

**Graduate Students' Perceptions of Library Support Services
for Distance Learners: A University-Wide Study**

**Amigos Fellowship Final Report
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Submitted by

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**Final Report for Amigos Fellowship for Project
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Purpose

The primary objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of online resources and resource sharing among the Texas A&M University System academic libraries in serving the information needs of graduate students enrolled in distance learning courses within the system's member institutions. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are distant students aware of the online resources available to students at distance sites and the TexShare program?
2. To what extent do distance students perceive that their information needs are being met by the online resources available to students at distance sites and the TexShare program?

Methods

A survey questionnaire consisting of both open and closed-ended questions was developed based on a survey conducted by Cassner and Adams at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in fall 1997. The population consisted of 133 graduate students at remote sites enrolled in course taught via interactive video and originating at member institutions within the Texas A&M University system in spring 1999.

Response rate is a recognized disadvantage of surveys. In an effort to improve the response rate, arrangements were made for proctors to administer the surveys. Twenty-four instructors agreed to allow the surveys to be administered to their classes. One instructor could not be contacted.

In the first week of April 1999, I began contacting TTVN site coordinators at those locations where graduate courses were offered. Eight coordinators agreed to administer and return the surveys but only six actually administered the surveys. The six sites at which surveys were administered were Fort Bend Health Center and George Memorial Library in Richmond, Raytheon E-Systems in Waco, St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas A&M Blacklands Research Center in Temple, Texas A&M University-Galveston, and The University Center in The Woodlands. Packets of surveys, grouped by site and course were mailed to proctors in mid April. No arrangements could be made for proctors at five sites. The researcher administered the surveys at three of these sites: Progresso Community Center, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, and Weslaco Agriculture Research Center. Additionally, the researcher administered the survey at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Seventy-two surveys were completed in class. Additionally, one instructor requested that his/her students be given the option to complete the survey electronically. Of these 16 students, six chose to complete the survey on-line and nine completed the survey in class. Ten additional surveys were received by mail from students enrolled in classes in which surveys were administered by proctors.

In May, class rosters were obtained through open-records requests and surveys were mailed to students to whom the surveys were not administered in class. This included 17 students enrolled in the class for which instructor permission was not obtained to survey; students during the class, 12 students at a site at which the surveys were misplaced until after the last class meeting, and 13 students at a site at which the proctor did not administer the surveys as expected. Fourteen (33.33%) students completed and returned

the survey. A total of 102 surveys were completed. As anticipated the return rate for surveys administered by a proctor was much greater than that for those classes surveyed using traditional mailed surveys methods.

Discussion

Surveys were coded and imported into SPSS for Windows, release 7.5 for analysis. Results indicate that TexShare online resources and the TexShare card are under utilized by students. Question 1 asked how frequently students used various library resources for course-related research. Twenty-five (24.5%) respondents indicated they used electronic databases very often, 14 (13.7%) often, and 17 (16.6%) sometimes. Twenty-one (20.5%) reported using a TexShare card. Question 2 pertained to how respondents obtained books, journal articles, etc for their course work. Thirty-eight (37.2%) respondents indicated they printed full-text materials or Internet based information from the screen very often, 22 (21.5%) often and 15 (14.7%) sometimes. Twenty-four (23.5%) Downloaded resources very often, 22 (21.5%) often and 16 (15.6%) sometimes. Twenty-one (20.5%) reported using a TexShare card at other college or university libraries.

Question 11 asked respondents to indicate their overall satisfaction with the library support services they received as distance learning students. Thirteen (12.7%) indicated they were very satisfied with the services they received, 16 (15.6%) satisfied and 22 (21.5%) were neutral. Twenty-nine (28.4%) responded “Not applicable”. These findings indicate the need for a follow-up study to better determine why students are not using library services and resources to their full potential. Based on comments and responses, there appears to be a need for orientations to the services. Additionally, libraries might consider reviewing their marketing processes.

Comments

The enclosed paper will be presented at the ACRL conference to be held in Portland, Oregon, in April 2000. This paper includes a tabulation of the results and a more comprehensive discussion of the results. Also enclosed is a copy of the survey.

I would like to express my gratitude to Amigos Library Services, Inc. for this fellowship. It greatly reduced the financial burden for this research and allowed me to compensate the proctors for their assistance. The quality of the survey instrument and the study benefited greatly through the generosity of Amigos.