Feature

SUNY*Connect*: Libraries Wherever You Are

Shouldn't all SUNY students have access to a core set of electronic databases? Why can't a student search all SUNY library catalogs, and then request books or other resources from whichever library owns them? Aren't there certain electronic library resources that are needed by every SUNY college? Nowadays, don't students applying for college expect this basic level of university-wide electronic library services?

Many people involved in libraries today see the need for shared electronic information services. Moreover, they view the lack of such services as a significant deterrent to increasing enrollment and improving student retention. If prospective students don't find these services at SUNY colleges they will take their tuition monies elsewhere.

SUNY/OLIS began creating the foundation of such core online resources in 1995. Today the office is building on those efforts through a virtual library project called SUNY*Connect*. Joe Branin, Dean and Director of Libraries at SUNY Stonybrook deserves credit for developing an initial proposal for the project. Following endorsement of the concept by SCLD, a Virtual Library Action Group was formed to help develop the project.

SUNY*Connect* seeks to provide the following:

- a core set of electronic databases broadly useful to students throughout the University
- a common library software system to facilitate searching and circulation of all SUNY library materials
- additional electronic research/reference tools
- document delivery/courier services
- online information literacy instruction
- shared, remote storage facilities
- image databases and digital collections

Larry Randall, on leave from SUNY Purchase where he was the library director, is the Project Manager for SUNY*Connect*. Larry, Carey Hatch and other members of the Virtual Library Action Group have been busy developing a financial plan and advocating for SUNY*Connect*. Presentations have been made to the SUNY Board of Trustees' Committee on Academic Standards, Provost Salins' office, the Academic Vice-Presidents of SUNY colleges, the Business Officers'

Association as well as to such professional organizations as ENY/ACRL.

Widespread support for SUNYConnect is seen in the SUNY library community. The April 24, 1998 resolution of SCLD is strongly supportive of the SUNYConnect initiative. The SUNY Librarians Association (SUNYLA) has voiced its support for SUNYConnect in a variety of ways including a formal resolution and a letter to the Provost's office. The OLIS would like to extend thanks to Provost Peter D. Salins for his continuing attention to and advocacy for the SUNYConnect initiative.

The SUNY budget process is underway. While the SUNY Board of Trustees chose to remove requests for funding any new program initiatives (including SUNY*Connect*), other mechanisms for providing the financial foundation to SUNY*Connect* are being pursued. SUNY/OLIS is committed to progressing towards the complete SUNY*Connect* model. This is seen as a supplement to existing library services and as such needs to be funded outside the confines of existing library budgeting.

Whether a complete SUNY*Connect* is achieved in a piece-meal fashion or via a fully funded approach, the fact that progress has been made should not be ignored. SUNY System Administration is committed to continued funding of the core database services already available -- IAC SearchBank ASAP (with full-text), OCLC FirstSearch, Britannica Online (encyclopedia) and the Carl Uncover Reveal (current awareness) services. These resources are available now, SUNY-wide via http://olis.sysadm.suny.edu/sunyconnect/db.htm.

The SUNY Library Contract Advisory Team (SLiCAT) continues to actively evaluate additional database resources. Plans are for more databases to become available to all of SUNY in the not too distant future.

Progress is being made on choosing a common library software system for SUNY. See the article on SLAM for more information.

Larry has been busy working with a team from the SUNYLA Library Instruction Committee to develop a RFP for an information literacy course. Proposals will be requested from within SUNY to develop a web-based course on core information literacy concepts.

More information about SUNY*Connect* can be found at http://olis.sysadm.suny.edu/sunyconnect/about.htm. Make use of a SUNY*Connect* prototype at http://olis.sysadm.suny.edu/sunyconnect. Supporting materials describing the program have been distributed to SUNY library directors. These materials are designed to

be used to advocate for the program around the SUNY system and at all of the SUNY colleges.

Will SUNY students of the future have access to the online resources now becoming commonplace? Will SUNY and New York be among those providing state-wide electronic library programs for the next century? OLIS and its partners are striving to make the answer "YES!".