
Accreditation Expectations for Library Support of Off-Campus Programs

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ABSTRACT

THE KEY PURPOSES OF THIS article are to reflect accurately the current stance of regional accrediting bodies with regard to the role which academic libraries play in evaluation and accrediting processes; to discuss access and equity considerations as they relate to the teaching and learning process; to identify and discuss problems and opportunities in providing library services to off-campus or distance learning programs; and to suggest recommendations for good practice. A recurrent theme in the article is the need for access to library and information resources and the need for library instruction programs which assist students and faculty in becoming more effective information managers.

INTRODUCTION

Though technological advances and a growing emphasis on information literacy have created an ideal environment in which colleges and universities can make improvements in library support to off-campus programs, progress is too slow in the implementation of changes which might result in an improved teaching and learning process for faculty and students. In a response to *A Nation At Risk*, one writer (Dougherty, 1983) alleged that not many "academic libraries place much emphasis on serving groups not connected with their parent institution" (p. 15). And while some off-campus programs indeed enjoy access to library and information resources comparable to those available to students on the main campus, greater progress probably will not be evident until more of an institutional

commitment is made to equity in support services—including information resources—to off-campus sites and programs. Unfortunately, many of these off-campus programs have developed not because of some supposed institutional objectives to broaden access to quality programs to unserved students who find it difficult to attend classes on the main campus, but because there is often a purely revenue or student credit hour producing motive.

Conceivably, it would be in the best interest of all of higher education and the pursuit of excellence if colleges and universities, on their own initiative, would assure equity and quality of “all activities conducted in [their] name or under [their] sponsorship” (Middle States Association [MSA]..., 1990, p. 17). However, since that is not likely to happen across the board, some external motivation may be necessary and desirable. In this instance, it is the accrediting agency which must implement appropriate evaluative criteria and evaluation protocols for further improvement and accountability. Thus, in addition to addressing the role of academic libraries in determining quality, emphasis in this article is placed on the importance of library and information resources in the accreditation process. And though the discussion of equity and access considerations for off-campus programs no doubt applies to professional or specialized accreditation, the emphasis here is devoted almost exclusively to the expectations and concerns of regional accrediting bodies.

Consequently, this article rests primarily upon appropriate references to the standards and policies of regional accrediting bodies (MSA, 1990, pp. 1-43; New England Association of Schools and Colleges [NEASC], 1983; North Central Association of Colleges and Schools [NCACS], 1990; Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges [NASC], 1990, p. 198; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools [SACS], 1988; Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Junior and Community Colleges [WASC/ACJCC], 1987; Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities [WASC/ACSCU], 1988) and draws heavily from the author's many years of experience visiting and reviewing off-campus programs in the Middle States region and elsewhere. In addition, it has been possible to use some information gleaned from a survey of off-campus programs and services which was conducted by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 1988. For the first time ever, Middle States was able to identify the majority of the off-campus activities conducted by member institutions and to ascertain which of these activities were supported by library and other student support services.

ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN DETERMINING QUALITY

Whenever academic administrators and faculty engage in serious discussions or write formally about what constitutes quality and excellence in higher education institutions, there is inevitably some reference made to the centrality of libraries in determining quality. Moreover, accrediting standards frequently address the essentiality of library resources to learning: "Library resources and services are essential to learning" (SACS, 1988, p. 30). With a new emphasis on the assessment of institutional effectiveness and learning outcomes, regional accrediting commissions are likely to assign even more importance to libraries and their impact on the development of self-directed learners (Simmons, 1989, pp. 4-6). Thus it will be important for colleges and universities engaged in self-study to demonstrate their effectiveness in graduating students who are information literate. Some accrediting bodies are already promoting bibliographic instruction as one means to improving the quality of the teaching and learning process. As this author has written elsewhere on the topic of assessment and evaluation, "the Commission...has an obligation to assist institutions in finding the most effective and appropriate means to develop and implement meaningful bibliographic instruction programs that have the potential of improving the teaching/learning process" (Simmons, 1989, p. 5). This writer is strongly committed to the notion that the development of information literate students and faculty is a shared responsibility of the librarian and teacher, and that general education programs are not entirely effective without library-based research. Indeed it would be difficult for any institution or accrediting body to develop criteria for self-assessment or evaluation which did not include a strong component on the value of library support for all programs.

And though accreditors have long since moved away from counting books as the sole barometer of library quality, there are still some among us in higher education who still view the library or learning resources center as being limited to a predetermined space containing books and periodicals. Fortunately for most of us, however, the library is a concept not bound by physical dimensions—it is the medium through which we gain access to information from all sources and in a variety of formats. In fact, some librarians (Kascus & Aguilar, 1988, pp. 33-35) have argued that there are not only a variety of formats in which to provide library support to off-campus programs, but there are numerous options available for accessing the information. An enlightened former college president provided the perfect context and conclusion when he wrote (Plane, 1982):

[T]echnology already available can be applied in the reasonably near future to free scholarship from the remaining bound of distance and, perhaps more importantly, the bound of time—time currently spent in

travel and in the busy work of locating information. Time will then become available to scholars from the most human of all activities—human thought. (p. 92)

And that is what all students—both on and off campus—must be free to do. Colleges and universities must facilitate the pursuit of information and the management of information. And accrediting bodies must assess whether or not the institution's policies and practices are directed toward the development of self-directed independent learners. That will be the ultimate test of the library's role in determining quality.

REGIONAL STANDARDS VIS À VIS LIBRARY SUPPORT FOR OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS

There is no doubt that all of the regional accrediting bodies have qualitative standards regarding library support for all academic programs, as well as for the utilization of library and information resources by students and faculty. However, from association to association there are varying degrees of specificity with regard to the nature of and accessibility to collections, bibliographic instruction and information literacy, staffing requirements, alternative approaches, and special requirements for off-campus and/or distance learning programs. When the general standards and criteria adopted by regional agencies for the assessment of library resources are categorized for their degree of prescriptiveness, there is a rather significant range. At one end of the range is the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (1990) which has only four rather broad evaluative criteria, one which states that: "The institution has effectively organized adequate human, financial and physical resources into educational and other programs to accomplish its purposes" (p. 15).

At the other end of the range is the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (1988) since it has perhaps the most extensive list of requirements for library support on and off campus (pp. 61-65). Those WASC criteria are also distinguishable from those of other regions in that the accrediting standard is more inclusive in its definition: "Information and learning resources, including the holdings and any equipment needed to access the holdings of libraries, media centers, computer centers and any other repositories, are sufficient to support institutional offerings at appropriate levels" (p. 61).

As can be seen readily in the discussion and analysis which follow, there are major differences—as well as subtler shades of difference—in specific factors such as collection development and the like. For

example, most agencies insist on "sufficient" or "adequate" collections related to the nature and scope of programs offered by an accredited institution, but none has numerical requirements as promulgated by the American Library Association (1986).

Collections

What do regional accrediting bodies have to say about the nature and scope of library collections and are there real differences in these statements? Of course, inherent in any discussion of collections is the issue of access, including the accessibility to library and information resources not maintained on location or not the property of the institution (e.g., access to bibliographic services).

With the exception of North Central, because of its unique evaluative criteria, other regional agencies include very similar language about collections or "holdings":

The types and variety of books and other materials depend on the nature of the institution; therefore, collection development must relate realistically to the institution's educational mission, goals, curricula, size, complexity and degree level, and the diversity of its teaching, learning, and research requirements. (MSA, 1988, pp. 34-35)

The library collections and data bases must be sufficient to support the educational and public service programs of the institution. Institutions offering graduate work must provide library resources substantially beyond those required for the bachelor's degree. (SACS, 1988, p. 31)

Learning resource holdings are sufficient in quantity and quality to meet the needs of the students and the objectives of the institution. (WASC/ACJCC, 1987, p. 34)

Library holdings and media resources are sufficient in quality, depth, diversity, and currentness to support the institution's academic offerings. (WASC/ACSCU, 1988, p. 61)

Whereas earlier "standards" of some agencies included specific provisions for numbers of books and periodicals in the collection, the foregoing excerpts represent the current emphasis of the regional accrediting bodies on qualitative assessment of library collections. This trend is in keeping with a new emphasis on outcomes assessment rather than sole reliance on input measures, and takes cognizance of the influence technological advances have had on access to and retrieval of library and information resources.

And though the "standards" on collections do not make explicit reference to off-campus programs and library support, phrases such as "diversity of its...requirements," "sufficient to support the educational and public service programs," and "sufficient to support... academic offerings" [presumably anywhere], strongly infer that all programs are covered (MSA, 1990; SACS, 1988; NASC, 1988). As others (Kascus & Aguilar, 1988) have written: "If library services at a distance can be provided in new and innovative ways, the

requirements can be satisfied" (p. 32). Hence accessibility to library and information resources for off-campus students may or may not be a more important criterion in the evaluation process than mere physical location and ownership of the collections. SACS (1988), for instance, states that an "institution must own the learning resources or provide them through formal agreements" (SACS, 1988, p. 32), while WASC/ACSCU insists that, "[w]here off campus programs exist, students are provided with ready access to basic collections held by the institution" (WASC/ACSCU, 1988, p. 63). In the criteria for the Western Association's Senior Commission (1988) is an even more strongly worded requirement for on-site collections: "The institution provides services and holds readily available basic collections at all program sites not serviced by the main library. Interlibrary loan or contractual use arrangements may be used to supplement basic holdings, but are not used as the main source of learning resources" (p. 62). And in various other ways the issue of access to collections and information resources is addressed in the standards of regional accrediting bodies. These include, among others, references to the hours libraries are open and information on networks that are operating; circulation systems; bibliographic retrieval systems; appropriate cataloging of documents; efficient organization of collections; and space considerations.

Bibliographic Instruction and Information Literacy

But no matter how much access there is to the collections and other information resources, users at off-campus or on-campus locations will be at a disadvantage if provisions are not made for effective programs of bibliographic instruction and information management. As the American Library Association (1986) has called for "bibliographic instruction programs designed to teach users how to take full advantage of the resources available to them" (p. 196), so have the regional accrediting bodies developed criteria which underscore the importance of bibliographic instruction programs and the results of which might lead to more widespread information literacy. These examples make the point:

Basic library services must include an orientation program designed to teach new users how to obtain individual assistance, access to bibliographic information, and access to materials....The library should offer point-of-use instruction, personal assistance in conducting library research and traditional reference services. (SACS, 1988, p. 63)

An active and continuous program of bibliographic instruction is essential....(MSA, 1990, p. 35)

Comprehensive training programs to promote library use are available to both students and faculty. Library orientation is responsive to the needs of the nontraditional as well as the traditional student. (WASC/ACSCU, 1988, p. 63)

Obviously, it is important that off-campus students and faculty be provided with an effective program of bibliographic instruction, particularly when it is often they who are required to use alternative means of accessing library and information sources. For example, the use of some options even requires students to use not only a variety of formats for retrieval of information, but also a number of different locations not always under the control of the central campus. To say that such a situation can be confusing and counterproductive is an understatement. But more than that, mere statements in accrediting agency handbooks mean little unless documentation is required as a part of the self-study or unless evaluation teams are given specific guidance about the import of library instruction and its ultimate relationship to the teaching and learning process. This issue takes on even more significance when the off-campus and distance learning programs have no counterparts on the main campus. All too often the students at off-campus locations and those on campus are figuratively worlds apart in terms of their knowledge of the college and university environment. Thus when off-campus students are faced with additional impediments in accessing library resources, they will sometimes give up in frustration; the result will be a lost opportunity to acquire additional knowledge, the inability to complete a research assignment, or the withdrawal from the course. Accordingly, it is argued that all students, and particularly those studying at a distance, need bibliographic tools to become more efficient in study and ultimately more effective learners.

Staffing

Naturally, it would be virtually impossible to plan, develop, and implement appropriate library resources for off-campus programs, students, and faculty without properly trained and credentialed library staff. Since the organization and management of library and information resources at any location require the expertise of specialized information specialists, it is important for accrediting bodies to have applicable criteria for the assessment of what campus library resources should be. That knowledgeable and experienced personnel are essential for collection development and maintenance, implementation of bibliographic instruction programs and other services is indisputable. The report of a dissertation study (Kania, 1988, pp. 22-23), in which academic library standards and performance measures were examined in terms of their benefit for self-study purposes, concluded such measures should include—among other factors—attention to graduate preparations, professional development, faculty status, and compensation of the library and information staffs.

Though not all of the regional accrediting bodies have criteria which outline all of the key expectations for library staff, most address expectations for staff preparation as to service to clients. Because there is the understanding that not all information and resource needs can be provided by the more traditionally prepared librarians, some criteria are stated in more inclusive terms. For example, the Western Association's Senior Commission requires that: "[P]rofessional staffs with appropriate expertise [be] available to assist users of the library, computer center and other learning resources" (WASC/ACSCU, 1988, p. 61). On the other hand, Southern's Commission on Colleges requires in more traditional terms that, "[t]he library must be adequately staffed by professional librarians who hold professional degrees at the graduate level in library science or learning resources" (SACS, 1988, p. 31). At least one survey of off-campus programs (MSA/CHE, 1988) seems to support the more inclusive WASC provision. Specifically, approximately 310 off-campus sites reported that 110 were the responsibility of a professional librarian while 50 were assigned to audiovisual specialists, and others were administered by academic deans, technical personnel, graduate assistants, or through cooperative arrangements. The more the off-campus programs have the attributes of fully operational branch campuses, the more likely they are to have appropriate staffing patterns, including professional and technical library personnel. But no staffing pattern will matter if library staff and faculty do not cooperate in making resources more accessible, or if effective bibliographic instruction programs are not implemented, or if the teaching and learning process is not designed to make students better information managers. All of these "ifs" should become realities where on- or off-campus programs are concerned. Extremely important is the notion that "[e]xcellence in the professional staff is measurable in part by the extent to which they are active participants in the academic enterprise..." (MSA, 1990, p. 36). Put another way, a "librarian must be a well-qualified professional whose...services [contribute] to the educational effectiveness of the institution" (SACS, 1988, pp. 31-32). After all, an accrediting body should seek documentation of institutional effectiveness in all of its endeavors as well as documentation of student outcomes.

Alternative Delivery Systems

The facilitation of institutional effectiveness and learning achievement as regards the use of library resources and information management may be accomplished in a variety of ways, including the use of traditional and newer access strategies. When programs are offered at a distance, those students who do not have easy access

to the main campus library resources and services may have comparable access through online bibliographic searches, other libraries and cooperative networks, module library systems, and "on request" delivery systems, among others.

And while it is true that some accreditors insist on discrete on-site library collections for all off-campus programs, most encourage and will allow alternatives as long as they are comparable to those available to on-campus students. The general tenor of regional requirements with respect to this factor can be characterized by the following criterion: "An institution's library/learning resources center can augment existing collections and draw upon the special strengths of other institutions through collaboration, networks, and cooperative agreements" (MSA, 1988, p. 36).

Because assessment of the effectiveness of library resources must take into account the institution's own efforts in providing for its off-campus programs, the Western Senior Commission recognized the possibility of abuse of another institution's resources or the reliance of a program on resources not entirely appropriate to the nature of the program. Accordingly, colleges and universities "having formalized agreements to supplement their own collections with those of other institutions" must mutually agree to "contribute appropriately to the maintenance of those resources" (WASC/ACSCU, 1988, p. 62). Accrediting agencies argue that the principle of equity must apply to any such agreements.

Equity Considerations in Library Support On and Off Campus

From the perspective of regional accrediting bodies, there can be no real differences in the quality of library support on or off campus. If the same level of quality is to be maintained, comparable—not necessarily the same—library resources and services are imperative. Ostensibly, the programs off campus have the same content, result in the same level of credit, are taught by equally qualified faculty as on the main campus, and have the advantage of equitable resources and services. And even when these expectations for equity result in not implementing the off-campus program, accrediting body officials might well argue that it is a function of accreditation to assure that substandard programs are not allowed to continue without major improvement. At least one of the regional agencies expresses its expectation for equity in the following manner: "Educational programs conducted off campus, or special programs offered on campus, must meet standards comparable to those of all other institutional offerings" (MSA, 1990, p. 17).

However, appropriate considerations of equity in the offering of off-campus programs and in the provision of requisite support

services—library or otherwise—do not preclude the provision of different though specially tailored services to meet the needs of discrete groups of students. For example, a research study (Johnson, 1983) carried out by the University of Wyoming at Casper examined very carefully the question as to whether “there existed differences between traditional, on-campus students and nontraditional, off campus students...” (pp. 24-25). In addition to finding that differences do indeed exist in terms of student preferences, motivations, and demographic characteristics, the researchers also discovered what we in accreditation have been aware of for years—i.e., what begins as a “nontraditional” off-campus site often evolves over time into a more traditional location, not unlike the main campus (Johnson, 1983, p. 25). This provides an even stronger rationale as to why accrediting standards and practices must continue to be predicated upon equity and comparability.

Off-Campus Faculty and Administrator Involvement

Crucial to the development, maintenance, and provision of library services to off-campus programs is the active involvement of teaching faculty and on-site administrators in collection building, policy development, selection and acquisition of equipment and access services, as well as the development and implementation of bibliographic instruction and information literacy programs. Such involvement presupposes the availability and cooperation of properly trained professionals who have considerable expertise in library research methods, information management, the use of bibliographic tools, etc. However general regional accrediting bodies are concerning the role of faculty, most standards include specific statements about the participation of faculty in building and maintaining collections. And even though off-campus programs are not isolated for treatment in the criteria, it is assumed that the statements apply equally to off-campus programs. What is missing in most instances, however, is any reference to how faculty and librarians cooperate in facilitating student access to collections and services. Nevertheless, the Middle States Association’s Commission on Higher Education and the Southern Association Commission on Colleges have similar statements on the subject respectively: “Faculty and library/learning resources staff need to work closely together to plan for collection development and utilization” (MSA/CHE, 1990, p. 35) and “librarians must work cooperatively with the teaching faculty in assisting [students] to use resource materials effectively” (SACS, 1988, p. 31).

It is most advantageous for the library or information specialist, the faculty members, and academic administrators to form a partnership for the most effective utilization of library and

information resources by both students and faculty in off-campus programs. It would be difficult indeed for any accrediting body to assess the extent to which resources are used if there does not exist a coordinated approach to self-assessment and evaluation. Therefore, the library and information specialists should work closely with those faculty teaching off campus to assure that there are resources consistent with the objectives and levels of the programs offered; that bibliographic instruction and information literacy programs relate to the characteristics and specific information needs of the off-campus students being served; and that significant emphasis in the teaching and learning process is placed on the development of information literate students who are also independent and self-directed learners.

PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN PROVIDING LIBRARY SERVICES TO OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS

From the perspective of regional accrediting bodies, the problems and opportunities associated with providing library support to off-campus programs and students are not always identical to those faced by the accredited member institution. Even if the ultimate goals of the accrediting body and the institution are reasonably similar, the means for reaching those goals as well as the degree of emphasis placed on quality assurance may indeed be dissimilar. That such differences are likely to exist is explainable in part by the distinct responsibilities and form of accountability inherent in the mission of the institution and the roles of the agency, even though they enjoy a symbiotic relationship in accreditation.

Ostensibly, colleges and universities develop off-campus programs in order to provide access for previously unserved populations and groups as an extension of the institutions' missions. More often than not, however, institutions develop such programs primarily to enhance or stabilize enrollments and to increase revenue. And when little or no real planning precedes the introduction of off-campus programs, seldom is enough attention paid or sufficient income devoted to the necessary support services for faculty or students. Aside from renting or purchasing classroom and office space and hiring faculty (often adjunct), only minimal attention is given to providing essential library and information services. Therefore, while the institution may feel secure in offering the off-campus activities with minimum library support, accrediting bodies are now insisting upon improved access to more diverse information resources, more comparable to those provided on campus to students and faculty. Some (Kascus & Aguilar, 1988) conclude correctly that effective accrediting requirements for the review of off-campus programs "are

long overdue and that the library needs of off-campus students and faculty will only be met when fiscal officers are forced to allocate funds for that purpose" (p. 32).

With that context in mind, what then are some of the other problems from an accrediting perspective? In addition to the often divergent goals of the institution and the agency, there is often the misconception or unfounded conclusion that off-campus students already have necessary library skills or are more resourceful than on-campus students in locating the information they need. That many of these off-campus students have been out of school for a considerable period, or never really became effective information managers even during their previous educational experience, is not seriously addressed by the institution or the faculty. For that reason, the Middle States Association's Commission on Higher Education (Simmons, 1989, p. 5) has placed strong emphasis on the need for bibliographic instruction programs in all of its accredited institutions. Because the off-campus sites are sometimes rather remote and the main campus collections are accessible only through electronic means, there is an even greater responsibility for the institution to provide library instruction which will lead to more effective information management by students and faculty alike. In many ways, all other problems pale in light of this extraordinary need.

Now to the problems encountered in the development and maintenance of graduate programs at off-campus sites. Because of the heavy demands for research, can quality off-campus graduate programs be maintained with sufficient library support? Even when easy access to bibliographic indexes is available, will the off-campus doctoral student, for example, still be at a disadvantage because there is not access to all primary and secondary sources? Will the problem not become more exacerbated when a range of graduate programs is offered?

Aside from the fact that the predominantly older student does not have either the discipline-related research skills needed or the basic information management skills he or she is presumed to have acquired during earlier schooling, the graduate program may end up being less rigorous because accommodations for deficiencies may be made by those responsible for its implementation. We are then faced with a graduate off-campus program which has serious internal threats to quality and integrity. A program developed under such circumstances can easily be judged by the accrediting body to be devoid of quality.

As early as 1959, in its policy statement on graduate work, the Middle States Association's Commission on [Institutions of] Higher Education was quite specific about its expectations for quality:

Extension graduate courses should require as much and as high level of preparation and outside reading as campus courses do....superior library resources must be available for extension students at times and places which favor their use. It is not sufficient to bring a few books from the campus collection, to depend on local public libraries, or to expect extension students to travel to the campus library when it is necessary to bring the course itself to them. (MSA/CHE, 1959, p. 3)

But though the policy statement continued by requiring the institution "to purchase duplicates of many volumes in the central library for the extension center" (MSA, 1959, p. 3), the reality today is otherwise since library cooperative networks are generally encouraged by most of the regional accrediting bodies and the availability of technological access and retrieval often preclude such duplication of information resources. As indicated earlier, the Southern Association Commission on Colleges currently requires that, "[i]nstitutions offering graduate work must provide library resources substantially beyond those required for the bachelor's degree" (SACS, 1988, p. 31). Such a requirement poses a somewhat greater challenge for institutions offering graduate programs at a distance.

Just as there are impediments to providing quality library support to off-campus graduate offerings, so are there equal challenges in assuring bilingual collections and services for off-campus programs at any level, particularly for upper division and graduate courses offered in Spanish and other languages. Even when the off-campus students are familiar with American higher education culture and have reasonable facility in English and their native language, suitable bilingual library resources are usually not readily available or the translated "primary sources" are unacceptably poor. Moreover, the costs of acquisition are relatively high when compared to those incurred in acquiring the text in the original language.

Finally, this leads one to the inescapable problem of the unavailability of adequate resources to purchase requisite books and serials, to enter interlibrary loan arrangements, to arrange access to external bibliographic databases and other information stored remotely, and to provide properly credentialed staff to provide bibliographic instruction. Because some accredited institutions have had difficulty maintaining basic collections on campus or have not made a real commitment of financial resources to library support, these same institutions will find it difficult or neglect to provide equitable resources for off-campus programs. And even though some (Kascus & Aguilar, 1988) consider expenses "of establishing a branch library and the resultant duplication of resources" (p. 33), accrediting bodies must insist on greater institutional accountability in assuring quality in library support. For most accrediting bodies this is not

insistence on discrete collections at specific sites, rather the emphasis is on "access to bibliographic books, collections, and trained staff" (p. 33).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSESSING OFF-CAMPUS LIBRARY RESOURCES

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned—from an accrediting perspective—in examining the issue of providing library and information support to off-campus programs and students is that the constant byword must be "accessibility." And that accessibility will not be fully realized unless a real commitment is made by the institution to provide equitable and comparable resources regardless of the location of programs. Cooperative planning, management, and evaluation will be key elements in any good design for access and utilization by those who need information for whatever reason. As indicated in the foregoing, it will also be critical to provide the necessary library instruction, not as a supplement but as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Obviously, these are factors which must be pondered by those in the institution. But what should be essential elements in the standards and practices of the regional accrediting bodies? And what recommendations might be helpful to those who either must be involved in assessment or peer review?

Since others have been most effective in suggesting options for providing library support to off-campus programs, the specific recommendations and suggestions which follow have relevance primarily for accrediting activities. Some are based on existing standards, practices, and expectations of regional accrediting bodies and the American Library Association, as well as on the extensive experience of the writer in the review of off-campus programs and library resources as ingredients of the evaluation and accreditation processes.

Generally, regional accrediting bodies already have criteria or standards which speak to the need to provide adequate or sufficient learning resources for all programs offered in any location, and the requirements are inclusive and flexible enough to apply to a spectrum of off-campus programs. Moreover, the assessment and evaluation should be consistent with the unique characteristics of the program and institution. In addition, peer reviewers, who themselves are library and information specialists, often consult standards of the American Library Association as a base of reference, even though most accrediting bodies do not give official endorsement or recognition to these standards.

What more then can be recommended in the area of standards? As a result of serious reflection, this writer would recommend:

- that regional accrediting bodies, when periodic reviews are made of standards, acknowledge the broader concept of information resources and information literacy;
- that the standards for library and information resources be more closely tied to their role in and impact on the teaching and learning process;
- that specific statements be included on the different information needs of off-campus students and faculty;
- that more relevant criteria be included on the desirability of cooperative use of resources and alternatives for providing library support to off-campus programs and sites;
- that more specific language be included about the advantages of librarian and teacher partnerships, especially in providing bibliographic instruction.

In light of the above, recommendations and suggestions for institutions involved in self-study as well as for site visitors are also in order. These might include but not be limited to the following:

- Institutions preparing self-studies for evaluation purposes should document how equitable and comparable services are provided for on- and off-campus students and faculty.
- Prior to implementing off-campus programs, institutions should carefully plan for the acquisition, maintenance, and utilization of appropriate library and information resources.
- As a part of learning outcomes documentation, institutions preparing for assessment by a regional accrediting body should indicate how information management is essential to the successful completion of course or program objectives.
- Institutional self-study documents should demonstrate congruence of regional accrediting standards, institutional goals and objectives, and actual practice.
- When reviewing off-campus programs, regional accrediting bodies should assure that the site visit team includes appropriate professional expertise in the area of library and information resources.
- In keeping with the changing dimensions of library resources and the technological applications available for access to and transfer of information, regional accrediting bodies should train or retrain site visitors for the most relevant and up-to-date evaluation of the effectiveness of library and information support for off-campus programs.

- In consultation with peers, regional accrediting bodies should decide who should be accountable for the evaluation of programs at a distance sponsored by a different regionally accredited institution—i.e., interregionally accredited programs.

While there are no doubt other considerations in the assessment and evaluation of library and information resources for off-campus programs, those discussed herein are considered by the writer to be the most critical. Everyone in the accrediting universe would indeed be happy if all accredited institutions offering off-campus and distance learning programs would accord these programs equal importance for support. That some off-campus programs still have the potential of threatening the institution's overall integrity is something which accrediting bodies cannot ignore. But the ultimate answer will not lie in the adoption of more stringent standards, but rather the answer will no doubt be found in the development and utilization of strategies which should assist students in becoming more independent learners, regardless of where they find themselves studying and learning.

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