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E-Books and a Distance Education Program:

A Look at Library's Success (or Failure) to Supply Course Readings for One Program.

Judith M. Nixon

Abstract

When Purdue University's College of Education decided to offer its first fully online master's program in Learning Design and Technology, the education librarian volunteered to find and organize all the course readings by creating a LibGuide web page with links to the readings for each course. This paper analyzes these course readings, delivered to distance education students through links to the library's electronic holdings, between January 2012 and June 2014. It categorizes the readings as journal articles, books (or chapters in books), and other openly available scholarly resources on the web. Since this book is primarily about e-books, the analysis focuses on chapters and books used for these courses. Approximately half the required readings are journal articles, about one third are books or book chapters, and about one fifth- are freely available reports or web pages. The journal articles are readily available via library subscriptions; however, approximately 60% of the books needed are not available in electronic format for purchase *at any price*. The analysis concludes that the library cannot meet the e-book demand for distance education students because many of the required books are not available for library purchase in digital format.

Case Study Question

In a distance education program, students do not have physical access to the library's printed books and journals. In many cases these students live miles from campus and cannot come to the library even occasionally. Therefore, librarians need to deliver the course readings in electronic format. This can be done successfully for journal articles since electronic journal subscriptions have been available for some time. However, access to book content is more limited. This case study of one online master's program at Purdue University analyzes the library's ability to supply the book content needed for course readings in 16 courses in the program between January 2012 and June 2014.

Program Background

In May 2011, Purdue's College of Education announced that a two-year master's program in Learning Design and Technology (LDT) would be offered by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Tim Newby, the educational technology area convener at Purdue, stated that one motivation for the fully online program was the drop in enrollment for the face-to-face master's program (Hunter, 2014). An asynchronistic distance-education master's program would meet the needs of individuals employed full time; it would be more convenient and less expensive. The College was correct in anticipating a successful program and, in fact, underestimated the demand. During its first term in fall 2011, the program enrolled 39 students. By spring semester, enrollment increased to 69 students, and continued to grow rapidly so that by spring 2014, there were 201 students.

Planning Access to the Course Reading

The education faculty members adapted the curriculum, course design, and course readings for distance education; like its on-campus counterpart, the program requires 33 credit hours. They planned 16 courses and sent the bibliography of course readings to the education librarian, who coordinated the gathering of links. After discussion with Tim Newby, the author organized the course links on a LibGuide website, with each course having its own page (or tab). LibGuide, produced by Springshare, is a content management software system used by Purdue and many other libraries to create guides to library material and websites. With the links gathered onto a single web site, students can look at all the readings for their present courses and both for courses they plan to take in the future and courses they have already taken. The LibGuide gives them a convenient resource to find articles and books that they recall from earlier courses and use them in further research. The LibGuide is “private;” only students in the program have access to the link. This privacy is an option in LibGuide software and is the choice of the teaching faculty members since they are interested in protecting their course development efforts.

The LibGuide has course-reading links to 14 of the 16 courses; two courses have no readings. There are a total of 176 assigned readings. Nearly half the readings (n=84, 48%) are journal articles. This comparatively large percentage is expected for the social sciences since the journal article is the first place of publication for research and the preferred source for scholars. Books, either for one chapter or for the full book, constitute 32% of the readings (n=57). This indicates relatively heavy dependence on the book literature by these courses. Faculty members select chapters, instead of articles, because they generally provide a good summary of a conceptual aspect of the

model or theory being studied, are much more comprehensive, and can be easier to read. Adding the six assigned government reports and ERIC documents, which are more similar to books than to articles or web pages, brings the reliance on book-type material to 35%. Open access web pages constitute 16% of the total assigned readings. (See Figure 1.)

{ED: Insert Nixon Figure 1}

Library's Ability to Supply Course Readings in Electronic Format

Overall, the library could supply 79%, or 139, of the 176 course readings in electronic format. This figure includes 81 of the 85 articles needed, but only 23 of the 57 books needed. Only 40% of the book material needed was available in electronic format. The rate of success for books from which one or two chapters are assigned is worse than the rate for books assigned in their entirety. This finding is contrary to what the author expected, since assigning a whole book suggests that it is being used as a textbook or supplemental textbook, and textbook publishers are usually reluctant to sell electronic access to libraries. (See Figure 2.)

{ED: Insert Nixon Figure 2}

In sum, 60% of the books (n=34) needed for this M.S. program are not available in electronic format despite the library's willingness to pay any price or to purchase the book from any source for e-access. The library, the teaching faculty, and the students are left with a dilemma. The solutions include students buying the books directly or buying faculty-prepared course packets with paid copyright clearance, or faculty scanning and posting the material for a short term on the course management pages. This last option, although providing a digital copy, places these readings in a different place than the rest of the links to the course readings and so inconveniences both the faculty member who has to scan the chapter as well as the students; in addition, scanning and posting entire books is not a legal option.

Availability of Course Reading E-Books with Campus-Wide Need for E-Books

The author thought that perhaps because these data represent a rather small sampling of campus needs, they present an unusually dismal outlook of the library's ability to purchase required e-books. However, comparing this project for a single online program with Purdue's system-wide ability to provide e-books reveals an even lower rate of availability. Purdue does not routinely collect statistics on the total number of books needed for course readings system-wide, but in spring 2014, as part of a project to reduce the cost of a Purdue education, the administration issued a call to faculty members to identify books needed for all course readings. Faculty submitted a total of 5,735 titles; of these, only 3,212 had ISBNs. After removing titles without an ISBN and eliminating duplicates, 2,341 books remained. Library staff matched these books' ISBNs

against the holdings of YBP Library Services, the library's major supplier of e-books on a title-by-title basis. Only 603 books (26%) were available in e-book format, a much lower percentage than the 40% of books available in e-format for the Learning Design and Technology program. So the 40% figure may, in fact, be deceptively high. This reinforces the point that librarians cannot meet their users' demand for e-books because publishers do not offer libraries the titles they need in electronic format.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It has long been a responsibility of libraries to supply course readings to students. As in the past, library staff still place physical copies of the readings on reserve in the library for short-term loans. Students consult and photocopy these articles or books while remaining in the library. Distance education programs are now expanding rapidly at many campuses, but the students enrolled in them usually cannot come to campus to use library material. The most convenient and obvious method for librarians to meet distance education students' needs for course readings is to provide electronic copies. Libraries are in a good position to meet this need for journal articles. However, this study has shown that a library could not meet even 50% of the need for electronic copies of books or chapters in books because many titles were simply not available for purchase in e-format.

This dilemma represents an opportunity for publishers and librarians to work together. Libraries are ready and willing to pay for e-access to material needed for their students in both distance education and on-campus courses. Developing a satisfactory

model for providing e-access to these high-use titles will be a win-win-win-win situation, resulting in revenue for publishers and satisfaction for the librarians as well as the students and faculty they serve.

Reference

Hunter, C. (2011, May 25). Purdue now offers fully online degree. *Exponent Online*.

Retrieved from http://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_26ee152c-8673-11e0-8f2d-0019bb30f31a.html

Acknowledgements

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Figure 1

Number of course readings listed on LibGuide, January 2012-June 2014

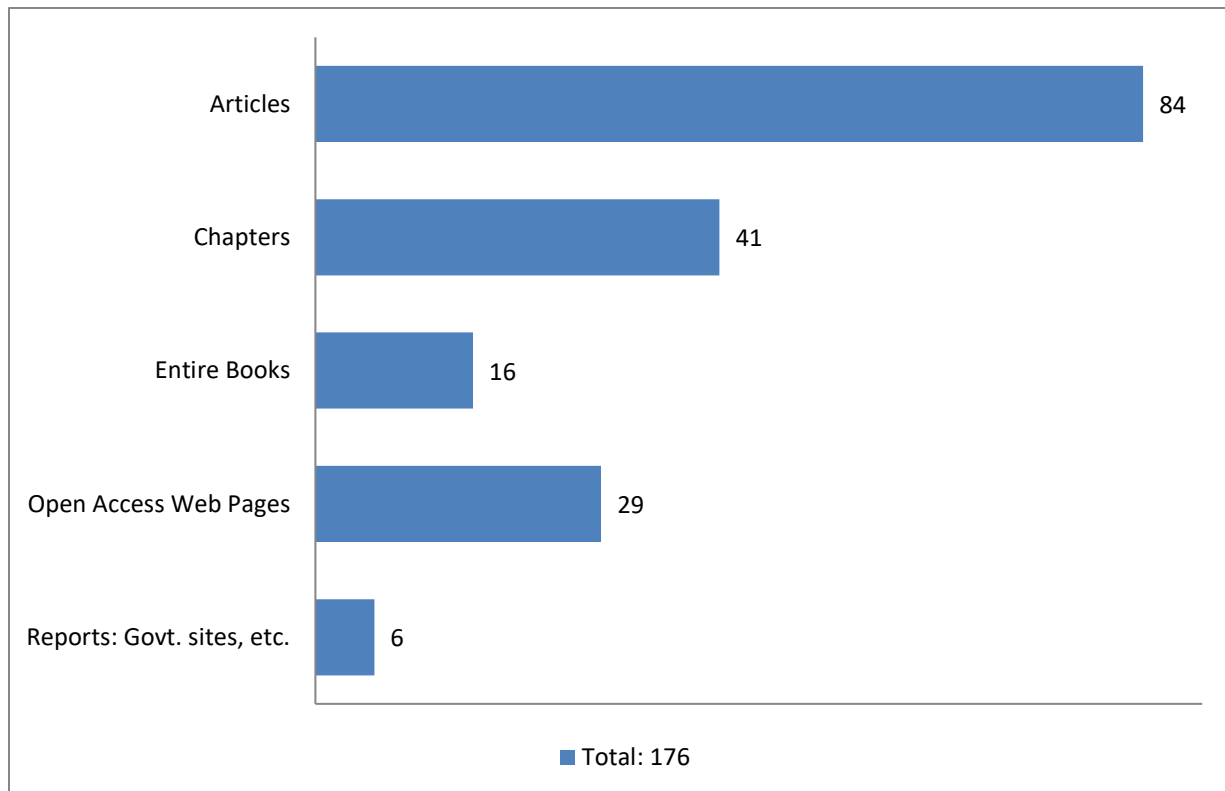


Figure 2

Percentage of course readings not available in electronic format, January 2012-June 2014

