Three terminals, a telefax, and one dictionary

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Electronic library service as a solution for an external Learning Center.

The term “electronic library” has been used for over a decade to describe the book-less library of the future which will rely on telecommunications and computers to provide users with whatever information they need. Howden and Boyce1 have expanded on that term with their recently proposed DELTA Center concept as a means for research libraries, particularly Louisiana State University, to provide access to information in a Distributed Electronic Library with Terminal Assistance. DePaul University Library in Chicago has implemented the idea behind the electronic library/DELTA Center to provide library services at its extended campus facility in DesPlaines, a northwest suburb of Chicago.

DePaul’s O’Hare Campus (formerly Northwest Center), located in an office complex just minutes from O’Hare Airport, offers undergraduate and graduate classes in the School of Commerce, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the School for New Learning with classes concentrated in the evening and on weekends. Most students at O’Hare Campus fit the description of “adult learners,” adult students over 21 years of age, and most are employed full-time. Students in the School for New Learning are unique in that all students are adults 24 years of age or older, and they can earn degree credits for work accomplishments and other learning experience. Approximately 500 students attend the O’Hare Campus every quarter for regularly scheduled classes, and an additional 20 professional development workshops and seminars are held in the School of Commerce every quarter.

To provide library service at the O’Hare Campus, DePaul University Library used the ACRL Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services2 as the foundation for determining and assessing needs. Restrictions on the availability of space for books and other library materials at O’Hare Campus and an already tight library materials budget were major considerations in planning for effective library service. DePaul’s solution to both problems was to focus on providing access to materials and to supply library materials as they were needed by students and faculty. Online access to the holdings of all DePaul library collections and the libraries of 26 other academic institutions in Illinois through two LCS (Library Computer System) terminals gives students and faculty at O’Hare Campus ready

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A DePaul student checks for book locations on OCLC.

information for finding materials by author and title. Users cannot walk to the stacks to browse or to retrieve materials immediately, but receipt of DePaul materials is delayed only until the next delivery from the University Library locations in the Loop and Lincoln Park to the O’Hare Campus.

Materials for the O’Hare Campus from the other LCS libraries are shipped to DePaul’s Lincoln Park Campus by the State Library’s Illinois Library Delivery System (ILDS) and then trans-shipped by DePaul courier to O’Hare Campus. Reserve materials, whether books or journal articles, are requested by the faculty member and sent from either campus library to O’Hare Campus for the time indicated by the requester. Microform reels or fiche are sent to O’Hare Campus for student/faculty use on a microform reader/printer there. No library materials are kept permanently at O’Hare Campus—except for one dictionary.

While the DePaul University Library endorses the assumptions in the Guidelines which place primary responsibility for satisfying information needs on the parent academic library and its institution, the thrust in Illinois has been to provide broad access and to share resources among all types of libraries. A public OCLC terminal was installed, therefore, to give library users access to serial holdings in the Serials of Illinois Libraries Online (SILO) union list group of OCLC which includes public, special, and academic libraries. Since many of the excellent public libraries in the Chicago suburbs also use OCLC for cataloging and retrospective conversion, DePaul students and faculty who reside in those suburbs can locate needed material on OCLC and then use the copy from their own public library. Subject access to business journal articles is available in the COM-fiche version of Business Index from Information Access Company. While a crude subject search by classification can be done on LCS, the BRS “Easi-Reference Index” will expand subject access for recent library materials in the OCLC database; reference librarians at any of DePaul’s three locations do subject database searching for DePaul students and faculty, but instruction in end-user searching to be implemented at O’Hare Campus in the 1985–86 academic year is needed to increase ready subject access.

Providing electronic access to holdings, however, does not guarantee a satisfied library user; indeed Haworth’s description of a “daunting experience, particularly for the inexperienced or timid library user” is very accurate when applied to students unfamiliar with a traditional academic library. Professional librarians and a user education program help to overcome such inexperience and timidity. At DePaul’s O’Hare Campus a full-time librarian who is based primarily at the Loop Campus oversees the extended campus library services which are staffed by part-time librarians; the supervising librarian works at least one night per

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November 1985 / 537
There are no permanent library books, except for one dictionary.
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885