

Letter from the Guest Editor

Distance Learning

by Philip Orr

Welcome to this issue of *Indiana Libraries* devoted to distance learning and distance learning librarianship. Not since 2002 has this journal devoted an entire issue to the subject of libraries and librarians serving distance education students and faculty. Prior to and since then, however, individual articles on the topic have occasionally appeared in these pages, and they are likely to continue, given both the growth and importance of this form of education.

This growth is evidenced in part by the increase in both the number and variety of courses offered via distance education in Indiana. As an example, during the fall 2009 semester the Indiana College Network (ICN), a statewide cooperative of 45 public and private institutions operated by the Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System (IHETS), listed 2,446 available courses. Although the majority of these courses were offered by colleges and universities for post-secondary students, 160 were aimed at K-12 students and 78 were continuing education courses for anyone interested in improving skills or expanding horizons. Distance education, therefore, which has historically been used largely by higher education, is now in use by elementary and secondary schools, government agencies and non-profits, and corporations training personnel across the country and around the world. The libraries and librarians associated with these institutions are actively attempting to support these learners.

This issue of *Indiana Libraries* begins with Larry Johnson and Annette Lamb's article which addresses how broadly diverse contemporary distance education is becoming, encompassing all types of libraries and library patrons. The article poses some challenging questions for librarians attempting to serve these library patrons in their quest as distance learners. Jason Fields' article follows, providing some advice for those working in a public library setting who are often called upon to serve distance education students living in their communities. Because Jason has worked in both public and academic libraries, his suggestions are both practical and insightful.

The next section of this issue opens with Susan Mannan's article detailing Ivy Tech Community College's online Library Technical Assistant (LTA) program. Susan currently serves as the chair of this very successful, expanding program which has enrolled scores of students throughout the state and which is improving the quality of support staff in many Hoosier libraries. Her article is followed by two personal narratives from professional librarians who pursued their graduate library science degrees via distance education. The first of these is written by Phuongkhanh (Khanh) Nguyen and the second by Lisa Felix. Both Khanh and Lisa not only share lessons that they learned through their experiences that will be beneficial to others considering a similar route to the MLS, but they also make helpful suggestions to faculty teaching in a distance education environment.

Certainly the growth of distance education has been dependent in large part on the technology explosion which has occurred in recent decades. Rapid changes in hardware, software, and network capabilities have given educators and librarians alike the potential to reach and teach distant students and remote library users. The next section of this issue discusses examples of ways technology is affecting distance learning librarianship. The section begins with Matthew Lancaster and Caroline Baker's article surveying some open source software options that can serve to enhance libraries' distance education efforts. Next, Shelley Arvin shares her experience in using LibGuides as an effective way to meet the needs of the distance education students on her campus. Finally, Eric Fisher takes a serious look at the advantages and obstacles of using another Web 2.0 application, SecondLife, in serving distance education students.

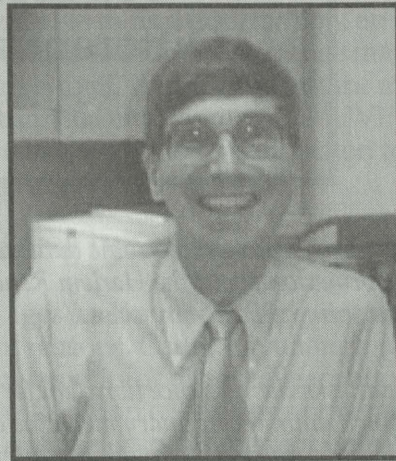
One of the areas in which technology has significantly affected distance learning librarianship is library instruction. The next section addresses a few of the ways in which technology is helping to provide this important service. The section begins with an article by Susan Skekloff and Worth Weller who update readers on a project that was first reported in *Indiana Libraries* in 2008. Susan and Worth present another year's worth

of data related to an interesting approach they are using to provide library instruction to freshmen English students. Mike Knecht and Kevin Reid, librarians from Henderson (KY) Community College, recount how they have successfully developed and embedded a library instruction program into their college's course management software, thus improving and expanding their library's information literacy efforts. The last three articles in this section provide information related to the use of online tutorials. Anne Haynes and Jennifer Laherty's article describes in detail how they developed an online tutorial for use with distance education students. The articles by Allyson Washburn and Judith Garrison describe two different processes they have used for evaluating the effectiveness of tutorials they developed for distance education students on their separate campuses. It should be noted that the articles by Knecht and Reid, Haynes and Laherty, and Washburn are based on presentations that the authors made during the Indiana Library Federation's 2008 annual conference, and materials related to those presentations are available on the ILF's Distance Learning Division Web site at <http://www.ilfonline.org/units/divisions/dl.htm>.

This issue of *Indiana Libraries* concludes with Susan Clark's exciting article describing how the librarians throughout Indiana's Ivy Tech Community College system are collaborating with teaching faculty to develop distance education courses that incorporate library resources and services in support of instructional goals. Such ground-floor involvement in the design and development of distance education courses may be one of the most significant services that distance learning librarians can provide as well as one their biggest challenges.

I want to thank each author who shared his or her research, experience and love of serving distance learners. Together we present this issue to the readers of *Indiana Libraries* hoping that all will gain information that will help them grow professionally and better serve these important library users.

About the Author



Philip Orr

Philip Orr is the Distance Learning Librarian at the University of Southern Indiana's David L. Rice Library, a position he has had since late 2001. Prior to coming to USI, Phil held professional library positions with Saint Louis Christian College, Kaskaskia College and the Mississippi Library Commission. He also has 12 years of experience as a public school teacher and a school library media specialist. He earned a BA in History and an MS in Ed in Instructional Materials, both from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, as well as an MS in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

E-mail: porr@usi.edu