

FAST **FACTS**

Recent Statistics from The Library Research Service

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HIGHLIGHTS

- **Public libraries popular sites for delivery of distance education courses.**
- **Library resources most often extended to distance learners from four-year institutions.**
- **Lack of library resources perceived as a serious obstacle to starting or expanding programs.**

The Role of Academic and Public Libraries in Distance Education

In October 1997, the National Center for Education Statistics released a statistical analysis report titled **Distance Education in Higher Education Institutions** (NCES 98-062).

A few of the questions in this survey concerned the role of academic and public libraries in distance education. Three of these questions yielded especially interesting results.

Libraries Among Most Popular Sites

The first such question concerned the numbers of courses directed to different types of remote sites.

- Libraries (presumably public libraries) were second only to students' homes, academic campuses, work sites, and schools as distance education sites.
- In the West, libraries outranked schools as distance education sites by almost 50 percent.
- Libraries in the West constitute over one-third of the library distance education sites in the nation.

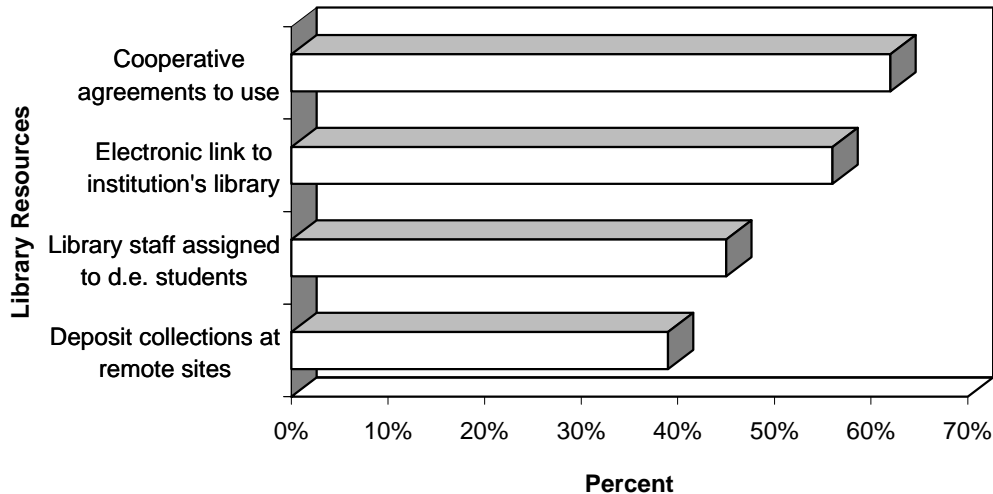
Table 1 ■ Number of Courses Directed By Higher Education Institutions to Remote Sites By Type, 1995

Type of Remote Site	Geographic Area	
	U.S.	West
Students' homes	10,380	4,210
Branch institutions	9,580	4,100
Other college campuses	5,700	2,090
Work sites	5,240	2,150
Elementary/secondary schools	2,220	550
Libraries	2,030	760
Other sites	1,860	530
Correctional institutions	1,630	910
Community-based organizations	540	170

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Library Resources Available to Distance Education Students, 1995



Library Resources Available To Distance Education Students

A second interesting, library-related question concerned the types of library resources available to distance education students. The responses to this question indicate that:

- The most popular means of addressing the library needs of distance education students is to make cooperative agreements to use other libraries. Almost two-thirds of institutions providing distance education use this strategy.
- Just over half of institutions offering distance education courses link students to their libraries electronically.
- Public, four-year institutions are most likely to make library resources available to distance education students. Three out of four such institutions provide both electronic links to their own libraries and cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries. Almost half provide deposit collections at remote sites.
- Private, four-year institutions are less likely to provide for the library needs of distance learners. A third lack electronic links to their libraries and almost half have neither library staff assigned to distance education students nor cooperative agreements for their students to use other libraries.

Table 2 ■ Institutions Providing Access to Library Resources to Students in Some or All Distance Education Courses by Sector and Level, 1995

Library Resource	Percent of Sector		
	Public 2 year	Public 4 year	Private 4 year
Access to electronic link to institution's library	40%	78%	62%
Institution's library staff assigned to assist d.e. students	41%	45%	53%
Cooperative agreements for students to use other libraries	58%	75%	54%
Deposit collections at remote sites	38%	47%	25%

- Community colleges (i.e., public, two-year institutions) are least likely to provide any type of library resources to distance learners. More than two out of five such institutions provide no electronic links to their libraries, over half do not assign library staff to meet the needs of distance education students, and three out of five have no cooperative agreements that entitle such students to use other libraries.

Lack of Access to Library Resources as an Obstacle to Starting or Expanding Distance Education Programs

A third interesting, library-related question in this study concerned perceived obstacles to starting or expanding distance education programs.



Table 3 ■ Perceived Obstacles to Starting or Expanding Distance Education Programs, 1995

Perceived Obstacle	Percent
Program development costs	84%
Concerns about course quality	68%
Concerns about faculty workload	67%
Lack of faculty interest	65%
Lack of faculty rewards or incentives	60%
<i>Lack of access to library or other resources for instructional support</i>	55%
Legal concerns (e.g., intellectual property rights, copyright)	43%
Lack of fit with institution's mission	42%
Lack of support from institutional administrators	40%
Inability to obtain state authorization	21%

be an obstacle to starting or expanding distance education programs.

- Two out of five institutions also cite as a perceived obstacle library-related legal concerns, such as copyright.

- Undeniably, one of the primary forces driving the expansion of distance education is its revenue-generating potential. But, decision-makers approaching such efforts for the first time are very concerned about the costs of establishing distance education programs. Four out of five institutions identified this as the number one obstacle to their starting or expanding such a program.
- After development costs, the next four highest ranking perceived obstacles concern the impact of such programs on faculty. About two-thirds of institutions identified faculty-related concerns, such as increased workload and lack of rewards or incentives for faculty participation.
- Over half of institutions indicate that lack of access to library and related instructional resources is perceived to

Summary

Public and academic libraries are key players in distance education. Many public libraries, especially in the West, serve as remote sites for courses. Academic libraries are critical to the development of distance education. While library services are provided to distance learners by a variety of means, they are critical to the development and expansion of such programs.