Special Forum: Distance Learning

The Leo Dehon Library's Response to COVID-19
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
by Jennifer Bartholomew and Kathy Harty

ONLINE LEARNING PRIOR TO MARCH 2020 / COVID-19

Until this year, Sacred Heart Seminary & School of Theology (SHSST) provided online classes solely to seminary students in India who are part of our MA program pathway—Adveniat Regnum Tuum (ART)—designed for Roman Catholic seminarians of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart (SCJ) living abroad.

ART consists of seven asynchronous online courses and three face-to-face courses for which faculty travel to India. ART delivers courses taught by six experienced online faculty. The main delivery mode is through our learning management system, Populi. In addition, support for student learning (mostly writing and language skills) is provided by embedding our writing skills associate and the director of our English and Cultural Studies (ECS) program in the courses.

MARCH 2020 — SPRING SEMESTER GOES ONLINE

As news of the COVID-19 viral pandemic spread, the rector and senior administration made the decision in mid-March to take our face-to-face courses online through the end of the semester. With the charge to transform all courses in a week, the academic dean partnered full- and part-time faculty into teams coordinated by an experienced faculty peer-mentor (including the research & technology librarian). Each mentor had taken the University of Wisconsin-Madison's certificate program in online teaching in 2019 upon receipt of an ATS grant.

Academic administrators, IT personnel, and library staff all provided support to faculty during the transition. Progress was tracked in an online spreadsheet. Specific needs were quickly identified. Lecture notes were converted into PowerPoints and videos. English and Spanish faculty thought about how to teach, and what pedagogies would work best. Online pedagogy varied widely but all classes were ready to go by the following Monday.

For the most part, online classes went well with a few bumps along the way. Technology needs varied. The library continued to provide first-level help for students and faculty. We amended library services tracking, including faculty for the first time as we supported their tech issues. We shared our contact information and were available via personal phone, Zoom, Skype, and email. Our research & technology librarian was very busy, providing expert Populi support to both students and faculty. Some students enjoyed robust Wi-Fi as they "sheltered in place," while others who went home had a variety of tech issues. The ECS programs were particularly challenged by the online environment. Different meeting software was purchased in early April for faculty who thought it would make small group work go more smoothly.

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Services provided by librarians included:

- Created a quarantine LibGuide describing library services and sharing basic details on how to access digital resources. Librarians shared best practices at online faculty meetings, then added these to an online teaching LibGuide. Tips such as: don't send multiple emails, use a variety of features in Populi (chat, calendars for weekly assignments), and update your syllabus as needed, all helped to improve communication and not overwhelm students.

- Participated as consultants and mentors as faculty converted courses to online learning. Worked with faculty to create online orientation materials and revise syllabi to include online resources and links. Shared best practices for Populi. Added links to e-resources; also scanned and posted content for e-reserves. Supported faculty as they learned to use technology (e.g., how to voice-over PowerPoints, how to use Zoom and WebEx).

- Student Outreach: The academic dean asked his support staff (the registrar, director of library and academic support services, the research & technology librarian, academic assistant) to reach out and call all students to see how they were faring in the new online environment. During the remaining seven weeks of class, we contacted students with specific questions regarding how things were going two times: once after two weeks online and again with two weeks left in the semester.

- Faculty Outreach: The library initiated an outreach program to all faculty. We called them to see how things were going, what their resource and technology needs were, and to determine how we could assist. These conversations were reassuring and fruitful, resulting in a number of suggestions for resource and technology purchases (Zoom, eBooks, and a journal package).

- Thesis Support: provided online resources and helped with citation and style questions.

JULY-AUGUST 2020

Previous summer sessions have been geared to English language learners (about 50 students) who came to Sacred Heart from all over the world. This summer, as travel restrictions are in place and many CPE programs have been cancelled, we decided to offer an online session for MA and MDiv students. The library was included in the support team planning. Our projects include:

- Create special online orientation materials for students who haven't attended Sacred Heart before.

- Create LibGuides, post digital resources, and add best online teaching practices into a faculty guide.

- Compile an FAQ for technology requirements, geared toward our new students. We'll list what they'll need for online learning: high-speed internet, camera, microphone, etc. Once students register, we will determine how comfortable they are online and come up with an individualized plan on how best to support them.

- Work with faculty to determine writing needs for assignments. Technology assistance will be offered by the research & technology librarian and IT staff.

- Purchase more digital resources and e-books.

- Communicate via a weekly newsletter and planned outreach (by phone once to faculty and twice, at the start and middle of the term, to students) during this session.

We have learned a great deal since March and will continue to adapt. For now, we are limiting library services and gearing them towards online learning. We are part of an eight-school consortium that shares a catalog and bin delivery service. We will also be thinking about our community patrons and how we can serve them safely.