Cornell University Library

Council of Librarians

Wednesday, March 18, 1998

The focus of this meeting was Library support for distance learning.

The agenda included

- an introduction and perspective on the CU Distance Learning Advisory Committee by Sarah Thomas;
- a presentation on Library Support for Distance Education by Jon Levy, the Associate Director of the Cornell University Office of Distance Learning; and
- a discussion of Issues in Library Support for Distance Education facilitated by the CUL Distance Learning Group (Phil Davis, Peter McDonald, Tony Cosgrave, and Constance Finlay) and based on the draft of their Cornell University Library Distance Learning White Paper.

Sarah serves on the Distance Learning Advisory Committee, a committee organized through the Office of Distance Learning, and chaired by David Lipsky. The University is currently undertaking several distance learning initiatives, including an ILR program in New York City, a program in the Architecture School, and Executive Education programs in the Hotel and Management Schools. Distance learning is especially good for both geographic and time shifting situations. It involves not just "talking heads", but also interactive learning. There are various groups at work. Sarah is on the business group. The University is discussing policies, issues, and the focus for the distance learning initiative. The diversity of the University should contribute to the strength of the initiative.

Jon Levy said that Distance Learning initiatives are now active everywhere. Harvard was one of the last holdouts, but their Business, Medical, and Arts and Sciences Schools are getting involved. At Cornell work is underway on business plans and an analysis of financial impact. There is great potential for increased income from distance learning implementation. Major problems include networking and technical support, including solving the "four wall" problem to satisfactorily authenticate students and authorize their access to licensed information.

Distance learning should extend the boundaries and enrich the quality of education. For example, it is easier to involve guest lecturers and also to reach a minimum threshold of interested students for more "esoteric" courses. Distance learning also changes the way the University functions. The University is no longer a time and place. It provides education at the convenience of the student, and is more student centered rather than faculty centered. All standard elements defining a university are altered.

Jon pointed out that it is hard to keep up with developments in the distance learning arena because things are changing so rapidly. He does not expect distance learning to displace traditional learning, but rather to augment it. He stated that the quality of the offerings is a big issue and Cornell has an advantage because it can offer assured quality.

Philip Davis moderated a discussion of the draft Cornell University Library Distance Learning White Paper. The Distance Learning Committee was appointed by Sarah Thomas and consists of Philip Davis, Constance Finlay, Tony Cosgrave, and Peter McDonald. It based its recommendations on the premise that the Library must provide it resources and services to distance learners to complement the University's

distance learning initiative. The discussion centered on the various sections of the white paper. Each section was presented by one of the members of the committee and was then discussed by the attendees.

The Networking and Authorization Issues include how to access materials and databases, ip address verification, contract and license issues with vendors, and the definition of a member of the Cornell community. We need to work with other Universities on strategies with vendors. These problems may take years to resolve. A major issue is how to ensure secure and verifiable access for people working at a distance.

The Acquisition and Collection Development Issues include the types of users who should have access to collections (students and non-students), and time specific usage (summer school courses, extra-mural courses, special education, executive seminars, etc). Perhaps financial arrangements could be made with the vendors and they could be shown how these arrangements are to their benefit with respect to future expanded markets.

Document Service issues include the availability of interlibrary loan facilities at locations near remote users, cooperative arrangements with other Universities for use of their facilities, and the on-line availability of materials. Methods other than shipping paper materials from place to place need to be developed.

Reference and Instruction Service issues include changes in methods of asking for and receiving information, extended use of e-mail to communicate with reference librarians, organized instruction via web pages, and partnerships between librarians and faculty to organize and disseminate educational materials.

Faculty Support issues include what the Library can and should provide for the faculty, and what should be left for others, index and metadata issues, the structure of information, and how collaborative work should be done. The role of the faculty may be changing from "Sage on the Stage" to "Guide on the Side".

Library Relationships to Other Department issues include how the Library fits in to the University's current distance learning initiatives, how the Library and CIT need to interact with respect to database support and other issues, interfaces with Media Services with respect to indexing issues, and work with Cooperative Extension for non-traditional students.

The Library Management Team (LMT) will be reviewing the White Paper at a future meeting.

Submitted by Joel Zumoff