



ACRL Standards for Distance and Online Learning Library Services

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Equitable Access Principle

All distance and online members of an institution of higher education are entitled to the library services, resources, and collections of that institution. This founding principle applies to all public, private, profit, and non-profit academic institutions and it is the underlying and uncompromising basis for the *Standards of Distance and Online Learning Library Services*, hereinafter designated as the *Standards*.

Purpose of Standards

This document is intended for any member of an institution who is involved in the provision of services to distance and online learning communities. This document provides a means to foster cross-departmental communication and improve advocacy, and offers a roadmap for strategic planning.

Standards

1. Vision and Strategic Planning

Standard: The library maintains a current vision and strategic plan that includes serving distance and online learning communities.

Benchmarks

The library:

- Incorporates support to distance and online learning communities into the vision and strategic plan of the library.
- Participates in the strategic planning processes of the originating institution, including developing and managing immediate and long-range goals.
- Uses vision and strategic planning as a tool for advocacy for distance and online learning communities.
- Cultivates awareness of current trends in the field of distance and online learning at the institutional administrative level.

2. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)

Standard: The library supports diversity and inclusivity through culturally relevant and responsive practices in support of distance and online learning communities.

Benchmarks

The library:

- Understands and meets all requirements and guidelines set forth by the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA) and Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Utilizes Universal Design for Learning ([UDL](#)) as an approach to instructional design.
- Provides resources and services in multiple formats to ensure accessibility and choice.
- Regularly participates in DEIA professional development activities.
- Provides equal or equivalent experiences to learners with varying levels of technological access and abilities.

3. Personnel

Standard: The library maintains sufficient personnel to support the needs of distance and online learning communities.

Benchmarks

The library:

- Hires either a dedicated distance and online learning librarian, or equivalent title, or maintains personnel distributed across many departments or positions.
- Provides adequate service hours and personal assistance.
- Regularly reviews workloads and capacities to provide and maintain services across departments that provide support, such as:
 - Strategic planning and management
 - Collection development
 - Information literacy
 - Research services
 - Resource access
 - Marketing and outreach
- Provides adequate and ongoing support for professional development.

4. Collections & Access

Standard: The library provides necessary resources and services for distance and online learning communities.

Benchmarks

The library:

- Ensures the provision of reliable, rapid, and secure access to online resources.
- Develops policies for delivering hard copy and electronic materials.
- Prepares and updates collection development and acquisitions policies to reflect the needs of the community.
- Regularly reviews library resources and materials to ensure sufficient coverage and appropriateness of format.
- Markets and promotes library collections directly to distance and online learning communities.
- Supports open access and open educational resources initiatives.

5. Research & Instruction

Standard: The library provides reference, research support, consultation, and instruction to distance and online learning communities.

Benchmarks

The library:

- Ensures instruction methods are supported by the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Appendix 1).
- Creates appropriate learning outcomes specific to the institution.
- Encourages library instructors to work collaboratively with teaching faculty to include information literacy instruction into distance and online courses and programs.
- Collaborates with faculty and/or learning management system administrator to embed library tools and instructional materials into the online classroom.
- Provides point-of-need or virtual assistance which may include, but is not limited to, the following:
 - research needs
 - use of collections and equipment
 - general library services
 - referrals

- Markets and promotes educational services directly to distance and online learning communities.

6. Assessment

Standard: The library conducts needs and outcomes assessments at regular intervals to ensure that the needs of distance and online learning communities are being met. These needs include, but are not limited to: resources, collections, personnel, library research and instruction, distance learning facilities, DEIA initiatives, and technology.

Benchmarks

The library:

- Identifies useful metrics, ideally aligned with the vision and strategic goals of the institution.
- Utilizes different types of assessment which may include surveys, tests, interviews, student learning, statistics on library use and collections, as well as data on staff and work assignments. Assessment could involve distance and online learning community representatives, including administrators, faculty, and students.
- Compares the library as a provider of distance and online learning library services with its peers.

7. Financial Support

Standard: The library and the institution provides funding to support distance and online learning communities. Financial support is an underlying and essential principle for the success of all the standards listed in this document.

Benchmarks:

The library:

- Advocates for continued financial support from the institution for existing programs.
- Advocates for additional financial support for any expansions or increased enrollment.

Appendix 1: Meeting Library-Related Standards and Other Guidelines, Regulations and Laws

Library-Related Standards

Library services offered to the distance and online learning communities are designed to meet a wide range of informational, instructional, and user needs, and facilitate some form of direct access between library users and personnel. The exact combination of service delivery methods will differ from institution to institution. Specific professional standards and guidelines which may be utilized in providing these services include, but are not limited to:

Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), American Library Association, 2016.

Standards for Libraries in Higher Education. Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), American Library Association, 2011.

Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians. Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), American Library Association, 2003.

Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference Services. Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), American Library Association, 2004.

Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers. Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), American Library Association, 2013.

Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries, Association of Research Libraries, 2012.

American Library Association Code of Ethics, 2021.

Other Standards, Guidelines, Laws, and Regulations:

Additionally, libraries must ensure that its distance and online learning library programs meet or exceed national and regional guidelines, laws, and regulations. There may be local or national statutes, rules, requirements, or other considerations to bear in mind and include in any procedures or approaches to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility work.

- [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) homepage](#)
 - [ADA Design Standards](#)
- [Section 508](#) (Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act)
 - [Section 508 Design and Develop](#) guidelines
- [Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)
 - [Section 504 FAQ](#)
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#)

Appendix 2: History of the Document

Today's *Standards* are the culmination of the expansion and revision of the following series of documents, the first of which originated in processes initiated in 1963: *ACRL Guidelines for Library Services to Extension Students*, 1967; *ACRL Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services*, 1981; *ACRL Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services*, 1990; *ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*, 1998; *ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*, 2000; *Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*, 2004; *Standards for Distance Learning Library Services*, 2008, and finally *Standards for Distance Learning Library Services*, 2016.

2023 Standards

The 2023 *Standards* include major edits which were written over the course of three years. For the 2019-2020 year, the co-chairs were Theresa Mastrodonato, Washington State University in St. Louis, and Elaine Thorton, University of Arkansas, and members included Jack Fritts, Benedictine University, Natalie Haber, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Danielle Apfelbaum, Farmingdale State College, Rachel E. Cannady, University of Texas at San Antonio, Paul Graham, Yorkville University, and Sherry Tinerella, Arkansas Tech University. The 2019-2020 committee conducted a close reading of the standards, identified necessary changes, conducted a guidelines and standards review, and began a draft.

For the 2020-2021 committee, the chairs were Natalie Haber, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and Janna Mattson, George Mason University, and members included Jack Fritts, Benedictine University, Paul Graham, Yorkville University, Rachel Isaac-Menard, Adelphi University, Marcia Keyser, Drake University, and Kelly Diamond, West Virginia University. The 2020-2021 committee decided to conduct a membership survey regarding the *Standards* before continuing the draft. They asked questions regarding *Standards* usage, which parts members find most useful, and which parts are frustrating or difficult to use. The survey had 49 respondents and gave the committee more

direction for their next steps. This committee also reviewed language and structure of other educational and library related guidelines and standards to gain ideas. From there, the committee identified seven Standards: Collections & Access, Personnel, Research & Instruction, Assessment, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, Financial Support, and Vision and Strategic Planning. From there, the committee worked to fit all the tenants of the 2016 *Standards* under these Standards.

The 2021-2022 committee included chairs, Janna Mattson, George Mason University and Rachel Isaac-Menard, Adelphi University, and members Natalie Haber, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Kelly Diamond, West Virginia University, Marcia Keyser, Drake University, Joelle E. Pitts, Carnegie Mellon University and Sarah Lynn Simms, Louisiana State University. Jack Fritts attended several meetings as an ex-officio member. This committee finalized the draft and shared it with the DOLS Executive Committee. DOLS Members were encouraged to give feedback during an open comment period which resulted in several friendly amendments to the text, but no substantive changes. The ACRL Standards Committee voted to approve them in December 2022, and the ACRL Board of Directors voted to approve them on February 17, 2023.

2016 *Standards*

The DLS Standards Committee was returned to standing committee status in 2012, and Harvey Gover, Washington State University Tri-Cities, was asked to return as Committee Chair in order to lead a revision of the 2008 *Standards*. Committee members who have actively participated in this revision include Dr. Monica Garcia Brooks, Marshall University; Stefanie Buck, Oregon State University; Rachel Cannady, University of Texas at San Antonio; Moushumi Chakraborty, Salisbury University; Heather Dalal, Rider University; Jack Fritts, Benedictine University; Jane M. Hutton, West Chester University; Michelle A. Kowalsky, Rowan University; and Stephan Macaluso, SUNY--New Paltz. In addition, Robin Deich Ottoson, Tabor College, as the ACRL Standards Committee (SAC) Liaison to DLS Standards Committee, monitored the final stages of the revision. Valuable technical assistance was provided by Stefanie

Buck, in her simultaneous role as Section Secretary, and by Karla Aleman, Chair of the Section Web Committee.

A highly successful and well attended Hearing, seeking input for the revision, was held at ALA Annual 2013 in Chicago. Many valuable ideas for revision emerged from this Hearing. Two subsequent meetings of the Standards Committee, one at Annual 2013 and one at Midwinter 2014 yielded additional valuable suggestions. At the suggestion of the Committee at Annual 2013, Harvey Gover set up a Google Docs file of the revision draft and further valuable suggestions resulted from the editorial notations made by Committee members using this draft.

The resulting draft was presented to SAC for approval at Annual 2014. Although the wording of the draft was approved and commended by SAC members, the draft was sent back because input on the draft had not been widely enough sought during the revision processes. SAC requested that reactions and responses to the draft be more widely sought beyond the membership of the Distance Learning Section. David Free, Editor-In-Chief of *College & Research Libraries News (C&RL News)* and Marketing and Communications Specialist for ACRL was attending the SAC meeting in his capacity as advisor and volunteered to offer whatever assistance was necessary to satisfy the requests of SAC members. David Free subsequently made postings in late October 2014 to *C&RL News*, *ACRL Update*, and *ACRL Insider*.

A special page requesting further input on the draft was posted at the Distance Learning Section Web site by the Section's Web Committee. Additional postings were also made to the Section listserv and to the OFFCAMP listserv. Members of the Standards Committee contacted the following the third week of October 2014: ULS, CLS, CJCLS, ILI, LITA-L, LITA Discussion Group, Collections groups, EBSS, and Chapters Council.

Harvey Gover made further revisions of the draft in the spring and summer of 2015, based upon the additional input and email deliberations of the Standards Committee.

The management issues associated with change in the delivery of distance learning courses and programs, and the globalization of distance learning were addressed and

further ideas generated at the Annual 2015 meeting of the Standards Committee. Harvey Gover then incorporated those ideas into a final draft in July 2015. The draft was approved by the Standards Committee in late July and sent to the Distance Learning Section Executive Committee for review and approval in September 2015. The draft was unanimously approved by DLS Exec on September 30, 2015. The draft was then approved by SAC in February 2016 to move forward to the ACRL Board of Directors for their final approval and subsequent publishing in *C&RL News*, and posting to the ACRL Guidelines, Standards, and Frameworks site.

2008 Standards

With completion of the 2004 revision, which had included only changes to the Introduction and the Revising the *Guidelines* section, the need for a new, major revision of what was still essentially the 1998 document had become evident, and members of the Guidelines Committee began the initial work toward making the transition from a guidelines document to a standards document. At that time, Rob Morrison, at Utah State University and later National-Louis University, served as Chair of the Guidelines Committee and set out to lead these efforts. Harvey Gover from Washington State University Tri-Cities continued to contribute to the new revision processes as Consultant to the Guidelines Committee.

Rob Morrison set up and led revision activities for three years. Under Morrison's leadership, three major revision hearings and two revision discussion groups took place. The first hearing was at the 2004 ALA Midwinter conference, in San Diego on January 11, the second at the 2005 ALA Annual conference, in Chicago on June 25, and the third at the 2006 ALA Midwinter conference in San Antonio on January 21. One discussion group took place at the Twelfth Off-Campus Library Services Conference in Savannah in April 2006, and the second was a roundtable discussion at the Thirteenth National Conference of the ACRL in Baltimore, March 31, 2007.

Further opportunity for outside participation in the *Guidelines* revision has been provided through a wiki, since it was first made available in 2005. The wiki has been used by members of the Guidelines committee to post proposed changes for

consideration by other committee members and to request email participation from individuals not on the committee and not eligible to write to the wiki. Michelle (Shelly) Drumm, Emergent Technology Trainer at BCR (Bibliographical Center for Research) and a member of the DLS Web committee, was instrumental in setting up the wiki and has both moved and maintained it since.

Members of the Guidelines Committee, who participated actively with Rob Morrison in the revision activities while he was Chair, were Betty Brice, University of Alabama; Marie Jones, East Tennessee State University; and Melissa Koenig, DePaul University.

Axel Schmetzke of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point provided valuable input on Americans with disabilities issues at the Chicago 2005 hearing. The former *Guidelines* had neither acknowledged nor addressed these issues.

David L. Bickford of the University of Phoenix participated actively in the roundtable discussion at the ACRL Thirteenth conference, making a number of valuable suggestions. Bickford later became a member of the Guidelines Committee.

Rob Morrison left the committee in 2007 and Jessica Catherine McCullough of ARTstor User Services took over as Chair. Harvey Gover continued to work actively on adding new content, rewriting, restructuring, and refining the final document for submission to the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee (SAC) and the ACRL Board for approval at the 2008 ALA Annual conference. Gover also served as Acting Chair of the committee in 2008 in McCullough's absence.

New members of the committee, Daniel Gall of the University of Iowa and Jan H. Kemp of the University of Texas at San Antonio, provided valuable assistance to Gover in preparation of the final 2008 draft.

An editorial discussion leading to further revisions took place during the online approval process by the DLS Executive Board in April 2008. Specific editorial suggestions were provided by Ruth Hodges of South Carolina State University, Jessica Catherine McCullough of ARTstor User Services, and Allyson Washburn of Brigham Young University. The draft was approved on April 17, 2008.

2000 Guidelines

When reviewing the publication history of the *Guidelines*, one readily notices the short span in editions from 1998 to 2000. The 1998 *Guidelines* were approved with the proviso from SAC that efforts be undertaken immediately upon their final approval to make the *Guidelines* more outcomes oriented through a minor rhetorical revision that would not require as complete a subsequent approval process as would a more thorough revision. This minor outcomes revision was actually initiated during the 1998 approval process, when the Guidelines Committee members began reviewing the draft document for possible outcomes additions and then Chair, Harvey Gover, prepared an additional precept for the then *Guidelines* Philosophy section acknowledging the importance of instilling lifelong learning skills through information literacy instruction for students in extended academic settings. With the approval of SAC, that precept was incorporated into the final draft of the 1998 *Guidelines*.

The outcomes revision continued through Annual 2000, when it was approved by SAC and the ACRL Board of Directors. Those Guidelines Committee members who participated actively in the outcomes revision throughout this time included Committee Chair Jean Caspers, Oregon State University; and Geraldine Collins, University of North Florida; Linda Frederiksen, Washington State University Vancouver; Lisa Hinchliffe, Illinois State University; Mae O'Neal, Western Michigan University; Bill Parton, Oklahoma Tech University; and Bernie Sloan, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign. Susan Maltese, Oakton Community College, then liaison from SAC to DLS, and Barton Lessin, Wayne State University, Chair of SAC, also contributed suggestions and guidance. Harvey Gover, then DLS Chair and Consultant to the Guidelines Committee, monitored the entire outcomes revision process, and prepared the final revision draft submitted to SAC just prior to Annual 2000. The final revision draft was based upon a draft insert that had been prepared by Jean Caspers and submitted to the Guidelines Committee for review on June 6. Gover's final draft consisted largely of an incorporation of Caspers' insert throughout the entire 1998 Guidelines text and was forwarded to Susan Maltese, SAC liaison to DLS, on June 9 for submission to SAC.

During the approval process for the outcomes revision, it was suggested by members of SAC that the *Guidelines* Introduction needed strengthening and recommended that an additional minor revision be prepared, rewriting the introduction. During the process of revising the introduction, it became evident that the Revising the *Guidelines* section would also require some corresponding strengthening and revision. These efforts, which led to approval of the 2004 edition, were initiated and prepared by Harvey Gover, then Consultant to the Guidelines Committee, with input from members of the Guidelines Committee, Linda Frederiksen, Chair, Washington State University Vancouver; Betty K. Bryce, University of Alabama Libraries; Deborah F. Cardinal, WiLS OCLC; Catharine Cebrowski, ITESM – Tec De Monterrey; Geraldine Collins, University of North Florida; Marie F. Jones, East Tennessee State University; Melissa H. Koenig, DePaul University; Debra Lamb-Deans, Cornell University; and Bernie Sloan, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign.

1998 *Guidelines*

From the beginning, those undertaking preparation or revision of the *Standards* have sought the widest possible input from everyone involved in all aspects and on all levels of distance teaching and learning in higher education. For example, the decision to revise the 1990 *Guidelines* was made initially by DLS Guidelines Committee. Then the official mandate came from the DLS Executive Board at its final 1996 Midwinter meeting. The revision of the 1990 *ACRL Guidelines for Extended Campus Library Services*, which produced the 1998 *ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*, was prepared by Harvey Gover, then Chair of the DLS Guidelines Committee. The revision was based upon input from members of the Guidelines Committee, members of the DLS Executive Board, the general membership of DLS, and other librarians and administrators involved in post-secondary distance learning programs from across the nation and around the world.

Members of the Guidelines Committee who initiated or contributed to the revision process for the 1990 *Guidelines* included: Stella Bentley, University of California at Santa Barbara; Jean Caspers, Oregon State University; Jacqueline A. Henning, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University; Sharon Hybki-Kerr, University of Arkansas, Little Rock;

Gordon Lynn Hufford, Indiana University East; Ruth M. Jackson, West Virginia University; Chui-Chun Lee, SUNY--New Paltz; G. Tom Mendina, University of Memphis; Virginia S. O'Herron, Old Dominion University; Mae O'Neal, Western Michigan University; Bill Parton, Arkansas Tech University; Mercedes L. Rowe, Mercy College; Dorothy Tolliver, Maui Community College Library; and Steven D. Zink, University of Nevada, Reno.

Others outside the Committee who contributed significantly to the cycle of revision of the 1990 *Guidelines* included: Thomas Abbott, University of Maine at Augusta; Janice Bain-Kerr, Troy State University; Nancy Burich, University of Kansas, Regents Center Library; Anne Marie Casey, Central Michigan University; Tony Cavanaugh, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia; Monica Hines Craig, Central Michigan University; Mary Ellen Davis, ACRL; Tom DeLoughry, Chronicle Of Higher Education; Jill Fatzner, University of New Orleans, ACRL Board, Task Force on Outcomes; Jack Fritts, Southeastern Wisconsin Information Technology Exchange Consortium (SWITCH); Barbara Gelman-Danley of SUNY Monroe Community College, Educational Technology, and the Consortium for Educational Technology for University Systems; Kay Harvey, Penn State, McKeesport; Maryhelen Jones, Central Michigan University; Marie Kascus, Central Connecticut State University; Barbara Krauth, Student Services Project Coordinator for the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunication of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE); Eleanor Kulleseid, Mercy College; Rob Morrison, Utah State University; Kathleen O'Connor, Gonzaga University; Alexander (Sandy) Slade, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada; Mem Catania Stahley, University of Central Florida, Brevard Campus; Peg Walther, City University, Renton, Washington; Virginia Witucke, Central Michigan University; Jennifer Wu, North Seattle Community College and College Librarians and Media Specialists (CLAMS).