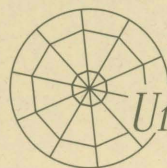


# Gatherings

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## Information Literacy: A Movable Feast

By Michele Behr,  
Off Campus Services Librarian

Some 3,000 students who are enrolled off campus may never set foot in the University Libraries in Kalamazoo! Yet, they are working on degrees that require access to data and information found in the Libraries' collections, both print and online, that are cataloged, indexed, and searched through the Web site simply marked [www.wmich.edu/library/](http://www.wmich.edu/library/).

These students, the majority of them studying at the graduate level, have at least as great a need for information literacy skills as do on campus students, while in many cases facing even greater challenges in dealing with the technology which is key to their use of library resources. As the Off Campus Services Librarian, I, together with Mae O'Neal, Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian, who works half-time with off campus programs, attempt to teach off campus students the skills they need to be information literate students and citizens.

### Who's out there?

The Office of Extended University Programs (known for years as "continuing education") is the key administrative office for off campus education offered by the University. The staff administers classes at WMU's branch campuses in Battle Creek, Grand Rapids (in two locations), Holland, Lansing, Muskegon, Southwest (Benton Harbor-St. Joseph), South Haven, and Traverse City. In addition, selected academic programs are also offered to students locally and nationally through electronic means such as interactive television and Web-based methods.

The academic programs offered off campus include courses of study in some 40 areas with curricula from

Business, Education, Engineering, Social Work, and Public Administration attracting the largest enrollments. Programs offered off campus are primarily at the graduate level: approximately 75% of the students enrolled off campus are working toward a master's degree, while about 10% are in doctoral programs.

Most WMU off campus students are considered "nontraditional." The median age of students enrolled in off campus programs is 35. The vast majority, about 88%, has full time jobs, and 68% of them are paying their own tuition.

### Which library services?

The Libraries strives to provide services to off campus students that are equivalent to students on the Kalamazoo campus. All indexes, databases, reference sources, electronic journals, and electronic books are available remotely. In addition, a document delivery service is available to all off campus students. Through this service, students request books and articles that are not already available elec-

tronically. Their requests are normally filled in 24-48 hours. Books are mailed to students' homes and can be renewed online. Articles are scanned and delivered electronically. The Libraries also provide electronic reserves, i.e., the reserve material can be obtained online. Access to all these services is available from a page on the Libraries' Web site designed specifically for off campus students.

### What are the problems?

While technology allows us to provide resources previously unavailable to off campus students, it also poses many difficulties in the area of information literacy. As a result, faculty librarians face unique challenges in assisting off campus students to find and evaluate information.

- Off campus students are accustomed to paper based, traditional ways of finding information in libraries.

- Nontraditional students can be intimidated by the technology, and may not have had experience with using a computer terminal as the main point of access.

- Nearly all off campus students have full time jobs and families so want to find and obtain what they need easily and quickly.

- Off campus students often access library and research services late at night and on weekends when both the Libraries' and the Computer Center's Help Desk staff are not available for assistance.

- Every student needs fast Internet connections and up to date Web browsers and plug ins, as well as citation software.

### What are we doing?

WMU librarians provide a variety of instructional services to assist off campus students with information literacy skills. We travel to all off campus sites to provide formal instruction to classes when asked by the course instructor. In the past academic year, about 50 face to face instruction sessions were offered in



Michele Behr and Mae W. O'Neal, off campus librarians

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## Information Literacy...

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all branch campus and off site locations. Many of the graduate programs off campus are offered using a cohort method with students taking classes together as they move through the course of study. Librarians participate in orientation sessions to introduce students to the library resources and services. We also work with off campus students in person at open lab sessions held at least once per semester in each branch campus location. These are "drop-in" sessions where students can get help with specific research assignments, or get more general help with accessing resources, using the document delivery service, etc. Off campus services librarians served over 1,000 off campus students in the past academic year through a formal class or open lab session.

Off campus students also get reference help and answers to questions using library reference services over the phone and through e-mail. In depth research consultations also take place either in person or using e-mail, phone, or fax. Particularly at the doctoral level, off campus students often need more involved help in conducting a literature search, finding primary source materials, locating statistical data, etc. Sometimes these students come to Kalamazoo to meet with advisors or committee members and can spend time in the University Libraries as well. Faculty librarians also travel to branch campuses to meet students closer to where they live and work. More often, however, this kind of assistance is provided over the phone while librarian and student are in different locations, through e-mail exchanges, or a combination of these and other methods. In the past academic year over 80 off campus students were assisted by one of these in depth sessions.

Off campus librarians customize instruction to the greatest extent possible to serve the specific needs of the students with whom we are working. We consult with the instructor ahead of time to find out what the research assignment is and what kind of topics students will be researching. This allows us to select the databases and resources we will introduce in the session, and prepare some examples that will be most relevant to the class. Typically, off campus classes meet once a week for three hours and generally a library instruction session will be about 90 minutes. While none of the branch campuses has a "traditional" library, each does have at least one computer lab where the students can begin their individual searches with our assistance. We must also teach basics such as how to access the Libraries' resources remotely at [www.wmich.edu/library/](http://www.wmich.edu/library/), how to sign

up for an account and use the document delivery service, and how to get assistance after the class is over.

### Information literacy onsite

Much of the off campus instruction interacts with the University Libraries located in Kalamazoo and uses the Libraries' Web site. But off campus information literacy must transfer to other libraries as well. An example of a customized information literacy initiative is in the Public Administration program that offers degrees at the master's and doctoral level. Dr. Peter Kobrak, Professor in the School of Public Affairs and Administration, has a history of taking his research-intensive classes in Lansing to the Library of Michigan for one six hour class session on a Saturday early in the semester. Students are given a "treasure hunt" assignment that requires them to locate various types of resources other than books and journal articles. The assignment includes sources such as polling data, budget information, and federal and state government information.

Two years ago, Peter Kobrak first invited me to come to the Saturday session to provide a basic library orientation, and to assist the students one on one throughout the day as they try to navigate in the library to find useful materials. The model developed that day is the model still used.

Before any searching begins, I provide a short instruction session for the class that outlines the nature of library research. I then spend the rest of the day working with students at the Library of Michigan as they use its Web site and catalog, the Internet access workstations, the print reference collections, and any other part of the Library where a student needs help. Students often begin the day unclear as to why they are meeting at the Library or are quickly intimidated by the assignment, but, at the end of the day, they leave with at least a few good sources for their projects. They have taken the first step toward information literacy and have a sense of how to navigate a large research collection. They are not yet information literate, but we have taken one more step in our mission to provide instruction to students when and where they need it. More important, we have helped to establish a foundation for the future information literacy of these researcher students working in their world.

*[Michele Behr joined the faculty of the University Libraries in 2001 bringing experience in educational services from the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) and as a training librarian at OCLC. She holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan and a M.I.L.S. degree from the School of Information and Library Studies, also at Michigan.]*

## Half Full?

By Joseph G. Reish, Dean, University Libraries

**I**t's that old question: Is the glass half full or half empty? Someone with a positive attitude will see the glass as half full, while someone that has a negative nature will see it as half empty."

We are realists in the University Libraries. We acknowledge the limitations imposed by the present cutbacks, yet, as realists, we push forward with firm determination to build upon our assets and fashion a brighter future. Our glass, as many, is half empty and half full at the same time.

**Half Empty and Holding:** Each year, the Libraries must cope with at least a 12 to 14% increase in the cost of acquisitions: books, journals, media, and electronic resources. The impact of recent cuts to our budget will deepen, even without additional reductions, because prices rise and the dollar is weak abroad. At jeopardy is the University Libraries' ability to augment and support faculty research and teaching. We face the possibility of the cancellation of selected serials and a reduction in monographic and book acquisitions. Interlibrary loan, funded by acquisition monies, may have to curtail services and disadvantage faculty and graduate students. We will feel at least half empty even if one-time supplemental dollars emerge later this academic year to keep us somewhat close to our current level of collection development.

Staff positions that became vacant in the past two years have not yet been filled. A FTE loss in faculty, staff, and students has resulted in reduced hours of operation by 19% since Spring semester 2003. A student employee, for example, provides limited service in our extensive Maps Department where a full-time staff member worked until earlier this year. Students also fill in for a lost position in the mailroom. Fewer student employees, down by 20% from two years ago, have led to operational delays in the processing, checking in, and reshelving of library materials. Possibly most significant, public service desks have fewer faculty librarians on duty given recent retirements. But the glass is definitely half full with the recognition by the administration that all vacant positions are needed if we are to achieve our goals, and there are plans for new hires, reorganization, and a more efficient use of both staff and students in the months to come.

**Half Full and Rising:** Every library begins with and builds on its collections that, in an academic setting, provide essential support for the institution's academic programs. WMU's ranking in the current Carnegie classifications is that of a doctoral extensive research university. Disparity exists, however, between the University Libraries' holdings and those

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