

## Chapter 15

# Embedded Librarians: Delivering Synchronous Library Instruction and Research Assistance to Meet Needs of Distance Students and Faculty

**Sheila Bonnard**

*Montana State University, USA*

**Mary Anne Hansen**

*Montana State University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter reports on one academic library's experiences with expanding instructional services by adding synchronous library instruction to better serve its online students and faculty located across the globe. Web conferencing software allows librarians to provide interactive, high-touch library instruction for online students equivalent to the experience of students in traditional face-to-face courses. While providing this real-time instruction on library resources and research skills, librarians are embedding themselves in online programs, becoming more readily accessible to online and distance students. By meeting the changing needs of academic library users wherever they are, librarians are reaffirming their integral role and relevance as partners in the educational endeavor.*

### INTRODUCTION

Librarians have long played an important role in the academic success of students and have traditionally provided on-campus students with face-to-face instruction on research and informa-

tion resources; librarians also play an integral role in facilitating lifelong learning. The Internet and online courses have changed the ways that libraries deliver research tools and resources in order to meet the needs students and faculty whatever their location. To remain relevant as instructors and to meet the information and research needs of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-441-3.ch015

distance and online students and faculty, librarians must go beyond providing web-based resources and static tutorials. It is not enough to be available within online courses for email and chat queries from students. For librarians to be truly embedded in the virtual academic enterprise, online library users should have the option to meet with librarians in real-time. The ability to provide live, synchronous library instruction allows librarians to offer interactive, high-touch research instruction, an experience similar to that of a face-to-face class. MSU librarians are using Adobe® Connect™ web conferencing software to deliver live library instruction sessions to students and faculty wherever they are located. This chapter discusses the successes, challenges, and surprises that librarians at Montana State University (MSU) have had in implementing synchronous library instruction to improve library services for distance and online students and faculty.

### **SERVING ONLINE STUDENTS**

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Standards for Distance Learning Library Services* (2008):

*"Every student, faculty member, administrator, staff member, or any other member of an institution of higher education, is entitled to the library services and resources of that institution, including direct communication with the appropriate library personnel, regardless of where enrolled or where located in affiliation with the institution. Academic libraries must, therefore, meet the information and research needs of all these constituents, wherever they may be" (Executive summary, para. 1).*

Fulfilling this mandate is becoming increasingly important as the number of distance and online courses continues to grow. Statistics from the 2006-2007 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) suggest that 66% of postsec-

ondary institutions were offering distance courses of some kind, whether online or hybrid (Parsad, Lewis, & Tice, 2008, p. 2). This number represents an increase of 10% from the 2000-2001 NCES survey (Waits, Lewis, & Green, 2003, p. 4). Though MSU has been involved with distance education for almost three decades, the number of courses has been relatively small and the institution has gathered few statistics. However, the statistics available suggest that MSU meets this trend of continued growth of distance education. As of spring semester 2010, 10% of MSU students were taking at least one class online while during the 2010 summer session 32% of students were enrolled in an online class.

The rapid expansion of online and distance instruction in higher education poses a number of challenges for academic libraries. Pival and Tuñón wrote in 2001 that "Bibliographic instruction (BI) is one of the major challenges facing libraries that support distance students" (2001, p. 347). To meet the library and information needs of students and faculty in this new environment, both on campus and at a distance, librarians must innovate. Cooke writing a few years later stated that, "Libraries cannot rest on their successes with traditional on-campus students; rather they must reinvent their support and services to accommodate distance learners" (2005, p. 55). To accomplish this, not only must ACRL distance education standards be applied, but libraries also have a responsibility to meet ACRL's information literacy standards which state that such standards are to be integrated "across curricula, in all programs and services" and that "competencies for distance learning students should be comparable to those for 'on campus' students" (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000, para. 2). In standard 2.E of the new standards from MSU's regional accrediting agency, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the importance of library support and information literacy instruction for students, faculty, and others involved in the institution's programs "...wherever offered

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