

# Multi-Institutional Assessment of Distance Instructors: High Satisfaction, Low Knowledge of Library Services

Cassandra Kvenild, Teagan Eastman, Erin Davis, and Kate Conerton

**Abstract:** With the continued growth and evolution of distance education at many colleges and universities, academic librarians must be prepared to respond to the changing needs of distance users. This article discusses the results of a utilization assessment of distance instructors at five midsized American universities. The results inform libraries about distance educators' current utilization of library services, and the discussion suggests opportunities to improve library instruction, collections, and outreach for education programs.

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## Introduction

For more than 50 years, libraries have provided library services and resources to distance programs.<sup>1</sup> As distance teaching methods and technologies have evolved from correspondence to television to interactive video and audio, so, too, the needs of distance learners have changed. At many universities, distance education programs have become an integral component of higher education. In 2015, 14 percent of postsecondary students in the United States were enrolled in exclusively distance education courses, while 28.5 percent were registered in at least one such course.<sup>2</sup> With the continued growth and evolution of distance education, academic librarians must be prepared to respond to the needs of these users.

As enrollment in distance education programs has risen, academic libraries have invested in providing equitable service to the instructors who teach in off-campus or online environments. The Association of College and Research Libraries "Standards for Distance Learning Library Services" outlines the access entitlement principle for libraries who serve distance learners. The

principle emphasizes that “all students, faculty members, administrators, staff members, or any other members of an institution of higher education are entitled to the library services and resources of that institution.”<sup>3</sup> It is imperative for libraries that serve distance education programs to evaluate their services regularly and ensure that they meet the access entitlement principle by providing equal services and resources for all students and instructors.

While numerous academic libraries have conducted surveys of distance instructors or students to uncover their local needs and to implement changes in services to better fulfill the access entitlement principle, none so far have surveyed faculty at multiple institutions. The literature of the past decade points to a need for ongoing research and for assessments of multiple institutions to detect larger trends in distance instructors’ use of library services. By continually examining the needs of teachers and learners, academic librarians can refine their services to better meet instructors’ needs and improve marketing and outreach to increase awareness of underutilized library services.

This article seeks to understand the library use and needs of teaching faculty and other instructors in distance education at five midsized public universities in the western United States. The authors built upon an assessment of library utilization by distance instructors at the University of Wyoming in Laramie in 2010.<sup>4</sup> They adapted the assessment instrument with permission, then administered it to instructors in distance education programs at Oregon State University in Corvallis, the University of Missouri in Columbia, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, the University of Wyoming, and Utah State University in Logan. The goal of this research is for the aggregated responses to this multi-institutional survey to inform libraries about distance educators’ utilization of library services and suggest opportunities to improve services at the participating institutions as well as others.

## **Literature Review**

Library services for distance learners have evolved as off-campus education programs have grown and as online, asynchronous courses have become more predominant. Peter Macauley and Rosemary Green note that, for libraries serving distance education programs, the move from print-based collections and face-to-face instruction to electronic resource delivery and asynchronous instructional methods better enabled libraries to provide equivalent services to students both on and off campus. They also found in a review of the literature that the role of librarians shifted over time in distance education, from “primarily service providers to that of educators, both directly and indirectly involved with teaching and learning processes.”<sup>5</sup> Kay Johnson and Elaine Fabbro found a similar history in the literature of distance education and libraries. They note the usefulness of institutional support for information literacy initiatives and the value of collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians to deliver information literacy instruction at a distance. They also emphasize the importance of providing access to resources for students and educators via e-resources, electronic course reserves, and document delivery.<sup>6</sup>

Connecting distance learners and instructors to library services and resources can be challenging. Compared to traditional on-campus students, who often find the library with relative ease and use it to study, distance education students frequently struggle to access library resources unless librarians actively market the resources to them.<sup>7</sup> Melinda Dermody points to distance faculty as key partners in sharing library resources and services with learners.

Needs assessments of distance instructors conducted by librarians reveal a pattern of significant gaps in teachers’ knowledge about library services for learners. Janette Shaffer, Kate Finkelstein, Nancy Woelfl, and Elizabeth Lyden found that distance instructors at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha identified copyright clearance as the most significant hurdle to using library resources. They named lack of awareness of library support as the second

most significant.<sup>8</sup> At Pennsylvania State University in State College, Elyssa Cahoy and Lesley Moyo determined that distance instructors had low awareness of library services, including online databases, document delivery, and virtual reference.<sup>9</sup> Cassandra Kvenild and Melissa Bowles-Terry echoed these findings at the University of Wyoming, where instructors named lack of awareness of library resources and copyright clearance as two of the top barriers to using library services.<sup>10</sup>

Beth Thomsett-Scott and Frances May uncovered a trend toward high instructor satisfaction coupled with low awareness of library services in their attitudinal survey of distance faculty at the University of North Texas in Denton. They concluded that “generally respondents were unaware of the services but those who used the services were fairly satisfied” and that additional marketing of library services was warranted.<sup>11</sup> Jessica Mussell and Carol Gordon found a similar result in their survey of distance instructors at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Mussell and Gordon noted that library services are “positively regarded by distance faculty” but that “one of the major hurdles that needs to be addressed is making ourselves and our services more visible to faculty.”<sup>12</sup>

A survey of distance instructors at the University of Montana in Missoula by Samantha Hines found that instructors felt well-informed about library services but unsure their students knew of those services. Hines struggled to correlate her results with those of similar surveys into a consistent picture of distance faculty’s needs across institutions. She concluded, “It would be useful to complete a wide, statistically valid study of distance education faculty across several campuses assessing library services.”<sup>13</sup> In 2014, Jon Ritterbush conducted a literature review on assessing academic library services to distance learners and concluded that “ongoing research is necessary to better understand the resource needs of distance students and instructors, as well as

the effectiveness and marketing of existing library services to these groups.”<sup>14</sup> These reflections on the state of the literature and recommendations for further research inspired the authors of this paper to develop a multi-institutional analysis of library services in distance education.

## **Methods**

The authors began by analyzing the tool used in the Kvenild and Bowles-Terry 2010 survey.

That instrument was modeled on one developed by Shaffer and her team for a formal needs assessment of distance instructors at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in 2004.<sup>15</sup> The authors also relied upon Judy Ann Jerabek, Lynn McMMain, and James Van Roekel’s process for surveying distance users and for implementing results-based library services, as outlined in their 2002 study.<sup>16</sup> McMMain and Jerabek’s pragmatic approach to carefully reviewing each level of question creation and clearly defining the purpose and goals of the survey also informed survey development and revision in 2010 and 2016.<sup>17</sup>

The survey asked distance instructors what specific library services they use, how their students access required readings for their courses, and whether students are expected to use library services or resources in their courses. Participants were prompted to mark all answers that applied, and they could select multiple services for each question, which explains why some of the totals in the tables exceed the number of respondents. The survey responses enabled analysis of the level of instructor awareness about various library resources and services available to them. The authors made minor changes to the survey instrument to reflect changing library services.<sup>15</sup> For example, under the question “Which of the following library services have you used for your distance courses?” they replaced the option “Podcasts demonstrating library resources” with “Tutorial prepared by a librarian (e.g., video, GIF, exercise).” The revisions

were kept minor in part to allow for longitudinal analysis of results at the University of Wyoming. The full survey instrument appears in the Appendix.

For the purposes of this survey, *distance instructors* were defined as anyone teaching a for-credit course either asynchronously, via video conferencing, or face-to-face at a regional or branch campus during the 2015–2016 academic year. This broad definition was selected due to the prevalence of remote campus sites at some of the surveyed institutions, where face-to-face instruction occurs without access to a physical academic library or traditional campus infrastructure. Instructors who fit the survey definition were identified locally at each institution, and the survey was distributed to all who met the definition. The survey did not require any additional demographic information about the instructors, and results do not indicate the mode of teaching nor whether they are permanent or adjunct faculty.

To distribute the survey, the authors contacted 18 member libraries of the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), a consortium of research libraries, most in the western United States. The authors chose to survey a subset of GWLA libraries that support distance learning programs and that also participate in the GWLA Student Learning Outcomes Task Force, a group studying the knowledge and skills students should acquire at educational institutions. The libraries' participation in a coordinated, multi-institutional task force allowed easier access and communication for planning and coordinating the assessment across institutions. Of the 18 libraries contacted, five opted to participate in the survey. The other 13 libraries declined for local reasons, including recent faculty surveys, inability to coordinate communication with all distance instructors, and lack of staffing to support survey implementation.

Librarians at Oregon State University, Utah State University, and the Universities of Missouri, Utah, and Wyoming e-mailed the survey instrument to their institution’s distance instructors. Each institution collected the survey data using either the LibWizard tool or local survey tools and shared the anonymous results with the authors via CSV (comma separated values) files, which allow data to be saved in a table-structured format. The authors suggested that the librarians follow a one-month timeline for implementation and data collection. The project received an exempt status from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wyoming. The study thus gained institutional authorization at other institutions under the Wyoming exemption. Responses came from a wide range of academic departments, including those in the arts, business, education, health sciences, humanities, physical sciences, and social sciences. The researchers collated and analyzed a total of 270 responses. While response rates varied between institutions (see Table 1), the survey nevertheless revealed useful patterns about distance instructors’ library needs. The authors followed up with survey respondents and distance education stakeholders locally at each institution after the initial results were complete.

**Table 1** Survey Response Rates

	Number of Responses	Response Percent
Oregon State University	48	10%
University of Missouri – Columbus	80	12%
University of Utah	16	4%
University of Wyoming	64	18%
Utah State University	62	18%
Total Responses: 270		

The survey asked both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The authors analyzed answers to the multiple-choice questions using LibQual software. They used manual descriptive

coding to examine and classify the 127 open-text responses to “other” in the multiple-choice questions and the 237 answers to the two open-ended questions. One author coded open-response questions for themes and phrases, and the other authors analyzed the coding for consistency.

The surveyed institutions support between 2,000 (University of Wyoming) and 20,000 (Oregon State University) distance education students through programs offered online or at regional campuses and centers. Each institution offers at least 20 degree programs and certificates, with the University of Missouri providing over 100 programs. Libraries support these programs in a multitude of ways, ranging from dedicated distance education librarians on staff to embedded subject liaison models, in which librarians focus on the needs of a department or other group. Regardless of the specific library positions supporting these programs, each institution provides print and electronic access to library resources, customized research guides, and individualized help from librarians.

## **Results**

### *Multi-Institutional Comparison*

The authors expected to see local concerns and practice reflected in the results of each surveyed university, but that seldom happened. Survey results were strikingly similar across institutions. The breakdown of responses to the multiple-choice questions was nearly identical for all institutions studied. Even where the percentage of responses varied by institution, the top three responses to multiple-choice questions remained the same. There was more local variation in answers to the open-ended questions, but coding revealed that the most common responses remained consistent across institutions. Because of the low differentiation of responses between institutions, the analysis in this paper considers the multi-institutional results as a whole.



The survey asked respondents to indicate their departmental affiliation. At all institutions surveyed, the largest group of respondents came from the liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences. The next largest group was from education, followed by health sciences and agriculture. Professional programs, such as business and engineering, had lower response rates.

*Library Resources Accessed by Instructors*

The first step in determining if libraries meet the access entitlement principle is to determine the range of library services that distance instructors use. Several faculty mentioned specific library databases and librarians by name, which suggests familiarity with the library’s services and resources. The most utilized library service, reported by 29 percent or 125 respondents, were online guides for classes. Interlibrary loan services were used by 22 percent. Slightly less used services included e-mails, meetings with a librarian, and library tutorials. Fourteen percent of respondents have e-mailed a librarian, and 13 percent have incorporated library tutorials. Ten percent of respondents mentioned services in the “Other” category, including databases and journal access, electronic reserves, e-books and online textbooks, and consultation or chat with a librarian. Other possibly underutilized services of the library were class visits from a librarian via video or audio (9 percent) and online discussion boards (3 percent).

**Table 2** Library Services Used in Distance Courses

	Number of Responses	Response Percent
Class visit from a librarian (video, audio)	39	9%
Class visit from a librarian (online discussion board)	12	3%
Interlibrary Loan	97	22%
Tutorial prepared by a librarian (e.g. video, gif, exercise)	57	13%
Emails from a librarian	62	14%
Online guides	125	29%
Other	44	10%
	Total Responses: 436	

The survey asked if instructors required their students to use library resources. Most respondents (54 percent) indicated that they do insist their students use library services. When asked how they expect students to access required readings, respondents reported that they direct students to use a combination of print materials, electronic journals, and Internet sources. Students were required to purchase printed course materials by 61.7 percent of instructors. Use of electronic journal access or document delivery services through the library was promoted by 49.4 percent of faculty, and 28 percent expect their students to access course materials through electronic reserves.

When asked how instructors expect students to access course readings, 45 percent responded they assign freely available Internet resources (not through the library), and 17.5 percent indicated that figuring out how to get course materials is part of their students' self-education. Several respondents also noted that they provide readings within the online course shell, usually by uploading pdfs (28); they do not assign required readings for their classes (11); or they use library e-books that allow multiple simultaneous users (6).

### *Barriers for Distance Users*

The authors were interested in discovering the barriers, both physical and technological, that limit instructors' use of library services or resources in their distance courses. The most common response was "I am not aware of library services to support distance education," representing 23 percent of survey respondents, or 82. Eighteen percent of respondents said, "I had not considered using the library for support." Other answers point to insufficient resources as a barrier, with 16 percent of participants selecting lack of online materials (for example, textbooks and journal articles) and 11 percent choosing copyright clearance as major obstacles to using library resources. Another interesting perspective on the barrier question related to students' technological skills. Eleven percent of instructors indicated "My students lack the technological

skills or equipment to use the library effectively from a distance.” Less than 5 percent of respondents reported that the library does not provide materials needed by students. Four percent said the procedures to use the library are too complicated for students, and another 4 percent called the procedures too complicated for the instructors themselves.

**Table 3** Barriers to Using Library Services or Resources for Distance Users

	Number of Responses	Response Percent
Copyright clearance	38	11%
Lack of online materials (e.g. textbooks, journal articles)	58	16%
Library does not provide materials my students need	18	5%
I had not considered library for support	63	18%
Procedures to use the library are too complicated for students	15	4%
Procedures to use the library are too complicated for me	13	4%
I am not aware of library services to support distance education	82	23%
My students lack the technological skills or equipment to use the library effectively from a distance	38	11%
My students have access to a community college library	8	2%
Other	26	7%
Total Responses: 359		

Many of the open-ended responses were positive, with comments indicating instructors did not perceive any barriers to the library, such as “I have not encountered ANY barriers and encourage my students to work within the library system constantly.” Other open-ended responses again pointed to lack of awareness about library resources and services, including such statements as “I like to use journal articles in my online classes, but they can be hard for distance students to access if they need a library subscription to get them.” In fact, students at all of the

surveyed institutions have access to the libraries' online journal subscriptions regardless of their physical location.

*Library Instructional Services in Distance Courses*

Another important consideration relates to where and how instructors expect their students to acquire library skills. Nearly a quarter of the respondents (23 percent) reported they direct students to contact a librarian for help. Another 18 percent of respondents believed their students already have the skills they need. Several responses included such comments as “I would expect they can figure it out” and “Students probably need library skills in my class, but I have assumed they did not need extra instruction. I am probably wrong, on reflection.” A similar perspective was echoed by 56 respondents (15 percent), who reported that their students do not need special library skills for their classes. Other instructors believed their students will reach out to a librarian for help if needed (13 percent), or they teach library skills to their students themselves (13 percent). Only 10 percent (37 respondents) expected students to obtain their library skills from an in-class orientation led by librarians. In response to a question about whether respondents are willing to give class time for library instructors to teach their students library skills, a clear majority of 72 percent (194) indicated they would.

**Table 4** Where Distance Instructors Expect Students to Learn Library/Research Skills

	Number of Responses	Response Percent
In-class orientation led by librarians	37	10%
I teach skills to students	46	13%
Students at this level already have skills they need	67	18%
Students will ask librarian for help if needed	47	13%
I direct students to contact librarian for help	84	23%
Students don't need special library skills for my classes	56	15%
Other	27	7%
	Total Responses: 364	

### *Feedback on Library Services by Students*

To solicit more nuanced information about their students' perspectives on the library, the survey included an open-ended question about what instructors hear from their distance students about finding and using library resources. Half of the 200 who answered this question indicated that they receive no feedback from their students regarding the library (100 responses). Twenty-two respondents reported that their students had some difficulty finding or accessing scholarly articles. One instructor noted, "The sources they use for their final papers usually come from Google even after spending time teaching library skills. It's easier and quicker to do a Google search." In addition to their students' difficulties finding scholarly articles, 10 noted technical limitations that kept students from accessing streaming media or e-books. Others praised the availability of assistance for their students through library chat services, tutorials, or other help options (28 responses). Underusing library resources and a general lack of awareness about the services and resources offered were other themes that 24 instructors mentioned. Ten respondents cited a lack of research skills as the primary reason their students struggle with the library. Six teachers mentioned providing specific instructions on accessing library resources to make the library experience "less daunting" for their students.

**Table 5** Feedback on Library Services by Students

	Number of Responses	Response Percent
Do not hear anything from students regarding library	100	50%
Positive comments about library	28	14%
Underutilizing library	24	12%
Difficulty finding and accessing articles	22	11%
Technical issues	10	5%
Lack of research skills	10	5%
Instructor shows students how to use library	6	3%
Total Responses: 200		

### *Suggestions for Library Services*

The survey asked instructors if any services not currently offered by the library could assist their distance teaching. Most respondents said there were no additional services that could facilitate their teaching (73 respondents). Sixty-seven open-ended responses included the following suggestions:

- Requests for tutorials or videos about how to use library resources: 20
- Requests for additional e-book licenses or online textbooks: 10
- Requests for other collection additions: 10
- Comments about interlibrary loan (ILL) or access issues: 9
- Requests for support of audio or video projects: 5
- Requests for citation support: 2
- Other one-off requests or comments: 11.

Eleven respondents noted specific library requests. Three requests related to primary source instruction and collections, while other pleas were directed to collection needs in the disciplines and access to software tutorials. Finally, 18 respondents praised the library's services, indicating their support of the library and their appreciation for the resources and services available.

### **Discussion**

As distance education programs grow and evolve, libraries must continue to adapt to meet the needs of these users. This survey lays a foundation for understanding distance instructors' utilization of library services. Data collected from survey participants provide insights into how distance educators interact with and use library services and how the library, in turn, can improve these services. This survey has also supplied deeper understanding of instructors' expectations of

students' information literacy skills and how they support the development of these skills.

Additionally, areas for further research have been illuminated.

### *Instructors' Use of Library Services*

This survey demonstrates that libraries play an important role in supporting the teaching and research needs of distance instructors. Most survey participants responded that they have utilized at least one library service. Distance educators indicated they rely on the library to create online research guides to support their teaching and to build collections that can be accessed both electronically and through interlibrary loan services. These findings indicate that libraries are meeting the access entitlement principle by providing equal services and resources for their distance instructors. However, additional assessment, employing such methods as user testing or focus groups, could determine how libraries can further improve these services.

While the survey results demonstrate that most respondents use the library, there is room for improvement. Lack of awareness of library services was cited by 23 percent of respondents, and an additional 18 percent stated they do not consider using the library for support. These findings are supported by past surveys, as evidenced in the work of Kvenild and Bowles-Terry and Thomsett-Scott and May.<sup>19</sup> In their 2017 longitudinal study of marketing to distance populations, Laura Bonella, Jonelle Pitts, and Jason Coleman outlined several best practices for marketing to and serving distance learners. They recommend promoting library services via partnerships, using existing channels for persistent and targeted messaging, and building strong connections with faculty members.<sup>20</sup> These methods could be applied to increase faculty awareness and use of library services.

In addition to lack of awareness of services, other barriers reduce effective use of library services. Sixteen percent of participants indicated that lack of online materials was an obstacle to using library services. Stronger relationship building with distance instructors could lead to

better collection development and acquisition of online materials needed by teachers and students. Further assessment could determine if perhaps faculty are simply unaware of online library subscriptions that are accessible by all students, regardless of location. Efforts to increase awareness of these resources might be needed.

Like the findings of Shaffer and her team, survey respondents listed copyright clearance as a significant barrier.<sup>21</sup> This result points to a need for libraries to provide copyright assistance and to proactively advertise existing copyright services to distance instructors. Additionally, 45 percent of respondents indicated that they already assign free Internet resources. This finding might suggest faculty are comfortable with students using websites to complete their assignments, or it could point to a growing interest in freely available or low-cost open educational resources (OER). Additional assessment could determine if supporting campus initiatives related to OER and open access publishing would benefit distance instructors and students.

### *Student Use of the Library*

Survey results indicate that only half of the surveyed instructors require their students to use library services and utilize the library's resources as course readings. However, because the survey instrument did not collect in-depth information about the specific courses respondents teach, further assessment is needed to better understand the context surrounding this question. The results could demonstrate a need for increased library outreach, or they could mean that respondents teach courses that traditionally do not require library resources.

Eleven percent of respondents indicated students encounter technological barriers when using the library, and an additional 4 percent indicated that library procedures are too complicated for students. This is problematic for many reasons. Especially since 54 percent of instructors require students to utilize library services as a course requirement, it is critical for



their students' academic success that they access these resources without barriers. A clearer understanding is needed of the technological and procedural barriers distance students encounter when using the library to ensure libraries meet the entitlement principle. Conducting user tests or surveys with distance students may further reveal where students encounter obstacles.

### *Use of Library Instruction*

An important component of providing equitable services to distance education students is ensuring they receive library instruction to assist in their development of information literacy skills. Twenty-three percent of instructors reported that they direct students to librarians for assistance, while only 10 percent indicated that they expect students to acquire information literacy skills through course-integrated library instruction. Additionally, most respondents reported they believe students already have sufficient information literacy skills, will seek out help from librarians when necessary, or simply do not need information literacy skills for their courses. As previously stated, the survey instrument did not collect information on specific courses taught by respondents. Further assessment is needed to determine if this result reflects distance instructors who teach courses that do not require research components or if this demonstrates a lack of awareness of library resources and students' information literacy skills. These data could indicate that, in addition to a marketing campaign to raise general library awareness, more targeted efforts should be taken to educate instructors on trends in students' information literacy skills and how libraries can help students develop these skills. Some institutions lack assessment data on trends specific to their students' information literacy skills. In such cases, data from the GWLA Student Learning Outcomes Task Force or from Project Information Literacy, a national study of how young adults find and use information during and after higher education, can be used to support broad claims of student information literacy skills.<sup>22</sup>

The results indicated that only 10 percent of respondents currently utilize library instruction, but it is encouraging to note that 72 percent of instructors reported themselves willing to dedicate class time to library instruction in the future. Additionally, several noted that students would benefit from library instruction to assist in successfully finding resources beyond Google. These results are a positive indication for librarians looking to grow their distance education instruction programs. While not every course can or should receive library instruction, educators seem willing to work with librarians, and instructional outreach efforts to distance courses should be well received. By adopting strategic approaches such as curriculum mapping, a process of diagramming subject-specific information literacy instruction with desired learning outcomes, librarians can identify courses with intensive research components and develop strategies for supporting students in these courses.<sup>23</sup> In institutions that use subject liaison models, these data can be shared with liaison librarians to demonstrate a need and encourage them to work directly with distance instructors in targeted classes.

Since the survey instrument did not collect data about whether instructors taught asynchronous or synchronous courses, it is difficult to determine how many distance courses libraries support. Survey results indicate that only 9 percent of respondents utilized class visits from a librarian via video or audio, and 3 percent used online discussion boards. For respondents who teach asynchronous online classes, these visits may be poorly suited to their needs. The fact that instructors also heavily utilized tutorials prepared by a librarian, e-mails from a librarian, and online library guides could potentially mean that librarians reach more online classes than previously thought. Since 29 percent of respondents indicate they rely on the library for online research guides, libraries should continue to provide and refine these resources. A 2017 study by

Kate Conerton and Cheryl Goldstein provides strategies for testing LibGuides with distance education students to identify and improve real or perceived problems.<sup>24</sup>

### **Limitations**

This study had limitations. The wording of the questions in the survey instrument, which was not tested prior to distribution, posed problems as it was deployed across multiple institutions. For instance, survey participants might have had varying definitions of such terms as *copyright clearance* or *in-class orientation by library instructors*. Local practice and the structure of distance library services could lead to different definitions and interpretations of the questions and answers. Additionally, some of the responses regarding reserves and document delivery could not be clearly analyzed because some institutions in the survey use similar names for these services, making it difficult to disambiguate responses. The survey did not ask for demographic data, so it is impossible to know whether individual respondents are full-time or part-time, temporary or permanent, or graduate or undergraduate instructors, or whether they teach online or in a different medium. Additional respondent data would improve follow-up efforts based on survey results.

Another limitation was that the authors chose not to utilize additional methods, such as focus groups or individual interviews with instructors. While those methods have been included in similar studies that utilized this survey instrument, the authors chose not to undertake the challenge of coordinating focus groups or interviews across institutions. These methods could be used as follow-up at individual institutions to elicit more meaning and understanding of the survey results.

The low response rate from the University of Utah is an additional limitation. This response rate might be related to technical difficulties identifying and distributing the survey to only distance instructors (who total 361). In addition, while the distance educators surveyed at these five mid-sized research universities responded consistently across institutions, the results are not necessarily generalizable to other academic libraries. And, finally, as with any survey, responses are self-reported and are assumed to be accurate and truthful, although this cannot be verified.

## **Conclusion**

Results of this utilization assessment confirm previous findings, which reveal inconsistencies in how distance instructors perceive and use library services. While libraries are valued resources for many faculty, many also remain unaware of the vast library resources and services available to them and their students. Another discrepancy revealed that distance instructors are willing to share class time with librarians, though many do not currently do so. What we do know is that instructors continue to rely on accessing library collections online and via interlibrary loan, and could potentially benefit from additional support for open educational resources, copyright, and e-book licensing.

The results present a case for improved marketing and more targeted services for academic libraries supporting distance education programs. Suggestions include building more robust relationships and sharing available services through customized marketing and outreach campaigns, which could close the knowledge gap regarding library services, although more research into what marketing and outreach is effective for distance instructors is indicated. The five institutions included in this study will utilize the data from this survey to support improvements in services to distance educators.

*Cassandra Kvenild is assistant dean of research and scholarship at the University of Wyoming Libraries in Laramie; she may be reached by e-mail at: ckvenild@uwyo.edu.*

*Teagan Eastman is the online learning librarian at Utah State University in Logan; she may be reached by e-mail at: teagan.eastman@usu.edu.*

*Erin Davis is the library coordinator of regional campuses and e-learning at Utah State University in Logan; she may be reached by e-mail at: erin.davis@usu.edu.*

*Kate Conerton is a research and learning librarian at the University of Minnesota Duluth; she may be reached by e-mail at: kconerto@d.umn.edu.*

## Appendix

### Distance Library Services Survey Instrument

1. For what institution do you teach?
2. For which department(s) do you teach?
3. Which of the following library services have you used for your distance courses? (Please mark all that apply)
  - Class visit from a librarian—video or audio
  - Class visit from a librarian—online discussion board
  - Interlibrary loan
  - Tutorial prepared by a librarian (e.g., video, GIF, exercise)
  - E-mails from a librarian

- Online guides
- Other

4. What are some barriers that limit your use of library services or resources in your distance courses? (Please mark all that apply)

- Copyright clearance
- Lack of online materials (e.g., textbooks, journal articles)
- Library does not provide materials my students need
- I had not considered using the library for support
- Procedures to use the library are too complicated for students
- Procedures to use the library are too complicated for me
- I am not aware of library services to support distance education
- My students lack the technological skills or equipment to use the library effectively from a distance
- My students have access to a community college library
- Other

5. Do you require your distance students to use library services or resources?

- Yes
- No

6. Where do you expect your distance students to get their library skills?

- In-class orientation by library instructors
- I teach library skills to my students
- I believe students at this level already have the skills they need
- I believe students will ask a librarian for help if needed

- I direct students to contact a librarian for help
- Students don't need special library skills for my classes
- Other

7. Are you willing to give class time for library instructors to teach your students library skills?

- Yes
- No

8. How do you expect your students to access their required readings? (Please mark all that apply)

- Print materials purchased by students (textbooks, course packs, etc.)
- Electronic reserves
- Electronic journal access or document delivery through the library (not reserves)
- Figuring out how to get the materials is part of the students' self-education
- Freely available Internet resources (not through the library)
- There are no required readings for my class(es)
- Other

9. What do you hear from your distance students about the ease or difficulty of finding and using library resources?

10. Are there services not currently offered by your library that could facilitate your distance teaching? Please elaborate.

## Notes

1. Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), "Standards for Distance Learning Library Services," 2016, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinesdistancelearning>.

2. Thomas D. Snyder, Cristobal de Brey, and Sally A. Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics 2015* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, United States Department of Education, 2016), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016014.pdf>.
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