Distance Learning at Monroe Community College

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MCC's system involvement in distance learning began in 1997 when it joined the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) and began offering online courses to students as part of the college curriculum. Since 1997, the course list has grown from 4 to 78, with approximately 2725 registrations for the fall 2003 semester. Reports published by SUNY consistently list MCC among the "Top 3" SUNY colleges in SLN course enrollment.

Part of MCC's success in distance learning is attributed to the "Monroe Model." The Monroe Model is, in part, a team-based approach to faculty and student support which includes college representatives from the following areas: Academic Services, Training Coordination, Instructional Design, Library, Technical Support, and Student Services. As part of my responsibilities as Reference-Distance Learning Librarian, I serve along with members from the above areas on Monroe's SLN and Distance Learning Advisory Committees. Here I have the opportunity to interact with other committee members to resolve faculty and student issues encountered in the online learning environment.

Use of SUNY*Connect* Resources at MCC (Databases, EZproxy, etc.)
Distance learning students at MCC have two methods of accessing magazine, journal, and newspaper articles directly from their home computer. The first method is by clicking on the SUNY*Connect* tab located at the top of their SLN course map page. Once connected to the OLIS-created "SLN Access to the SUNY*Connect* Resources" web page, students simply select the database they want to search, and then log on using their SLN username and password.

The second method is through the EZproxy icon located on MCC Libraries' "Find Articles and Other Information" and "Access to Library Databases from Home" web pages. Distance learning students can access the library web site by selecting the "MCC Library" icon that appears in their SLN course map page, and also by selecting "Libraries" from the "Quick Links" menu on the college home page. To log on to EZproxy, all students are required to use the same username and password combination used for accessing their MCC student email account. All MCC students automatically receive an MCC student email account regardless of the number, or type of courses they are registered for. Via a SUNY-wide license, EZproxy has been available to all MCC students, faculty and staff since the fall 2002 semester, and is beneficial to our distance learning students, since MCC Libraries subscribe to additional article databases which are not available through SUNY*Connect*.

For **ACCESS from HOME** please read the following instructions: Most of the databases on this page are by subscription-only, and access is limited to MCC students and faculty. However, if you are a current MCC student or faculty member, you *can* access these databases from off-campus via our proxy server. Click the 'EZproxy' button below to go to the login pages. Once there, simply follow the directions.

Connect to EZproxy

SUNY*Connect* information resources have also been introduced to students enrolled in distance learning courses at MCC through creation of customized research support documents inserted directly into their online course materials. For example, during summer 2003 we created a library instruction document in collaboration with the instructor for the SLN online course BIO 133 Human Machine. The document entitled "Tips on How to Find Current Health and Science Articles" discusses accessing and using magazine, journal, and newspaper article databases available through SUNY*Connect*. We incorporated screen images from InfoTrac OneFile, included step-by-step instructions on how to search the database, provided links to science journals on the web, and described how to properly cite electronic resources.

Future plans for promoting SUNY*Connect* databases to distance learners, include collaborating with online instructors to create customized electronic newsletters to send to students via email. In addition to providing a brief overview of MCC Libraries, the electronic newsletter will also contain information on library services for distance learners, frequently used library links, choosing a database, and SFX.

MCC Libraries Distance Learning Library Services & Resources
In spring 2003 MCC Libraries began to develop book delivery, interlibrary loan, and document delivery policies to address the needs of MCC's "pure" distance learning students. "Pure" distance learners are defined as students enrolled exclusively in MCC SUNY Learning Network online courses, and not taking any on-campus, telecourses, or hybrid courses at either MCC's Brighton or Damon City Campus. MCC Libraries require students to register for distance learning library services each semester.

Our Distance Learning Library Services & Resources web site, which debuted in September 2003, provides information on how to find & borrow books, how to find articles, a frequently asked questions document, tips for searching the Internet, a list of reference web sites, resources for instructors, and access to MCC-specific SLN course web pages. The latter were developed specifically to support the content of Monroe's SLN courses. Future plans for this site include the addition of online tutorials and subject-specific web guides.

SFX and ALEPH
We are in the process of customizing the SFX linking software for MCC Libraries. This includes developing an SFX "FAQ" and supporting web pages to explain SFX features to the college community. We completed migration to the SUNY*Connect* LMS (ALEPH500) in December 2003. A more intuitive and user-friendly interface will greet students looking for library resources. Distance learners, of course, will also have access to our new web OPAC.

Challenges for a Two Year College Library in Serving Distance Learners
At MCC, like at other SUNY community colleges, our student population is very diverse and is always changing from semester to semester. This points to MCC Libraries' challenge in serving the needs of our distance learners. Examples of MCC's student population include students who may only be registered for one online course, for one semester, or non-consecutive semesters, and therefore may use a local library for their information research. Also, there may be students who are taking online courses through MCC, and are also enrolled in on-campus courses at another college, and therefore use that institution's library. As a two year college, many of the courses MCC offers online through SLN are introductory level courses (e.g. 100, 200) which may not have assignments requiring extensive library research, as is often required in higher level online courses (e.g. 300, 400) offered by four year colleges and university centers.

As mentioned earlier, MCC Libraries' policies for distance learning students developed in spring 2003, focus on providing services and resources to students who are exclusively off campus. Budgetary and staffing concerns played a large role in deciding what position we would take regarding defining our policies. From the library's viewpoint, students who are enrolled simultaneously in online and on-campus courses, have the opportunity to look for library materials they need for their online course assignments when they are on campus for their face-to-face class sessions.

We believe these issues present us with opportunities to introduce the library's services and resources to this specific group of students through distribution of promotional materials. One marketing approach MCC Libraries will be testing in the spring 2004 semester, involves collaborating with the Records & Registration office on a direct mailing. We will send a letter introducing the Distance Learning Library Services & Resources web site to "pure" distance learning students including instructions on how to access the site. Our goal is to increase awareness among our student population that library support is available to assist them with their information needs.

Looking Ahead
As MCC's distance learning program continues to expand, the library seeks to develop new services and add resources that will enhance the learning experience for both our distance learning faculty and students.

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