main Library or Hardin Library before the due date, and they may use any delivery method that they prefer (mail, UPS, hand-delivery, etc.). Renewals are possible.

Requests can be submitted electronically. Forms are available from a link on the Distance-Education Library Services Homepage. For students enrolled in programs that have made financial arrangements with the Libraries, total costs will be charged to the program account. Otherwise, total costs will be charged to the student's University Bill.

Reference Services: Email and Toll-Free Telephone
Without leaving home or office, students can ask for help or advice from library staff. Any student who needs help finding information for a class project or help with research strategies should contact Stephen Dew, the Coordinator of Library Services for Distance Education. Web-based email forms are available on the Homepage. Otherwise, Dr. Dew can be contacted at the following: **1-877-807-9587**   **stephen-dew@uiowa.edu**