

**Every
Librarian
a Leader**

Developing an associate degree for distance learners

By Thomas E. Abbott and Kirk T. Rau

The University of Maine's excellent adventure

It isn't every day, that librarians from a library without academic rank, or their place in the campus academic decision-making process, are asked to create a degree program for 300 constituents spread over the entire state. And we are pleased to report that the only ones we know of can say they succeeded.

Establishing the need and getting started

Almost six years ago, leaders from the Maine Education Media Association's (MEMA) Support Staff Group approached the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) Library dean with an urgent request from its membership that a coordinated program of education and training be established. They sought educational opportunities (ultimately agreeing on an associate of science degree in library and information technology) for their members that would support their efforts to achieve fair and consistent compensation and recognition for their work. And to add to the challenge, the support staff interested in continuing education were scattered across the 32,000 square miles of Maine—requiring some version of distance education for the potential students.

Determined to respond positively to our new constituents, and not miss the opportunity to create the first degree program in Maine designed specifically for Maine's Interactive Television (ITV) System, the dean sought support from a community advisory group for curriculum development, and found several willing faculty allies in UMA's Social and Behavioral

Sciences Academic Division to sponsor the program proposals. At that time, UMA had already been in the business of delivering ITV courses on the Maine ITV network for about three years, and we had been watching and learning. We had discovered what we thought worked and what didn't, and did our best to apply our findings to our degree program.

We wrestled with the issues of integrating the university core curriculum into the program, what level of mathematics our students needed, and in the end, had the degree program approved by the division faculty, the Educational Policy Committee, the Faculty Assembly, the provost, the president, and the University of Maine System Chief Academic Officers, as well as the system chancellor and Board of Trustees—all in a little over six months, which stood as a record until recently.

Finding our stride

In the process of gaining degree approval, we library professionals found we were pretty good at collaborative processes (utilizing the community advisory group and gaining trust and support for academic approval with the faculty) and good at writing curriculum and proposals in general. We found we knew our content area very well and knew how to teach others, and, indeed, impressed the skeptics among the divisional faculty. We found we were comfortable arguing our points at the various approval levels, and we were able to adequately address a last-minute concern from some of our library colleagues who felt the associate of science in library and information technology would be used by some as a poor substitute for an MLS. Working with the academic units through the various approval stages, we concluded we were as good at the

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Library and information technology core courses

- Lib 100 Introduction to Libraries and Library and Information Careers
- Lib 101 Library and Public Services Programming
- Lib 150 Basic Reference and Database Searching
- Lib 175 Library Technical Processes
- Lib 225 Library Information Technology and Media
- Lib 250 Orientation to Collection Development, Budgeting and Fund Raising
- Lib 299 Library Assistant Practicum—80 hours supervised

academic curriculum end of the business as many of our faculty who held academic rank.

Mid-course correction: Major change in delivery method

The degree program ran for two years as a Maine ITV offering. Although we admitted 120 students to the program, we managed to attract only 30 to 50 students at the off-peak times we were scheduled in, and faced cancellation of several courses due to low enrollments and high delivery costs of ITV. After consulting with our students and members of our original advisory group, Program Coordinator and Library Assistant Dean Kirk Rau took a deep breath and the leap of faith necessary to become the first UMA degree program to become totally asynchronous—offered as an independent group learning activity via videotape and Internet listserv. We dropped the ITV offerings of our courses and began instead videotaping about two-thirds of each course using experts in their home environments (the business librarian in the business library), and setting up Internet listservs for the students and faculty for each class. All students receive personal copies of the videotaped lectures and a course packet, and follow along, week by week, with assignments, and interact with other students and faculty members on the listserv. The new delivery method was begun as an experiment during the summer of 1996; the student reaction was so positive, everyone agreed to convert the entire degree program to this method of asynchronous delivery. Five courses of the 11 have been pre-

pared, and plans are underway to convert the remaining six to the asynchronous model. The 80-hour practicum is the last hurdle in making the program available at a distance. At this point, a local on-site work supervisor is selected by UMA, and communication among student, work supervisor, and faculty member is managed via e-mail, telephone, and mail for the duration of the project.

Success, and a new era is born at UMA

Students are delighted with the flexibility the asynchronous mode of delivery offers. Students say they appreciate the ability to watch the tapes and use the listserv at times convenient to their work and family schedules, and that they have the time necessary to respond thoughtfully to issues raised on the listserv. Faculty back this up with stories of incredible levels of interaction among and with students. Faculty concerns about keeping up with student expectations led to the point where Rau has successfully negotiated a split into two sections when the enrollment reaches 40. During the fall 1997 semester registration process, we were forced to close a double section of one course and stop enrollment. The flexibility of the new model, however, will allow us to offer all seven of the library core courses each semester, so students
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Students like distance class

Students taking the asynchronous version of Lib 150, Reference and Database Searching this past summer overwhelmingly appreciated the flexibility that videotapes and listservs afforded. Some of their comments:

"I felt this was a great course and I would definitely recommend it to others."

"This distance learning is a great way to meet my recertification requirements . . . it is a good way to get ideas from library people from different parts of the country. I would give the course an A+."

"Thank you so much. I will promote the use of the library in the future . . . I speak to over 10,000 people and 5,000 fifth graders about electricity safety each year. . . I will direct them to the library."

Note: Of the 62 people in Lib 150 only one would have preferred a traditional course.

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- **Edgar Database of Corporate Information.** Domestic public companies required to file forms 10-K and 10-KSB, containing most of the information from the "Annual Report to Shareholders," with the SEC (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission) are found on Edgar. Edgar posts the forms within 24 hours of filing. *Access:* <http://www.sec.gov/edgarhp.htm>.



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- **The Fortune 500.** This site contains information about the Fortune 500 companies arranged by company names, industry, and CEO. Some of the information provided in the Company Snapshot includes links to the company Web sites, the company's address, current stock prices, and revenues. A large number of the company Web sites include employment opportunities. *Access:* <http://www.pathfinder.com/@T9BcBQUAOiH20634/fortune/fortune500>.

- **JobWeb: Employer Profiles.** The National Association of Colleges and Employers publishes these Web site pages describing various employers and providing links to their homepages. *Access:* <http://www.jobweb.org/employer/>.

- **Sources of Public Information on Privately Held Companies.** A list, provided by Washington Researchers, Ltd., notes public sources to consider when searching for information about private companies. *Access:* <http://>

allison.clark.net/pub/busintel/premium-private.html.

Electronic journals

- **Career Magazine.** This site provides access to job openings, résumé banks, employer profiles, articles, and news, as well as career links. *Access:* <http://www.careermag.com/>.

- **Job Choices Online.** This online periodical contains current and archived career articles from the print version of *Job Choices*. *Access:* <http://www.jobweb.org/jconline/>.

- **Research Magazine Online.** Research Magazine Online provides comprehensive stock information to job seekers concerned with the financial health of a potential place of employment. *Access:* <http://www.researchmag.com/>. ■

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won't have long to wait. And an exciting side benefit of going asynchronous is that we are now able to welcome out-of-state students to participate, and have done so with 16 out-of-state students taking Basic Reference and Database Searching this past summer. Out-of-state students are eligible to earn a UMA degree by taking the library core courses via distance education and transferring in other required courses from an accredited institution of higher education, or as many seem to do, take them for professional development. Based on a special policy for these type of courses, set up by the Board of Trustees, out-of-state students pay in-state tuition rates.

It has been an interesting and "excellent" adventure—one we are delighted we signed up for. The staff have come together in support of our students and we have made another name for ourselves in our institution and in the state. Changes continue to swirl around the librarians and their entrepreneurship. This fall, Dean Abbott submitted a proposal to the president requesting that, in addition to Kirk Rau, the two other reference librarians be given non-tenure faculty rank to recognize their place in the greater institution. Of course, while all of this is going on, we continue to provide library services to our undergraduates and keep the business of the library in good order.

Note

1. Shirley M. Jarvella, "Associate Degree in Library and Information Technology: Experiment in 'Virtual' Library Education in Maine," *Library Mosaics* (May/June 1996). ■