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/.

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 electronically. 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
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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, 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 involves the use of resources 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 project. They have taken the next 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.

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Half Full?

By Joseph G. Reish, Dean, University Libraries

Is 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 somehow 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. While many of the current Carnegie classifications is that of a doctoral extensive research university. Disparity exists, however, between the University Libraries' holdings and those
of the members of the prestigious Association of Research Libraries. We are not members of this organization although the majority of research universities do belong. We must plan for extensive collection development if we are to become a member.

We do have a commendable, strong, and, in some disciplines, an excellent undergraduate collection. In addition, for the majority of our master's programs, our collections more than meet the student and faculty demands. On the other hand, the University Libraries does not have sufficient onsite or online collections for the wide range of doctoral programs offered by WMU. Fortunately, a key service department, Resource Sharing (more commonly known as Interlibrary Loan), borrows thousands of monographs and journal articles that facilitate faculty research and the needs of the students enrolled in doctoral programs. Unfortunately, this type of "collection building" is not a lasting solution to providing the doctoral level support so essential to the reputation of an institution.

Our faculty librarians continue to work closely with department faculty to select resources for purchase, to find the best of the electronic databases, and to use extensive special collections, such as Center for Research Libraries, located in Chicago, from which we can obtain unique research materials. We benefit from active membership in the Michigan Library Consortium, buy materials at group rates, and welcome the support of the Library of Michigan, in Lansing, that supplies databases from State tax dollars.

In every library's mission statement, there is an emphasis on service and, in the academic library, that emphasis takes a different slant: we believe we are first and foremost "a teaching library." Our teacher-librarians are a best-kept secret that will, we trust, be uncovered as the University Libraries plays an essential role in the academic and intellectual development of freshmen.

A third aspect of the University Libraries' mission relates to its initiatives in evaluating the degree to which its collections and service meet user needs and expectations. In the spring of 2004, the University Libraries participated in the LibQual+ survey developed by the Association of Research Libraries. At issue were considerations of the Library as Place (qualities of our physical space), the Affect of Service (our ability to meet needs and expectations of patrons), and Information Control (the functionality of our virtual presence, i.e., our Libraries' Web site and ease of use of e-resources). We have received initial feedback from students and faculty about their perceptions of the library and its resources, real and virtual. Preliminary conclusions indicate that graduate students and faculty are pleased with and make use of our Web presence and Internet access. Their perception is that our immediate physical resources are limited. Generally satisfied with the virtual presence of University Libraries on the Internet, undergraduates rate highly our physical premises for they are more likely than faculty and graduate students to seek out quiet areas, group-study rooms, or a space to study and socialize.

Libraries have, for the past century, faced a growing space crisis in their efforts to safeguard their valuable collections. Because of the constant expansion of what we know and "publish," all academic libraries prepare for a growth in shelving space to accommodate print materials twenty years beyond the completion of any construction. Moreover, library operations must insure that the environmental conditions of humidity, heat, and light remain within consistent norms. Some materials, however, can't be physically preserved and we have adopted the latest technology, digitization, to our needs. Many unique items in our own collection will be digitized, but even with this technological advance we must deal with space issues. Digitized materials necessitate secure storage and adaptable technology that will provide accessibility and keepin in both the near and distant future.

And so, the conundrum of the half empty or half full glass remains. Overall, the bottom of the glass is definitely not to be seen; rather, the glass is at least half full and ready for more. While the University Libraries knows well the negative and positive sides of its financial/materials and personnel/operations ledger, it is an organic organization that remains undaunted by the myriad challenges. Dedicated personnel not only work in the world of now, but also simultaneously envision the world of tomorrow. Keeping the glass half full might even be seen as the right goal of the University Libraries as we contemplate our future. After all, the University community has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge that should always be available and never untapped in our University Libraries.
Good evening (or morning, or afternoon).

I am Dwight Bryant Waldo, President of the Western Normal School. Yes, just as you do now, we made jokes about the name back in 1903, when the school was founded. Few people realize that this was the way that educators described a school with norms, or standards that we tried to achieve in teaching. In fact, my spokesperson David Isaacson might refer you to the Oxford English Dictionary or to the brainyencyclopedia.com, where it states that “the term originated in the early nineteenth century from the French école normale, because the first such schools were models.” Indeed, Western has always striven to be both a model school and a model for other institutions as well.

But yes, since you’re still sniggering, there was an “abnormal” school just up the road a short distance. Then the Kalamazoo Mental Hospital, this institution now bears a more distinguished title, the Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital. Some of its original buildings stand tall, as do the original buildings of Western on the Great Republic: Abraham Lincoln. I’m glad the Rare Book department at Waldo still keeps my Lincoln books together. I tried to model myself after honest Abe. He believed in education too. I tried to be as strong a leader as Lincoln. I hired all the professors and, if necessary, fired them during those first years. I had been a history professor myself at Beloit College and could boast about graduate work at Harvard after graduating from Michigan’s Albion College.

Even while serving as president, I tried to set a good teaching example, teaching my share of history classes. I was a good teacher. For one thing, people said I had a hypnotic voice. I was strict, even Victorian, which meant that I was firm, disciplined, standing for moral principles as well as intellectual ones. If a student got out of line, I got him back in line. One evening, back in the early days, a Kalamazoo citizen telephoned me to complain about some rowdy students having a party in a downtown rooming house (we had no dormitories back then). I called the young man, identifying myself as President Waldo. “Yeah, sure, and I’m the King of England, Pops” was the foolhardy reply. I presented myself ten minutes later at the door of the noisemakers. There was no more trouble at that rooming house for the rest of the evening. In the 21st century, I hope both the students and faculty at Western continue to respect one another.

Today, the government has made laws that prohibit smoking in public buildings, but I also didn’t allow smoking, not finding the need of that stimulant myself. We made a few exceptions. The gardener was permitted to smoke his pipe outside. One professor chewed tobacco in class. During the War (I understand you call it World War II) the officers training our students were allowed to smoke. As with later wars, a number of our professors as well as students not only served their country in Europe and elsewhere, but paid the supreme sacrifice. Our school, then and now, must always graduate students who contribute to our society in different ways.

I had a lighter side too. Once—early on—we were having Senior Honors Day. This was a ceremony as auspicious as Graduation. It was held in the gymnasium of the first building built at Western, East Hall. (The gym is still there, but is now filled with archivists and researchers instead of instead of runners and players.) It was sweltering hot. There was no air-conditioning in those days. Everyone was bored, including President Waldo! So I decided to give the audience a respite from the drone of the speeches. I called Ike Miller up to the stage. The audience must have wondered what I was doing calling a junior up to the stage during Senior Honors Day. I said, “Ike has just won the state hog-calling contest. Ike, demonstrate how you won: ‘Sueeey... Sueeeey... Pig Pig Pig.”

Western welcomed students of all colors. Today, you use confusing words such as “diversity” and “multicultural,” but we, even a century ago, believed that everyone had a right to attend a school or college. One of our best all-round athletes, Sam Dunlap, was Negro. Culver Military Academy refused to play football against us if Sam were allowed to play. I told Sam it was his choice—if he wanted to play, that was fine with me. He chose to sit the game out. And we trounced Culver. Dunlap eventually returned here, and ended his career working as a custodian at his alma mater to which he was ever loyal.

Another important part of our “normal school” was bringing famous people to visit our campus. Will Rogers, seeing the famous set of buildings on the hill, called Western’s hill “the Aeropolis.” Even in 2005, if you drive on Walnut Street toward the campus, the imposing East Hall looks down upon us mere mortals as if it were the home of the gods who spoke of higher matters. William Jennings Bryan spoke here...
The Morgan Photographic Collection is one of the cornerstone collections of the Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections with its nearly 27,000 4x6 black and white photographic negatives. The Ward Morgan Photograph Collection reflects the people, industries, built environment, and commercial activities that resulted in Kalamazoo’s being called the “Window City of America” in the 1950s. While the ordinary has been broken by some events, such as the unprecedented decision to construct the first pedestrian mall in the heart of Kalamazoo’s business district in 1959, more often than not, Kalamazoo was celebrated for its typical qualities. In 1958, the United States Information Agency selected Kalamazoo as a typical American City. A pictorial exhibit, “Kalamazoo—And How It Grew,” was shown in Manchester, London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Coventry, and Hull, England; and Cardiff, Wales, and Edinburgh, Scotland. The United States Information Agency also selected Kalamazoo to represent the United States as the major American contribution to the Berlin Free Fair in 1958.

Although Kalamazoo was at times known for its paper and later for pharmaceuticals, the community always depended on a multitude of middle-sized and small businesses. Kalamazoo’s working class labored at paper, sheet metal, and within the service sectors of the community. The Ward Morgan Collection documents the people, processes, and products of the community from the 1940s through the 1980s.

Ward Morgan was himself a product of Kalamazoo. Born June 23, 1907 in Kalamazoo, Morgan spent all of his adult life in the community. His father, Ernest Morgan, worked for several businesses in the city before he became an employee of the local Board of Education, and his mother was a housewife. Ward Morgan’s first job was a proofreader at the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company in 1929. He moved into the photography department and remained with this business until he purchased the photography studios of A. J. Nuthall in the Todd Building. Morgan operated the photography studio for the next fifty years, working primarily for local companies. His 27,000 Kalamazoo images include commercial work, streets, buildings, people, advertising, architecture and span 1939-1987. Morgan died in 1997 and donated his lifetime collection of photographic work and copyright privileges to the Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections.

Despite the importance of the collection, it remained inaccessible to all but the most determined researchers. Researchers had to travel to the Archives to use it under careful supervision because of the vulnerable nature of photographic negatives. The Collection was researched and appeared in the Kalamazoo Historic Preservation Commission’s publication, Kalamazoo: Lost & Found (2001). Other researchers throughout the United States contacted the Archives relative to historical product and industry information about Kalamazoo Stoves, Shakespeare Rod and Reels, and the numerous paper industries that were in Kalamazoo during the 1950s and 1960s.

In 2002, a decision was made to use the Ward Morgan Collection as a pilot project to begin digitizing some of the collections at the Archives. The Ward Morgan Collection was chosen because of its importance and also because copyright had been transferred with the collection. Lou Ann Morgan, who later became coordinator of the WMU Regional Digitization Center, began the process of determining the research value of the collection. A decision was made to retain the chronological order imposed by the creator. Also, preliminary steps were taken to insure the long-term preservation of the collection, which included transferring the negatives from their original acidic sleeves to archival sleeves and transferring the collection into appropriate acid-neutral boxes.

During the preliminary appraisal of the Collection, Western Michigan University became involved as a Regional Digitization Center in The Making of Modern Michigan. The Making of Modern Michigan is a statewide collaborative project aimed at libraries throughout the state to contribute to a digital collection about the state’s history. The digitization of the Ward Morgan Collection was a perfect fit. (The last two issues of Gatherings include detailed articles on the Center.)

Because of the size of the Ward Morgan Collection, it was decided to create categories to assist researchers using the digital collection. The categories include Advertising, Business Products, Business Scenes, Education, Events, Industrial Products, Industrial Scenes, Insurance, People - Daily Life, People Working, Religious, Residential Scenes, Societies, and Street Scenes were selected to address the types of resources requested by patrons using photographic collections at the Archives and Regional History Collections. Digital collections are often organized around themes without changing the original order of the physical collection, and thereby provide unique opportunities to assist users.

Within these categories, the wealth of the Ward Morgan Collection reflects the economic mix of small to large manufacturing processes as well as numerous service industries providing employment to the majority of Kalamazoos citizens. The collection has proven to be a good source of scenes from paper manufacturing and related industries, such as printing, publishing, binding, and box manufacture. Other photos include commercial laundries, repair shops, and retail establishments. The collection also depicts the leisure interests and activities of the working class, including employee groups and organizations. Images depict a cooking school sponsored by a local appliance sales company, community dances, and housing within the community. Perhaps one of the most interesting categories is that of “Insurance.” Morgan worked for a variety of attorneys over his career. Much of this section includes photos of roads and damaged automobiles.

The Ward Morgan Collection as part of The Making of Modern Michigan will benefit scholars, students learning about Michigan history, and free-choice learners of all ages. To date, 500 images have been prepared. To preview the Collection, see the web site at http://mmm.lib.msu.edu/search. Although The Making of Modern Michigan project has been completed, the regional center is actively seeking additional funding from other sources to continue the preservation and digitization project associated with the Ward Morgan Collection. The breadth and depth of this collection, as well as a myriad of other digitization projects in southwestern Michigan, are a strong justification for the Regional Digitization Center at WMU.

And, for Ward Morgan, the digitized collection will provide a permanent archive of a unique individual’s view of a “typical” midwestern community.

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under the auspices of Chautauqua. (This old word, easily defined by David Isaacson using those amazing dictionaries that he loves, meant "a meeting ... providing public lectures combined with entertainment such as concerts and plays.") But, back to my point. It was so hot the day Bryant spoke, he cooled his brow with a block of ice, and all of the students wished that they had some as well. Many years later, the Western campus is filled with air-conditioned buildings and wonderful aids to listening and learning.

One famous writer who did not visit our campus was George Bernard Shaw, who said about education, "He who can, does. He who can't, teaches." And then some wag added a codicil, targeted right at schools of education like Western: "Those who can, do, those who can't, teach, and those who can't teach, teach teachers." Both Shaw and the anonymous wag were very insulting to a school like ours, which to this day prides itself on the teachers it educates. Yes, yes, yes. There is something profoundly mind-numbing about "lesson plans," "learning objectives," and advice about how to arrange the chalk on the blackboard. But that's not what we did at Western Normal School, later Western State Teacher's College, then Western State College, and, in 1957, Western Michigan University.

We not only taught teachers how to teach. We gave them a higher and a liberal education. You may not have heard that classic definition of what a higher education is, or if you have, from where it came. Well, the story is that President James Garfield described education as what happens when Mark Hopkins sits on one end of a log with a student sitting on the other. Mark Hopkins was, in those days, a renowned scholar and teacher of Greek and Latin, and President of Williams College, in Massachusetts.

I emulated him. His were large shoes to fill. Hopkins was an old-fashioned scholar and gentleman. Think of what that log image suggests. Hopkins doesn't require a classroom, books, or a group of students in order to impart a good liberal education. He sits on a log with one student. This suggests the Oxford-Cambridge tutorial. But it's also very American and a lot like Lincoln's log cabin, or Thoreau's cabin out in the woods. Hopkins is talking with, rather than at the student. The student is listening, but not slavishly.

This is the very finest kind of conversation - and education - imaginable. One centennial afterthought - what a strange word "afterthought" - is how difficult it is to have such a conversation in a modern university, but the idea of one teacher conversing with one student is still part of Western Michigan University in the 21st century. As president Judith Bailey said, at her inauguration in 2003, Western Michigan University will continue to be loyal to its early tradition of being a student-centered school.

I couldn't agree more.