
PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Best Practices for Virtual Library Services

Three Small Libraries with Three Perspectives
on Virtual Library Services

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ABSTRACT Panelists Elli Cucksey from Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, Susan Ebertz from Wartburg Theological Seminary, and Stephanie Garrett from Catholic Distance University brought their experiences to the discussion of best practices for virtual library services. These three panelists represent three points on the spectrum between programs that are fully online to mostly residential (or commuting) programs struggling to deliver expected virtual library services. Each panelist shared strategies for the way they try to provide virtual services given their different contexts. A question-and-answer time at the end highlighted other best practices. This session was presented by members of Atla's Small Libraries Interest Group (SLIG).

INTRODUCTION

Many of us scrambled to figure out virtual library services when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and our schools went to online classes. We

created ad hoc services to fill in the gaps. We are now discovering that distance education is not going away. For those in small libraries, we know that staffing and budget make a difference in what we can offer. In this session presented by members of Atla's Small Libraries Interest Group (SLIG), three librarians working to provide virtual library services for their small libraries share how to plan strategically and provide practical helps and best practices.

INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Wartburg Theological Seminary

Susan Ebertz

Wartburg Theological Seminary is in Dubuque, Iowa, in the United States of America. Our full-time equivalency is approximately 200 students. About two-thirds of our students are distance students. The rest are residential students. We have three degree programs, plus a certificate program leading to denominational rostering. The library is staffed by a director, a part-time paraprofessional, and students.

Catholic Distance University

Stephanie Garrett

This year, CDU celebrates its 40th anniversary. What began as an ecclesial directive to provide correspondence courses for students who did not live near a Catholic institution of higher learning has grown into a 100%-online university offering AA through MA degrees in Catholic theology.

Per IPED's 2021 Fall Enrollment Data, CDU's peer group consists of 31 seminaries and religious colleges, and CDU is counted among the 62 schools designated as distance-only institutions — of which only 59 submitted age-related demographics for Fall 2021.

Courses are offered during five 8-week accelerated terms per academic year. All courses are taught asynchronously online using the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS).

We are aware that 53.8% of CDU's students are over the age of 40, with just over 31% over the age of 50. This high percentage of digital immigrants makes CDU unique among both its peer-institutions and distance-only institutions. Whether comparing undergraduates, graduates, or both, CDU consistently serves more students over the age of 50 than its peer institutions, as well as a great many students

who are 40–49 years old. There are three driving forces that lead students to seek a degree at CDU:

- They are already serving, either in paid or volunteer positions, at their churches and are seeking to advance or gain a paid position.
- They are deacons or religious brothers and sisters who have not previously earned a theological degree and are asked to do so by their diocese or religious order.
- They are older adults who have time and resources to pursue a pet project degree.

Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University

Elli Cucksey

Trinity was first founded as the German Theological Seminary in 1830 and in 1850 was chartered Capital University. While the renamed Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary (ELTS) was separated from Capital around 1960, the two operated jointly in many ways. In 1978 ELTS and Hamma Divinity (of Wittenberg University) merged to form Trinity Lutheran Seminary. In 2018, Trinity once again became part of Capital University as an embedded seminary. This will allow the seminary to continue as a sustainable institution into the 21st century. While enrollment the last few years has been much lower, we are stable in terms of numbers. We continue to become more diverse, however, in terms of age, family status, educational level, religious tradition, economic status, gender, and race. Each new population brings different needs, and we had only begun to try and figure this out when the pandemic hit in 2020. Now we realize that one thing each population will expect going forward is an increased availability of education and services delivered in an online format.

VIRTUAL LIBRARY SERVICES PROVIDED BY EACH SETTING

Wartburg Theological Seminary

Susan Ebertz

We are both a residential and a distance seminary. Because of Association of Theological Schools (ATS) standards, we attempt to provide equity in library services for our distance and residential students. That said, we are also trying to increase our residential student population. We are attempting to create library services that residential students would find attractive. Thus, the tension between equity for

distance students and value added for residential students. We do not want to create a “sibling rivalry” of “you love them more than us.” We want to stress the idea of equity and not same. We take the particular situation and needs of the students in determining what particular services to provide or policies to create.

Equity in Library Resources. We try to create equity in library resources. Our goal is to provide students with all the required, recommended, and suggested readings for all our degree and certificate courses. Part of this stems from the desire of our institution to make seminary affordable. Our physical reserve collection includes all these books. We try to provide equity for our distance students by providing access to the same “reserve” resources. We use the reserve module of our library catalog. Students are able to quickly find the links to the online resources for their classes.

Our residential students have access to the physical collection in our library. They also have easy access to our entire collection and are able to browse the shelves. To provide equity for our distance students, we mail books in our circulating collection to them. We also provide a longer check out for them. All our students must be on campus during the first week of each semester. Books are due the next time the distance student is on campus. If the book is needed by another student, we will recall the book and the student will pay return postage. This allows access for all our students.

Equity in Assistance. Residential students may walk into the library when the library is open and ask for help when needed. Library staff see the students on campus, when passing in the hall or before and after chapel. Students feel free to ask questions during casual encounters. Relationships are easy to build in the residential setting.

It is a bit more difficult to provide easy access to or build relationships with distance students. We have a Zoom account for the library. It is on whenever the library is open. We encourage students to Zoom us whenever they need help. When a student Zooms us when the library is closed, an email is sent to the library. The next person who works at the library will contact the student to see how we may help. Zoom has been a great way to see our students and interact with them. The share screen feature allows us to provide help easily. During orientation we emphasize using Zoom. We also use email to provide assistance to our distance students. We have also zoomed with our residential students when they have found it more convenient that coming to the library.

We have a course site in our learning management system. The course site has our Zoom link to the library prominently featured, link to our catalog, links to our databases and resources, and other information. Students know that they can go here for their needs. We highlight our site during library orientation.

Equity in Instruction. As I mentioned earlier, all our students need to be on campus the first week of each semester. We try to provide orientation and instruction during this week. We also have short workshops during the semester both in-person and via Zoom. For students who are asynchronous, we record the sessions and post them on our course site. We have discovered that students who are enthusiastic about a service do the best workshops and videos.

Equity in creating place/community. For residential students it is easy to create a library space conducive for learning and community. Chairs are placed in small groupings. Tables are available for group study. We have a puzzle table that allows students to build community with each other. We have book readings and pizza parties.

Creating place for distance students is a bit more difficult. We try to include them in various ways. For example, we have monthly displays. We send out emails with pictures of the display and the list of books (with links) that are displayed. Distance students have commented about how much they appreciate this. We also do a similar thing for our new book display. We have thought about putting a Zoom station near the puzzle table so that distance students may interact with residential students while putting together a puzzle.

We continue to think of ways that we can provide equitable services for both our residential and distance students through our resources, assistance, instruction, and place.

Catholic Distance University

Stephanie Garrett

Working in the asynchronous online-only environment and serving a student base that mainly consists of digital immigrants means the CDU Online Library continually strives to demonstrate relevance and create presence to provide information literacy instruction and writing support.

When I first arrived at CDU, I had two prompt realizations. First, there was little institutional understanding of the role the library plays in student success. Second, there was a complete lack of knowledge of what “information literacy” means in the academic library

setting. This lack of understanding was due in part to the position of librarian being instituted to meet ATS accreditation requirements less than 10 years ago. Before coming to CDU in 2015, my predecessor, the first CDU librarian, had just returned to the US after 16 years of working in European libraries and archives. Academic libraries in Europe did not adopt the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy until 2018. Information literacy as we understand it had never been part of her professional development.

Another challenge came from the instructors' reliance on outdated publications and web resources. Getting buy-in from these stakeholders has not been difficult. However, changing their habits and getting them to update their syllabi and course modules has been more challenging as it requires instructors to change their habits.

A lack of discoverability and accessibility in the previous versions of the online library meant that our students, who often have the financial means, simply buy the books they wanted to use for research, or relied on popular Catholic media available on the web.

I came to CDU as an early career librarian with an extensive background in business administration and nonprofit management. I spent my first three months listening to students, faculty, and staff, reviewing ALA and ACRL's Guidelines for Higher Education, Distance Education, and the Information Literacy Framework, and questioning library mentors about library policies and procedures.

After completing a SWOT Analysis, creating a document on the role of the library in an academic institution, and drafting the library's first ever policies and procedures manual, I set to work sharing that information with the university's leadership and faculty chairs, and pretty much anyone who made eye contact with me.

Simple purchases such as Oxford Reference's Dictionary of the Christian Church gave many instructors access to a longed-for resource. Posting Atla's "How to Search" videos in the online library helped increase student understanding of why their natural language searches failed to return relevant results. Offering writing support provided the opportunity to teach proper citation procedures and introduce the concept of "Scholarship as Conversation."

In November 2021, I was given the opportunity to appear before the Board of Trustees' academic committee. Leveraging my business experience, I showed up with a presentation that included the SWOT Analysis, a strategic plan that aligned with the institution's strategic plan, and baselines and benchmarks for library assessment. While

these are standard expectations at most institutions, at CDU this was new knowledge that repositioned the library from necessary evil to essential services.

“Creating Presence” was our primary task, while providing information literacy and writing instruction.

We examined what it means to be fully online. In the online environment, face-to-face is only a small fraction of “presence” with students. We attacked these questions by using the Community of Inquiry model. People generally have a different understanding of “presence” than what we must do in the online environment. The Community of Inquiry model divides presence into three categories: cognitive, social, and teaching.

What constitutes effective social, cognitive, and/or teaching presence for a matriculating high school student differs from what resonates with students over the age of 50, and what is expected from the 40–49 age bracket. Younger students are more likely to be unwilling to admit they need help with research and writing, while older students do not want to admit their struggles with learning technology.

Our instructors have a well-groomed path to follow the Community of Inquiry model when it comes to developing teaching content for the LMS, lesson plans that set parameters for discussions, and engagement expectations for students.

How can we create or maintain cognitive, social, and teaching presence as librarians when all course work is asynchronous?

One of the most important lessons we have incorporated into the Community of Inquiry model is an understanding that everything must be instantiated in multiple forms and platforms. And, you can never assume that students understand how to complete a digital task.

For example, a student seeking writing support was asked to email her paper to the librarian. Student understood how to upload her assignments in Canvas, but not how to attach a document to an email. As a result, she printed her paper and sent me 17 photos, using her cellphone, one photo for each page. This example is an important reminder that many students are more comfortable using their phones than their computers.

The Cognitive Presence is the academic content that engages the mind of the student. Through the CDU Online Library absolutely everything is virtual. There are no handouts or physical books to give students. The library started as a list of hotlinks and has grown to a Canvas Module, and now a LibGuides content management system site. Because we now understood that the entire presence of the li-

brary was digital, I was able to re-allocate \$14,000 to get a Discovery Box and more databases.

There is a lot of overlap in activities that create social and teaching presence. With Social presence, we are referring to the ability to project your personal identity in the online community. This takes all kinds of forms, but it amounts to finding your voice in digital communications from emails to newsletters (MailChimp, Canva, Snagit, even Bitmoji). CDU also offers other fee or low-cost online tools like Populi News Feed, Pronto, and Canvas Introduction Bombs.

Teaching Presence is the design, facilitation, and direction of both the social and cognitive processes to create meaningful and educational learning outcomes. To achieve these, we use term presentations set up as LibGuides, Canvas Embeds, Virtual Research Instruction, and Online Writing Services. At CDU we have experimented with and found great value in services like Zoom and YouTube.

Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University

Elli Cucksey

Hamma Library is at the beginner end of the virtual library services spectrum. In preparing for this session TLS gave a good deal of thought to what exists about presence in person and what we hope to carry over to the online environment. That would include things like the ability to find the librarian or staff member to help us, or to browse the collection for serendipitous discovery of resources. We have (and hope to keep) the ability to ask questions and get them answered as they arise. In person we can come together in groups to facilitate the formation of community. In person, almost by accident, we become more aware of the questions, struggles, and triumphs of other students, and losing that to an online environment would be a great loss.

Further reflecting on the realities of our current online presence attempts we are aware that students sometimes struggle to know how or who best to contact for help. We are acutely aware that many students battle with information overload within the databases, even as they are also only aware of a few of the available resources. We recognize that many students are putting off questions and sometimes to not ask them at all. There is often a feeling of isolation and disconnectedness from the institution, a lack of community. This last part contributes greatly to students remaining unaware that they are experience completely normal struggles.

So, in the conversations leading up to this group discussion, Susan and Stephanie were extremely helpful in helping Hamma Library begin to realize what needs to be done. Going forward we have plans to double our efforts to make the library's availability known and blast contact information. We will be working with our system's manager at Capital to foster more browsability in cataloging while we rework instruction to include better search strategies. Since so many of the residential students work in the library, we will increase efforts to get them to be trained reference assistants so that they can help with online inquiries and in person reference. We will increase our efforts to find real time communication methods to create and foster better community, and this includes students and faculty and staff.

As we think about these goals, we break it down to the same goals Stephanie and Susan had. We want to demonstrate our relevance in the library, create presence for students to find what they need, and provide information literacy and writing instruction.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

A robust question and answer session followed the panelist presentation.