

Foreword

THE CHANGING NATURE OF EDUCATION: EVERY EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY FORMAT CAN INCORPORATE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Computer-mediated communication permeates our daily lives. We check and post status updates on Facebook, Tweet, text, check apps on mobiles, and still spend significant amounts of time on email. Social networking and the use of devices such as clickers are incorporated into many face-to-face and virtual classrooms. In addition to providing means to cover and explore course content, such technology-based communications provide options for individual work, as well as countless ways to acquire and strengthen project management skills for effective teamwork. As information professionals, we are active partners in the use of technologies to support and extend communication in educational settings, whether those settings are formal courses or individual interactions with users in their search for information. It is this environment that sets the context for modern educational practices.

Today, online education is meaningful for millions of Americans. The eighth annual national survey on online learning, *Class Differences: Online Education in the United States*, found that in the fall of 2009, almost 30 percent of students took one or more online courses. This number represents more than 5.6 million individuals — a million more students than reported in the previous year. These include courses the study categorizes as web facilitated, blended/hybrid, or entirely online (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Around half of the respondents to this survey (which included 2,500 higher education institutions) noted that the recession has contributed to increased interest in completing online courses and/or entire programs online. The forecast is that interest in and involvement with online education will continue to grow.

Online education has created opportunities for students around the world, for it permits them to enter into learning environments at their convenience. Whether or not librarians have completed online courses as part of their professional education, it behooves them, at a minimum, to become aware of the options of online communication and education. Regardless of whether library faculty members in graduate programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) deliver online courses, they are called on to assist their students to be successful in these settings.

A glance at current job vacancy announcements illustrate these needs as applicants are called on to support, advance, and create college and university's online education initiatives. Prospective employees should demonstrate "knowledge of and interest in exploring emerging technologies" (Missouri State University, 2011), or, more specifically, they should lead "the creation of library instructional videos, screencasts and other multimedia presentations" (Houston Academy of Medicine, 2011). And, of course, applicants are still expected to have traditional skills including excellent written, oral, and interpersonal communication skills.

These responsibilities are obvious in the current accreditation standards for LIS programs, developed by ALA's Committee on Accreditation. Standards stipulate that each LIS program curriculum "integrates the theory, application, and use of technology" (American Library Association, 2008, p. 7). The role of the librarian is more specifically addressed in competency documents developed to delineate the skills, attributes, and knowledge needed for entry into specific information service areas. These changes in LIS education are most often seen in references to skills needed in employing technologies in teaching and other forms of communication. For example, in their teaching roles, music librarians "promote the effective use of all technologies" (Hunter, 2002, p. 5). Art librarians "have a broad understanding of information technology and are skilled in the implementation and utilization of technological tools, regardless of specific format, medium, or method of delivery . . . And help shape information technology products" (Ball & Harrington, pp. 8-9). The Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) has developed a number of excellent guidelines for information professionals, including the revised "Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers" and the "Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference Services," approved in 2010 (RUSA, 2010).

These statements might be perceived as ironic, as I am speaking as a Professor in, perhaps, the only library and information science (LIS) program that proudly continues to deliver its coursework only in face-to-face format. Still, even our courses involve aspects of online education: faculty and students use Blackboard for email, discussion threads, document sharing, and e-grading. My colleagues have established presences in Second Life and supervised a doctoral dissertation on the results of a Second Life educational cooperative (Chavez, 2008). Faculty might serve as guest lecturers in other LIS programs and participate in conversations through web conferencing services such as Adobe Acrobat Connect, Clarity, and Elluminate.

We incorporate active learning experiences to support differing learning styles and to model to our students the strategies that they might use in their future careers. Students and faculty use Skype to continue personal and professional connections. Students participate in a mentoring program in the University of Texas at Austin University Libraries that may expose them to digital library services. Similarly, student Capstone projects, culminating efforts completed at the end of students' coursework, have included using social media to market library services and to establish new services including online book clubs. Thus, even within face-to-face educational settings, online technologies enhance learning and help present alternative educational options to students. Educators can and should embrace such methods to experience them now and to prepare for the next innovations.

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