

profession. The criteria include considerations such as cost-effectiveness, immediacy of the need or effect, and breadth of applicability.

Members of the working group, chaired by Lawrence Dowler, are now preparing background or informational papers on several topics raised before the group reconvenes in June. The issues addressed will include the potential for developing

guidelines or conventions for archival information systems, the impact of format integration on archival uses of the MARC format, and the relationship between description standards activities in the U.S. and Canada. For more information, contact Victoria Walch, 65 N. Westminster St., Iowa City, IA 52245; (319) 338-6650.



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# Online search services in the community college

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*Online services can improve the LRC's image.*

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In 1977 the American Library Association passed a resolution promoting equal access to information. This resolution states in part that "It shall be the policy of the American Library Association to seek to make it possible for library and information science agencies which receive their major support from public funds to provide service to all people without additional fees and to utilize the latest technological developments to ensure the best possible access to information."<sup>1</sup>

Academic libraries in the United States are suffering from severe economic pressure due to tightened budgets and coupled with rapidly increasing costs. Tuition revenue and enrollments are declining. State and federal assistance has decreased. Local tax referenda are increasingly difficult to pass. Some costs, such as those for facilities and tenured

faculty, are relatively fixed compared to enrollment, necessitating budget cuts in other areas, such as libraries. Academic library budgets are rising more slowly than overall university budgets and definitely more slowly than information costs.<sup>2</sup>

How are academic libraries, specifically community college libraries, responding to the ALA policy of equal access to information during this period of economic decline? A review of the literature, combined with a survey of the membership of the Northern Illinois Learning Resources Cooperative, provides more information.

Among published individual case studies, three describe successful free online services. The Library at California State College considers online services an integral part of the total reference service; consequently, online search services are not treated any differently from any other reference

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<sup>1</sup>Sara D. Knapp and C. James Schmidt, "Budgeting to Provide Computer-Based Reference Services: A Case Study." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 5 (March 1979): 9.

<sup>2</sup>Donald W. King, "Pricing Policies in Academic Libraries," *Library Trends* 28 (Summer 1979): 47-62.

tool.<sup>3</sup> At the University of Pennsylvania, end-user searching for free is offered successfully and has resulted in an improved library image coupled with pressures for expanding the services.<sup>4</sup> Governors State University considers the book budget to be an information budget and consequently provides free online search services. Twice as many patrons are served with more effective results. Subsequent interlibrary loan requests have increased, with document delivery the only weak link.<sup>5</sup>

The fee structure varies among academic libraries that do charge fees for online services. SUNY/Albany had offered free online searches for five years but finally had to impose charges for off-line printing. By sharing the costs, the services could be expanded to serve more patrons.<sup>6</sup> At the University of Delaware, a student search program is introduced as a "half-price" search. On the whole, "students and librarians alike have found online searching to be an important new reference tool and student exposure to it an important part of college research experience."<sup>7</sup>

To gain a broader view of how academic libraries are responding to the equal access policy, two published surveys have been reviewed. In 1981 ALA distributed a survey to publicly supported libraries providing online search services. A total of 985 libraries, including 610 academic libraries, responded. Seventy-two percent of the respondents charged fees for at least some users of the service. Of those charging fees, 75% charged only for direct costs of service. The report concluded: "These findings support a current trend of thought that public funds may be used to finance the costs of making a service available to all (i.e., for start-up and general operating expenses or overhead) but that private funds should be used to cover those 'direct costs' related to a service from which one person benefits (i.e., communication charges, connect time, and offline printing for a specific search)."<sup>8</sup> The report also found that the "level of funding available" had the most impact on the decision of whether or not to charge a fee.<sup>9</sup>

In 1982 the Association of College and Research Libraries conducted a survey to determine the ex-

tent to which college libraries were involved in online bibliographic searching. A total of 223 public and private colleges with enrollments between 1,000 and 5,000 responded. Of these, 65% offered online search services. Of those who did not, expense, insufficient anticipated use, and insufficient personnel were cited as the primary reasons. Seventy-three percent indicated that they charged faculty and students for the services. DIALOG was the vendor most frequently used and the average direct cost per search was \$10-\$15, with the average range from \$5-\$25.<sup>10</sup>

Since little information discussing online search services in community colleges is available, I surveyed the membership of the Northern Illinois Learning Resources Cooperative (NILRC). NILRC, a cooperative of two- and four-year institutions in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri, was established to improve cost effectiveness, to share and exchange resources and information, and to strengthen the skills and knowledge of its membership. Of the 35 member community colleges surveyed, 31 responded. Of these, eighteen (58%) provide online reference search services. This is slightly less than the ACRL survey cited earlier. Similar to the ACRL respondents, DIALOG is the most used vendor.

Of the respondents providing online search services, 100% provide services to faculty and administration or staff, 83% provide services to students, and 72% provide services to other patrons. When asked, "Do you charge a fee for reference database services?", 89% did not charge faculty and administration or staff, 61% did not charge students, and 1% did not charge other patrons. Among colleges charging fees, the fee structures varied, but most charged only direct expenses on a cost recovery basis similar to the ALA survey findings. These statistics support the stated mission of the community college and the role of its learning resources center (LRC). The LRC provides the resources necessary to support the instructional programs of the college. LRC services then extend beyond the traditional college community into the community at large.

The NILRC survey did not address the issue of why LRCs did not provide online search services; however, if the reasons paralleled the ACRL survey, helpful data was gained. In response to "expense," Jean Koch discusses in depth the costs involved when a library adds online bibliographic search services.<sup>11</sup> The capital outlay necessary to initiate online search services totals approximately \$2,000 for purchase of a microcomputer system

<sup>3</sup>Paula Crawford and Judith A. Thompson, "Free Online Searches Are Feasible," *Library Journal* 104 (April 1, 1979): 783-95.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Halperin and Ruth A. Pagell, "Free Do-It-Yourself Online Searching...What to Expect," *Online* 9 (March 1985): 82-84.

<sup>5</sup>Virgil Diodato, "Eliminating Fees from Online Search Services in a University Library," 10 (November 1986): 44-50.

<sup>6</sup>Knapp and Schmidt, "Budgeting," 9-13.

<sup>7</sup>Pamela Kobelski and Jean Trumbore, "Student Use of Online Bibliographic Services," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 4 (March 1978): 14-18.

<sup>8</sup>Mary Jo Lynch, "Libraries Embrace Online Search Fees," *American Libraries* 13 (March 1982): 174.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Jo Lynch, "Financing Online Services," *RQ* 21 (Spring 1982): 226.

<sup>10</sup>David Carlson and P. Grady Morein, *Online Bibliographic Searching in College Libraries: Clip Note #4-83* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1983).

<sup>11</sup>Jean E. Koch, "A Review of the Costs and Cost-Effectiveness of Online Bibliographic Services," *Reference Services Review* 10 (Spring 1982): 59-84.

with telephone modem and printer. Within Illinois, the College of Lake County coordinates group discounts to DIALOG for libraries who place \$1,000 "on account" each October. NILRC survey respondents estimated the annual direct online search costs ranging from \$200 to \$6,000 per year. Sixty-four percent had annual costs less than \$900. The average direct cost per search was \$7.77.

In response to "insufficient anticipated use," the NILRC survey showed that the number of searches per college ranged from 29 to 1,022 per year, with 71% conducting fewer than 100 searches per year. Among the colleges reporting searches by patron category, 30% searches were for faculty, 13% for administration/staff, 39% for students, and 18% for other patrons. Although use of online search services is low, access to the information resources is provided.

Finally, in response to "insufficient personnel," the survey showed the amount of staff time required for online searching was low. Seventy-two percent estimated staff time devoted to online

search services during the academic year to five hours per week or less.

In conclusion, academic libraries, especially community colleges, consider online search services as a part of their overall library service in support of the college's instructional program and institutional mission. Funding availability and philosophy determine the interpretation of equal access to information within budgetary constraints. Fee structures can range from simple to complex, from free to the patron to cost-recovery. Structures consider the patron status (student, staff, external), the search category (basic or specialized), and pricing goal (token, discount, or cost-recovery). Community colleges tend to provide free online services to faculty, administration, staff and students more frequently than other academic institutions. Implementing online search services need not be prohibitively expensive to initiate or maintain and will not only provide enhanced reference service but also will improve the image of the library. ■■

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## In defense of FIRST and freedom of access to information

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*Campus-based information service ruled no challenge to  
private enterprise in Arizona.*

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**F**IRST, the Fee-based Information and Research Service Team at Arizona State University Libraries, was challenged in July 1988 by an information broker marketing online database searches to

clients in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The challenge was brought under the Arizona Private Enterprise Law, ARS 41-2751, which constrains the publicly-funded community colleges and universi-