

# Book Reviews



**Brophy, Peter, et al.** *Access to Campus Library Services by Distance Users: Final Report*. Preston, U.K.: CERLIM, 1996. 80p. £25, paper (ISBN 0-9066-9497-3).

**Goodall, Deborah, and Peter Brophy.** *A Comparable Experience? Library Support for Franchised Courses in Higher Education*. Preston, U.K.: CERLIM (British Library Research Report 33), 1997. 233p. £20, paper (ISBN 090-6694-655).

**Brophy, Peter, et al.** *Self-Service Systems in Libraries: Final Report*. Preston, U.K.: CERLIM, 1996. 119p. £25, paper (ISBN 0-906694-95-7).

These three reports from the Centre for Research in Library and Information Management (CERLIM), based at the University of Central Lancashire, present detailed examinations of the design and provision of library services in three different distance learning environments. CERLIM was established in 1993 to conduct practical research to support operational work in libraries. The results and evaluation of each research project undertaken are disseminated in reports such as those reviewed here.

*Access to Campus Library and Information Services by Distance Users* is the final report of experiments conducted at three academic institutions in Europe to test the capabilities of information technology (IT) to provide access to library catalogs, databases, interlibrary loan, and reference service. Each experiment was designed according to the particular distance learning environment at each institution: at the University of Central Lancashire for courses at small remote locations, at Dublin University for service to individuals, and at the University of the Aegean (Greece) to provide connection between two of four libraries located on separate islands. Careful to note that this research was conducted in small-scale projects, which could in part account for their suc-

cess, the report concludes that the experiments were successful; two of the three have become permanent services.

*A Comparable Experience?* examines library services provided to franchised courses in the United Kingdom. *Franchised* is defined as those courses taught away from the main university campus, but with traditional pedagogical methods. This study was conducted in response to a concern about the lack of appropriate library resources at the remote sites as the number of franchised courses and distance learning students increase. The report examines how library services are provided and how students cope with the lack of services, and provides recommendations for steps to ensure that franchised students are not disadvantaged in terms of access to library resources.

*Self-Service Systems in Libraries* presents results of an investigation conducted February 1995 through March 1996 on the development of self-service IT systems based in libraries. The investigation was a collaborative project of CERLIM, the National Library for Psychology and Education, and Dynix. Its specific objectives were to assess the requirements for self-service, examine the implementation of a service and its operation, explore the implications of the shift to open systems, identify areas for further analysis and development, and develop a functional specification. This report presents the functional specification objective in detail; other objectives are reported in other CERLIM publications.

Although all these studies and experiments were conducted in the United Kingdom and Europe, they provide a valuable resource for any academic library exploring options for implementing and providing service to distance education

and off-campus students. Themes common to all distance education programs are threaded through, and highlighted in, all three reports, particularly those dealing with communication, staffing, training, and funding.

Of particular interest is the distance education report that describes in some detail the three experiments conducted, the equipment and technology used, and the surrounding issues and implications of establishing and providing service to remote students. The experiments were grounded in the principles that remote service must be as near as possible to on-campus service, conform to open-system standards, be cost-effective, and be simple to install, maintain, and use. The report concludes that the experiments demonstrated that a high level of service can be obtained using a combination of low-cost telecommunications and traditional delivery methods. The experiments also demonstrated, however, that obstacles remain, including the need for improved user interfaces and ongoing user training. In addition, increased staffing needs may be expensive, and therefore a commitment must be made by institutions to provide extra funding for distance education. Collaboration among institutions also is essential, and librarians must be involved in course/curriculum design for distance education courses and must work with publishers to provide electronic versions of their products.

Issues that arose during the course of these experiments are typical of the problems all libraries face when instituting service to students off-site. The provision of access to OPACs and databases, problems of site licensing and copyright, technical problems with interfaces, and document delivery all are issues with which libraries are familiar. Although these problems may not be technically difficult to resolve, their resolution will take time, negotiation, and careful attention. For example, the distance education project determined that scanning and file trans-

fer were feasible both technically and in terms of cost but were not used because of potential violation of copyright laws.

Another interesting approach used by the experiments was the use of a reference surrogate, or intermediary, located at the remote site who could perform a reference interview before submitting the request by e-mail to a subject specialist at the university library. However, use of a surrogate works only when centralized remote locations are used (such as a public library or a computer center) in which a librarian is present and would not work if service were directed toward individuals' homes.

As an outgrowth of the distance education project, the "Libraries Without Walls Toolkit" was developed on CERLIM's Web site (<http://www.dcu.ie/library/bibdel/index.html>). The tool kit is designed to assist librarians with developing services for distant users. Useful and informative, it provides help and advice on topics such as telecommunications, electronic documents, copyright, and the costs of establishing and maintaining service.

The self-service report also will be of interest to those in academic libraries attempting to increase patron self-service through the use of IT systems. The report analyzes each of 41 potential self-service functions in detail, describing the requirements for integration of automation and networking capabilities so that services are available both within the library and remotely. One of these, a self-service checkout system, was installed at the University of Central Lancashire as part of the project. The report discusses surrounding issues and presents eleven recommendations to be addressed in the future.

Of less interest is *A Comparable Experience?* Based on a study of library services already in place to franchised courses in Britain, this report analyzes common themes from the points of view of university librarians, college librarians (at the

remote sites), students, and tutors. It presents an interesting view of services currently provided to franchised students, along with each group's perceptions of those services and the libraries. Recommendations include enhanced communication between university librarians and college librarians, greater collaboration with instructors, provision of more copies of materials at both university and college libraries, allocation of additional funding, and implementation of more user and librarian training.—*Barbara J. D'Angelo, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond.*

**Hjørland, Birger.** *Information Seeking and Subject Representation: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Information Science.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr. (New Directions in Information Management, no. 34), 1997. 213p. alk. paper, \$59.95 (ISBN 0-313-29893-9). LC 96-51136.

Hjørland is a member of the faculty of the Royal School of Librarianship in Copenhagen; his academic background is in psychology and information science. This work should interest theoretically inclined research librarians because it is centered on information gathering by and for researchers—indeed, it is almost exclusively focused on researchers. It is a work on theoretical foundations, not of practical details; and it has a very strong programmatic aim. The author wants to change the orientation of information science research from what he sees as the dominant individualist and subjectivist approach to information science's problems, to an objectivist, group-oriented approach that completely accepts and appreciates the social character of scientific and scholarly research. He refers to this orientation as "methodological collectivism," contrasting it with an established "methodological individualism."

The author describes various psychological theories favored by, or consonant with, different approaches to information

science problems, contrasting, for example, a widespread affinity for an information-processing model of human cognitive processes with the approach he prefers—activity theory. This last approach is derived from the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and emphasizes social and cultural factors in cognitive development. Hjørland also shows the relationships of information science research strategies to philosophical theories of knowledge, and argues that activity theory is highly compatible with philosophical pragmatism, both of which support the kind of objectivist, socially oriented approach he calls methodological collectivism. Reflection on pragmatism's view of knowledge and activity theory's approach to cognition leads Hjørland to propose that we understand the concept of the subject of a document in terms of the document's epistemological or informative potentials, that is, potentials for helping to solve research problems and thus contribute to knowledge.

Information needs are to be understood in a similarly public, objective way, as relative to scientific problem-solving, not (or not primarily) as inner psychological states. Literature searching by individual researchers must be seen as guided, and in a sense disciplined, by established practices within the disciplines and smaller research communities. A fruitful approach in information science research is domain analysis, the study of the information and communication structure of a discipline or smaller specialized field, with an interest in improving the information systems available within the domain. Such research can usefully draw on the history, sociology, and philosophy of science as background.

The proposal, to define the concept of a subject in terms of informative potentials, sounds strange if understood as an analysis or reconstruction of what people ordinarily think about a document's subject. But it can be revamped easily into a