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Supporting Rapidly Growing Online Programs in Times of Change

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Abstract

In May 2012, Maryville University launched two online graduate Nursing programs. Twenty-eight months later, 2,321 students from across the United States were enrolled as online-only students in these programs. Two additional Nursing graduate programs are going online as well as an MBA program. Concurrently, Library space is being reconfigured to accommodate student support services from other areas and to provide more learning spaces for students. With less space for physical collections and more students to support, Maryville University Library is trying to find ways to provide better research support for all its students. How Maryville is handling these challenges and their impact on all aspects of library service (Interlibrary Loan, Collection Development for Journals, Books and Databases, and Reference) will be discussed in this paper.

Background

Maryville University is a small private university located in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Maryville's mission statement describes its mission as offering "an innovative liberal arts education leading to excellent academic and professional programs." In April, 2012, Maryville offered undergraduate degrees in programs similar to many four year small private institutions: Liberal Arts, Business, and Education. Maryville also had a robust School of Health Professions, offering degrees in Nursing, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Rehabilitation Counseling Services, and Music Therapy. Several graduate programs were offered, including an EdD and a clinical doctorate in Physical Therapy along with Masters degrees in various programs, including Nursing. All Maryville programs were on-ground. Maryville's official student population consisted of a headcount of 3,846 students with an FTE of 2,568.

On May 7, 2012, Maryville began three nationwide online graduate Nursing programs: a Master of Science in Nursing for Adult/Geriatric Nurse Practitioner, a Master of Science for Family Nurse Practitioner, and a DNP degree (Doctor of Nursing Practice) program. In fall 2011 (the last student census prior to the beginning of the online programs) Maryville had no online students. The fall 2014 student census counted 2,321 online-only students.

At the same time as the growth in online students occurred, the physical space in the Library's two-story building was being reconfigured to increase first-floor student collaboration areas for on-ground students and to make way for offices from other areas of campus. By August 2014 all library collection materials needed to be consolidated on the Library's 2nd floor.

We thought we were prepared for the online programs. A librarian had been embedded in each course. An updated tutorial on using library resources for nursing was prepared. LibGuides were created for specific classes. We began a Nursing e-book PDA with EBSCO. What we (and the Nursing Program) didn't plan for was how many students there would be and how fast these programs would grow.

This paper will describe how the introduction and growth of the online student population coupled with the need to reduce the physical collection have impacted the library's collections and services.

Interlibrary Loan

ILL BORROWING	2011-2012	2013-2014	% Change
Articles requested	5,733	8,949	56.1%
Articles received	4,986	7,634	53.1%
Articles Average			
Turn-Around Time	n-a	4.14	

Table 1. ILL articles two-year borrowing comparison, 2011–2012 to 2013–2014.

Interlibrary Loan was the area in which change was most immediately noticeable.

This increase resulted in an increase in copyright fee payments from \$1,873 in 2011–2012 to \$11,984 in 2013–2014, an increase of 539%. The much larger percentage increase in dollars versus number of articles occurred because most of the articles received in 2011–2012 fell within our fair use allotment. Almost all of the articles making up the increase between 2011–2012 and 2013–2014 fell outside of our fair use allotment and fell within a very specific (and expensive in terms of copyright fees) subject set of journals.

The Copyright Clearance Center's Get-It-Now service was implemented during this time as a way of decreasing the time between a patron request and the patron receipt of an article. These numbers are included in the above calculations. We have not implemented unmediated Get It Now service as we find a significant number of article requests are from journals for which the Library has the article available in a database or a subscription.

The Library began a document delivery service to supply, via email, a scanned copy of an Interlibrary Loan requested article where the Library had the article available, but only within its physical holdings. In 2011–2012, 1,337 articles were delivered in this manner. In 2013–2014, 3,484 articles were provided via document delivery, a 161% increase.

Journals

The Library conducted a review of its physical journal collection from November 2013 through January 2014. A master spreadsheet was prepared with the following information:

- Title.
- Physical Holdings.
- Interlibrary Loan & Internal Document Delivery Usage of Our Physical Holdings (the scanning of articles from our physical collection & emailing to patrons).
- Vendor/Publisher for Electronic Availability.

- Online Backfile Coverage Available from Vendor/Publisher.
- Online Backfile Price.
- Online Coverage Currently Available via our Database Subscriptions & Title-by-Title Subscriptions.
- Subscription Price for a Current Online Subscription.
- Library's Current Physical Subscription Price.

For titles identified in this process as candidates for replacement with online, we further looked at questions of online format stability. This included factors such as whether paid content was preferable to free content when both were options and what the vendor or publisher's policy was regarding continued access to online content if a subscription was cancelled. Once decisions were reached as to which titles should have physical holdings replaced with online, we examined the economics of title-by-title subscription vs packages.

As a result of the review, back holdings for 194 titles were completely withdrawn and back holdings for 36 serial titles were partially withdrawn. In some instances, back files overlapped with current online availability in our databases and subscriptions; in other instances changes in programs and teaching methods meant that holdings were no longer relevant to our students' learning. Deep online back file purchases were made for 10 titles in Nursing. In our spring EBSCO annual renewal review, 79 print subscriptions were cancelled. Twenty were total cancellations while 59 were converted to online only. Of the 34 nursing journals to which we subscribed, only two remain in print as this point; the rest are online only.

The Library initiated subscriptions to three online journal packages for Nursing: the OVID I and II nursing collections from Lippincott, Williams, & Wilkins and the Clinics package from Elsevier. OVID I and II provided us with 28 new nursing titles and allowed us to replace print with online for 10 titles. The Clinics package provided current and back holdings for nine health titles, four of

which were new and five of which replaced print titles. A site license for JAMA was also initiated.

Books

MOBIUS (the Missouri state-wide library consortium with membership including several major medical libraries and a robust delivery system), backed up by traditional Interlibrary Loan, has served our on-ground students well as a supplement to our physical book collection. This model does not work for an online program with students in 48 states. Students cannot come to the library to pick up books from ILL nor the MOBIUS delivery system, both of which are predicated on delivery to libraries, not individuals. Our online courses run on eight-week rather than the on-ground 16-week cycle, so the shipping of books from our library to students would not have provided a timely solution, even if we had the staff resources to handle this.

By May 2012, the Library had begun moving towards e-book as the preferential format for selected subject areas, including most of the Health Professions. Selection of e-books was done by librarians and faculty members in the disciplines. The PDA model had been investigated, but not adopted. The online Nursing programs propelled us into our first PDA, a targeted nursing PDA with EBSCO begun in May 2012.

We began the PDA by looking at the then-current EBSCO Nursing subject set, making additions and deletions to it based on a review of the title list by our reference librarians. We began with an initial set of 109 titles and a beginning deposit of \$3,000 on a Thursday in May 2012. We had an initial scare when we came in the following Monday to discover that \$780 had been purchased from the PDA during its first four days. The pace of spending did slow somewhat, since a book “purchased” by one user was frequently used by others.

Each spring, the PDA is redone. All titles not purchased are removed and a new PDA based on the latest EBSCO Nursing subject set is created. Titles we already own (through purchases outside the PDA) are identified and removed. Expensive titles (\$350 or higher) are removed. The reference

librarians review the list of removed expensive titles and any they identify as relevant for our curriculum are added back. Starting in 2013, any requests for books during the year that are received from Nursing faculty are added to the PDA rather than being outright purchased, so we only pay for them if they are actually used. PDA statistics are summarized below:

PDA Statistics -- 2 and 1/2 years	
Total PDA titles	273 titles
Purchased	155 titles
Usages	3,880 uses
Total Cost	\$18,924
Cost per Title	\$122.09
Cost per Usage	\$4.88

Table 2. PDA Statistics for 2 ½ years.

In conjunction with the shift to e-books-only purchasing for the Health Professions, a major review of the print collection was conducted by nursing and library faculty. The Library weeding project was designated as a “community service” project for the University’s Maryville Reaches Out day of community service when classes are cancelled on a day in September so that students, faculty, and staff can participate in service projects across the St. Louis area. Once Nursing and other Health and Sciences faculty had begun the project on this day, their interest in continuing to work on the project during the school year was easier to maintain. By year’s end, 3,524 volumes had been withdrawn from the Health Sciences collection.

Databases

Full-text article databases are critically important in the support of online programs. The Maryville University Library upgraded several databases to the “Complete” versions to gain additional full-text titles. A highly specialized medical database, Up To Date, was added. In addition to full-text article databases, nontextual databases are important for online programs, such as EBSCO’s SMARTImage collection of medical images. Databases of streaming video collections (such as the Alexander Street Press Nursing Education in Video and Academic Video Online) were added.

The rapid growth in the number of students impacted our FTE count for several databases which base pricing on FTE. This impact spilled over to other nonmedical subject areas in which database use the University's FTE to calculate pricing. Overall database spending has increased by 58% since the implementation of our online programs.

Reference Service

Maryville University Reference staffing prior to the online programs consisted of two full-time Reference librarians, supplemented by Circulation Desk staff paraprofessionals. Neither Reference librarian had medical librarian background or training, though both had gained sufficient experience to handle the on-ground undergraduate nursing students and the small number of on-ground graduate health professions graduate programs. The number of online nursing students and the increasingly complex nature of their research led to the hiring of one FTE medical librarian (filled initially by one full-time librarian and now by two part-time librarians).

Video tutorials on library resources and their usage are embedded in each online course as is a LibGuide specific to the class. Close communication with both the faculty teaching the online courses and the online course developers (not always the same personnel) is essential. Knowing logistical details such as the number of

students enrolled in a class and the schedule of due dates as well as the content of class assignments allows for better scheduling of library personnel to meet the ebbs and flows of student needs.

Ideally assignments should be vetted with reference librarians as the assignments are being developed to ensure that there are electronic resources available for students to find. During the first eight-week online course cycle, the Nursing Theory class was offered. Each student in this class completes a research project, including primary resources, on a present or past nursing theorist, picking from a list prepared by the instructor. This had been a successful assignment in the on-ground version of the course. However, with the large number of students in the online course, the instructor, not wanting duplication among the student choices, increased the number of names on the list. Unfortunately, primary resources in electronic format didn't exist for many of the newly added names, leading to student (and librarian) frustration. This list is now reviewed by a reference librarian when changes are made to it.

In 2012–2013, the Library implemented an online form for the collection of reference statistics. A comparison of 2012–2013 with 2013–2014 shows the shift in reference transactions as the online student population has grown.

REFERENCE STATISTICS		2012-2013	2013-2014	Change
	Total Questions	1,409	1,280	-9.16%
Communication Method	Email	159	407	155.97%
	In Person	864	432	-50.00%
	Phone	384	441	14.84%
Category	Reference	396	509	28.54%
	Research	528	691	30.87%
	Directional	54	27	-50.00%
	Technology	552	253	-54.17%
	Other	44	19	-56.82%
Length of Question	0-3	387	210	-45.74%
	4-10	669	458	-31.54%
	10-20	221	272	23.08%
	20+	132	340	157.58%
	Time spent (minutes)	12,539	17,801	41.97%

Table 3. Reference statistics two-year comparison.

E-mail and phone transactions increased as in-person transactions decreased. While the overall number of transactions has decreased, the number of transactions categorized as reference (under 20 minutes) and research (over 20 minutes) have increased. (The decrease in overall questions is due to the decrease in the number of technology questions directed to the Library as the campus's School of Adult and Online Education has geared up to handle technology issues.)

In looking at the time spent in transactions, the greatest growth is found in the 20 or more minutes category. The 10–20 minute category also increased as did overall time spent in transactions with patrons.

Future Plans

The Library will continue to shift its collections from print to online, transforming from a library with a primarily physical collection supplemented with online resources to a library with a primarily online collection supplemented with some physical resources. A chat reference service will be introduced in early 2015. We are looking at ways to reduce our turnaround time for Interlibrary Loan article delivery. While turnaround time for the internal document delivery service is a respectable 1.22 days, turnaround time for ILL article delivery is 4.14, days which is higher than we would like for classes on an eight-week cycle. The University will soon be adding two additional online Masters programs in Nursing and an online MBA program, so we know our growth and our learning experiences in the world of online support will continue.