INSTRUCTION

11,664 KILOMETERS ACROSS THE SEA:
BRIDGING THE STUDENT SUPPORT GAP TO THE PAIFICIA ISLANDS

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Abstract:
The Library Education for the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific (LEAP) program was funded by an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant to provide the opportunity to pursue a master’s degree level, distance education program in library and information sciences for the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI). The USAPI consists of six distinct political entities, including the Territories of American Samoa and Guam; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); the Republic of Palau; the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI); and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). What differentiated this program from other University of North Texas (UNT) distance programs was the inclusion of mentors assigned to each student and a much larger role for the embedded librarians in the introductory workshop and throughout the two-year degree program. Library skills were integrated into the curriculum of the 10-day, on-site, total immersion program. This would be the only face-to-face contact students would have with faculty or librarians. We will discuss the numerous reference channels used, the librarian-in-the-classroom program, and the effects of culture on communication. Issues with long-term sustainability of mentoring relationships and access to resources will be also discussed.

Keywords: Distance learning, embedded librarian, Micronesia, MLIS, mentoring, multicultural students, online courses, library education, multiculturalism.

Introduction
For several decades Jane Barnwell, Director of Library and Literacy Initiatives at Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) had been concerned that there were no indigenous librarians in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands with degrees from an American Library Association (ALA) accredited program. Through her conversations with Beth Avery and Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) program officers, three partners were brought together to apply for an IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program grant to bring the University of North Texas (UNT) online master’s degree program to the area. These students would remain on their home islands and, upon successful completion of the program, work to bring 21st century information services and skills to the region. These librarians would
be challenged to provide leadership by mentoring and encouraging other persons interested in entering librarianship.

For a variety of reasons, most notably the lack of local accredited graduate library and information science programs and inadequate funding, there are few qualified librarians in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific region. For example, in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Mr. Dakio Syne was the only indigenous librarian to have successfully completed a master’s degree in librarianship; he passed away in 1997. Except for Hawaii and in some cases such as Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the person placed in the role of librarian often has little or no formal education in the discipline. No regional programs of higher education in librarianship currently exist to provide the advanced degree necessary to prepare professional librarians to serve their communities. The Palau Community College (PCC) established an associate’s degree program in library science in 2007, thus making some formal training available to residents of this remote island (IMLS Application Narrative 2009).

The UNT College of Information, Department of Library and Information Sciences (DLIS) has a history of developing successful distance cohorts of students based on the blended learning approach. The UNT online program is able to meet the needs of students in remote areas around the world. The master’s degree in library and information sciences (MLIS) program had been successfully sustained and expanded in Texas and other states, including Georgia, California, Nevada, Utah, and Virginia.

The Library Education for the U.S.-affiliated Pacific (LEAP): A Project to Strengthen Libraries and Library Education in the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands program was developed specifically to support indigenous students from the geographically dispersed and economically depressed areas of the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands in a master’s program in librarianship utilizing distance learning and culturally relevant support services. The UNT DLIS and University Libraries, in collaboration with formal partner Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), successfully collaborated for three years. The goal of the proposal was to support the cohort in meeting their educational goals within the three years of this project. In Year One project partners planned to implement, and deliver the program to the Pacific, representatives from all three partners jointly developed the recruitment strategy, professional development programming, website design, and project implementation. In Year Two students attended an opening “Web Institute” in Guam, decided on a program of study, started classes, and attended a professional conference and workshop. In Year Three classes continued, students made presentations at the Pacific Educational Conference, and graduated.

The Challenges
The Pacific region served by PREL includes ten U.S.-affiliated island entities with the political statuses of a state, commonwealth, territory, or independent nation in a compact of free association with the United States. These entities include the state of Hawaii; the Territory of American Samoa; the Territory of Guam; the CNMI; the FSM, including the states of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap; RMI; and the Republic of Palau. The entities are spread across more than 4.9 million square miles of ocean and hundreds of islands and atolls, many of which are uninhabited. The LEAP Project’s UNT faculty members live and work primarily in the central time zone of the United States. Clearly the first challenge was providing communication and education across six time zones, the International Date Line, and the equator.
The second challenge was presented by the limited incomes in the area. A disproportionate percentage of the population is undereducated; a large number are English-as-a-second language learners; and the cost of education is high. There is considerable income variation across the region. For example, the average per capita income in the state of Hawaii is $27,814 (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 2008); while in the RMI it is $3,070 (World Bank, 2008). Approximately 250,000 students are enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the Pacific region, primarily in schools classified as rural (PREL, 2007) As in the rest of the United States, English language learners often have difficulty achieving in school. Various National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) studies of math and reading continue to document poor performance of students from Hawaii, American Samoa, CNMI, and Guam (NCES, 2005). While NAEP does not report achievement for the FSM, RMI, or Palau, Pacific educators and researchers agree that student performance is well below standard in the rest of the region, while attrition levels are very high. Young and rapidly growing populations are common, placing enormous challenges upon the social and educational systems and fragile economies.

The Pacific region is multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Among the region’s 1.6 million people, nine different Pacific cultures are prominent. More than 30 languages are in use in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific (PREL, 1995). This presented the third challenge. Considerations of the cultural context of education and inclusion of mentors from these contexts would be critical elements to an understanding of successful program design and implementation.

The IMLS Grant
The IMLS grant awarded UNT $999,700.00 for the program. The costs of recruiting, scholarships and student materials, program support, enrichment activities, and travel were included in the grant. To be admitted to the program, all students must have completed an earned BA/BS degree from an accredited college or university recognized by UNT prior to starting the program, and must be accepted to the MLIS distance program using the same criteria as all UNT students.

When developing the grant proposal we identified several critical areas that needed to be funded. Distance programs require good Internet connectivity and up-to-date computers. High speed Internet connectivity can be expensive in remote areas and, given the average income in the area, beyond the ability of most students to pay.

Full tuition scholarships were awarded to twenty-three students, called the LEAP Scholars. In addition to all tuition and fees, the scholarships included the additional support needed to complete the program such as a laptop computer and the cost of connectivity, professional association memberships in the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries, Archives, and Museums (PIALA) and the joint ALA/Hawaii Library Association, and travel to the Web Institute held on Guam and to the PIALA and Pacific Educational Conferences (PEC) in Saipan.

Scholarship requirements stipulated that students had to agree to attend and present at the PEC and/or PIALA conference in Saipan, CNMI, which was also where the graduation ceremony took place. Scholarship recipients also had to agree to work in a local library or information center in the USAPI for a minimum of 2 years after their degree completion.

Recruiting
The LEAP project recruitment plan sought to identify potential students and to inform employers about the program immediately after the grant award. The plan identified a variety of methods to market the
master’s degree program and the LEAP scholarship program to the Pacific community. A goal of the LEAP project was the enhancement of library education opportunities for the indigenous populations of the Pacific island region. To that end a major focus of the recruitment plan was to identify, recruit, and admit indigenous students who are representative of the demographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the region. Jane Barnwell has lived and worked in the USAPI for over 25 years, and her extensive knowledge of the region, and in particular her relationships with individual librarians, formed the basis of the recruitment effort, as many eligible individuals had already been recruited to apply for the program upon its successful funding.

Methods to achieve the recruitment goals included the following: publication of press releases about the LEAP scholarship and the UNT/DLIS program by the UNT and PREL; recruitment information sessions, developed and scheduled immediately after the announcement of the grant award and held in the USAPI; and virtual information sessions conducted using Wimba Classroom online technology. An article by Jane Barnwell about the grant was published in the Pacific Educator. Information sessions were publicized in the Pacific Daily News and in the Saipan Tribune in Guam and Saipan.

Production of promotional materials included a four-page color brochure to market the IMLS/UNT LEAP Scholarship and the UNT/DLIS program. The brochure included instructions for applying for the LEAP scholarship as well as extensive step by step directions for the admission process to the Toulouse Graduate School and the DLIS, MLIS program.

Exhibit booths and information sessions were staffed at professional conferences by Dr. Yvonne Chandler, UNT/DLIS faculty member and principle investigator, and Jane Barnwell, who attended the 20th Annual Conference of PIALA held in Chuuk State, FSM in November, 2010. The PIALA conference was attended by librarians and administrators representing all of the islands in the USAPI. Dr. Chandler gave a conference presentation about the LEAP grant and the scholarship program.

Promotional materials, brochures, and application materials were distributed to libraries and universities in the USAPI. Creation of a mailing list included contact information for paraprofessionals or library assistants working in libraries; professional librarians; and library directors of public school systems, colleges and universities, public libraries, and special libraries on the six Pacific Island entities.

In person and virtual information sessions were presented by Dr. Yvonne Chandler and Jane Barnwell on the islands of Pohnpei and Chuuk; FSM Micronesia at the College of Micronesia; Guam at the University of Guam, various Guam Public Library branches, Guam Public Schools and the Guam Department of Education Service Center; and on CMNI at the Northern Marianas College and the CNMI Public School System. Jane Barnwell facilitated virtual information sessions on the islands of American Samoa and Palau. Dr. Chandler participated in those sessions via Skype; she also traveled a total of 38,336 air miles to recruit the students for the LEAP program.

Advertisements were placed in print and online journals and newsletters and posted on listservs promoting librarianship as a career and the LEAP scholarship program. A dedicated website promoting the IMLS/UNT-DLIS LEAP Scholarship program and the MLS educational program was created, providing links to program information, the LEAP Scholarship application forms, instructions, and other information about the project. The site may be viewed at http://lis.unt.edu/apps/leap.

Through these varied recruitment efforts, contact was made with 232 individuals who showed interest, emailed, or attended a virtual or in-person information session. The majority of attendees at
information sessions were female; they also included a cross-section of the represented demographic populations of the Pacific Islands, and lived equally in both rural and urban areas. Approximately one-third of the students who ultimately applied and were accepted into the program were selected to receive the LEAP scholarship. The most frequent method that the interested students heard about the LEAP master’s degree program and scholarship was by attending an information session or directly from a library or information professional.

The committee evaluating scholarship applications included three island college library directors; one public library director; two instructors in local undergraduate library science programs; Dr. Yvonne Chandler, UNT Faculty; Jane Barnwell, PREL; and Beth Avery, UNT Librarian. The applications were evaluated on six criteria:

1. Potential for academic and professional employment success (resume);
2. Community involvement (examples of community service);
3. Successful employment and indication of future employment success (work history, purpose, and goals);
4. Understanding of Pacific region library issues and needs (library services essay);
5. Communication skills – written (entire application);
6. Recommendations (letters of support).

The LEAP project team successfully recruited 23 students to receive funding. Seven other students were recruited who paid their own tuition for the first five semesters, but they did receive IMLS funded scholarships to pay their tuition for the last term.

Demographics
PREL evaluation staff was responsible for the ongoing program evaluation and related IMLS reporting requirements. To provide baseline data and to begin the evaluation and assessment program for the grant, each grant recipient completed an intake survey that included demographic information. The gender makeup of the LEAP Scholars was 60.9% female and 39.1% male. Each of the USAPI entities except the Marshall Islands was represented by a scholarship recipient. Since Guam is the most populous island in the Pacific area, the largest ethnicity in the cohort was Chamorro, which is the indigenous population of Guam and the CNMI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAP Scholars Live In</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI);</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Palau</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Table 1. Home countries of LEAP scholars.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chamorro</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesian</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Hispanic, Korean)</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamorro - Pacific</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islander</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamorro - Caucasian</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palauan</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not Answer</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Ethnicity of LEAP scholars.

The Web Institute: Developing Relationships – August 2011 in Guam

“The University of North Texas Department of Library and Information Sciences created the Web Institute as a foundation for distance learning students to begin their Master’s degree study. Students meet at the host site for two-to four-day institutes where all of the core courses are introduced. The students complete the remainder of the courses for the master’s degree online. The Institute consists of classroom instruction, technology training, and social events. The Department of Library and Information Sciences faculty believes that these three elements provide the best opportunity for individual success in a distance education program. The Web Institute courses are open to all students pursuing the Master's degree through Department of Library and Information Sciences.” From the DLIS website, http://lis.unt.edu/web-institute

The LEAP Cohort was unique in many ways. It was the first international cohort; students met each other and the UNT faculty members and librarians for the first time at the Outrigger Guam Resort in Tumon, Guam. The ten days were filled with intense daily instruction and social activities, which took place from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., and 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. The students and faculty had the opportunity to get to know each other. Study groups and other support networks were formed as a result of this time together.

In other UNT Web Institutes in the contiguous United States, the schedule is for two to four days and the teaching team consists of a faculty member and a teaching assistant. Bibliographic instruction in those situations is a one hour presentation presented online by Cindy Batman, the Liaison to the DLIS. When students travel to UNT in Denton, Texas, for a Web Institute, they receive one hour of face-to-face library instruction while on campus. The students in the Web Institute in Guam received twenty-three hours of information literacy instruction, which was an integral part of the classes and curriculum taught to the students.

The Web Institute in Guam was led by the UNT teaching and advising team comprised of Dr. Yvonne Chandler, Dr. Linda Schamber, Dr. Larry Enoch, Beth Avery, Cindy Batman, and Charlotte Thomas, along with Jane Barnwell, from PREL. Students represented diverse backgrounds and included ten different cultures. Some had previously earned master's degrees; some had never taken an online course; one had never been on an escalator; and most were the first in their family to earn an advanced degree. Nine additional cohort students not selected for scholarships joined the Web Institute and paid their
own way for all program costs, including tuition materials, travel costs, etc. The two lead librarians, Avery and Batman, were embedded throughout the Web Institute, in the classes with the students as well as throughout their ten days in Guam. Librarians were always present and provided continuity for the students. They assisted when other faculty members were teaching and helped manage group work.

Web Institute activities
The activities held at the Institute began with an orientation session for all of the LEAP students. This session was held on the first afternoon after the scholars arrived on Guam. Full admission to the UNT program requires entrance examination scores from each student from a standardized test such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Because many of the students live on islands with no entrance examination testing center, arrangements were made for all of the students to take the Graduate Record Examination at the Guam Prometric Testing Center. At the orientation session the project team reviewed information about the program, including funding and expectations. Each scholar received a software loaded laptop computer and was instructed in loading the Wimba software recommended for the Blackboard Course Management system needed for the online classes.

The cohort-based approach to the UNT/LIS program provides an opportunity for students and faculty to build a vibrant learning community. Students participated in an array of enrichment activities and coursework geared toward cultivating library leaders in the 21st Century at the Web Institute. The Institute began with the traditional Web Institute Welcome Dinner at the Fiesta Resort Guam in the World Café. The Dutch treat meal was accented with a gift of mwar mwar (traditional floral headpieces) given to the new students as from their librarian mentors. The dinner gave students the opportunity to meet informally (but nevertheless extensively) with the Institute faculty and support staff and fellow cohort members. Individual advising sessions were held with the students to plan their curricula for the two-year program.

The design of the LEAP Web Institute allowed for the students to truly build a community as there was more time for social events and other activities to be held with the cohort. During the Institute, a varied set of on-site enrichment experiences were offered, including a professional development workshop led by Jane Barnwell and Guam librarians, a cultural evening led by the students, and library tours. The students toured the University of Guam – Robert F. Kennedy Library, the Richard Flores Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center, and the Guam Public Library. After the tours, the entire cohort celebrated reaching the midpoint of the Web Institute with the “Halfway Lunch” at the famous Shirley’s Coffee Shop.

The students took over the presenting at the Web Institute with the program “Pacific Voices.” Students from each of the islands gave fascinating presentations about the culture, traditions, history, and fun facts about their island. Group presentations were lively and included stories of island traditions of courtship, costumes, food preferences, and religious beliefs unique to their island. The personalized presentations allowed everyone to learn more about the islands and more importantly, each of the students. The presentations were videotaped.

The first of the professional development workshops designed to meet the goals of the project plan was held at the Web Institute. This career development workshop proved to be very popular and useful. The workshop consisted of a panel of local library professionals who shared their experiences, career stories, and ideas for success in the information world and librarianship. Each panelist addressed a series of questions posed by program participants. Questions included: What is a professional job really like? What are the ins and outs of day-to-day work as a librarian, technologist, or vendor? What
is being a librarian or information specialist really like? What else can one do with a MLIS degree? What is the future of librarianship?

Students’ impressions
Student’s impressions of the Web Institute were “exciting, draining, really good.” Students were awed by the opportunity, overwhelmed at the challenge, terrified of the technological difficulties that could hamper their success, and dumbstruck at the amount of reading and research paper writing required. They began to see that librarianship is a complex profession.

Overall the students saw it as a very positive, energizing experience conducive to being successful in the program. They began to understand that a large commitment of time was needed that would require the support of others. The most important thing seemed to be meeting and connecting with the other students. The group bonded during the Institute, relationships were formed, study-buddy systems developed. A large study group was organized among the Guam students. Accountability partners helped each other on the smaller islands.

Classes: During the Institute and the Next Five Semesters
The three core classes of the UNT DLIS master’s program were launched at the Web Institute on Guam, essentially kicking off the cohort’s Fall 2011 semester. All of the Pacific Island students, whether scholarship recipients or self-paying, were in these class sections together as a unique section. The three faculty members, who had been with them throughout the Institute, taught the first three classes.

During the second semester, Spring 2012, one of their classes was still with their cohort group. However, due to the differences in their degree plans, these students were integrated with the rest of the Library & Information Sciences online students from their 4th class on. This experience allowed them to learn from other students from all over the world who were pursuing the same specialty, such as school librarianship or information systems.

More Challenges
The faculty members teaching the 4th through 12th classes in the LIS program were aware of the LEAP students as part of the MLS program and of the special arrangements that may need to be made in order to insure their success. However, in many cases they were unprepared for some of the curriculum, technological, and other needs of the Pacific Island students. Problems included the issue of time zones variations which made chat meetings difficult to schedule; the LEAP students did not have access to many of the literature resources need for some classes; and LEAP cohort students did not have the same opportunities to access physical libraries, study collections, use reference books, volunteer, or observe professional librarians. Weather related issues also impacted Internet access for some students.

Special challenges had to be addressed throughout the program. One cohort member was even farther away than the rest, teaching on a military base in Tokyo. Many time zones were involved in reaching students across the Pacific Islands; there is fifteen hours’ difference from UNT’s main campus in Denton, Texas, to Guam. This necessitated the Texas faculty team members sometimes teaching at 3:00 a.m. or 4:00 a.m. Class chats that required participation were held late at night, Central Standard Time. Two faculty members for the important core courses conducted chat sessions from 3:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. Central Standard Time so that the LEAP students could attend class after their normal work hours.

With the exception of Guam, there were no certified school librarians on the Islands to provide school librarian mentoring, a requirement of the school library degree tract. Extensive work by several
individuals was required to locate and train virtual mentors from the continental United States. In addition, librarians working in academic environments served as mentors to some of the students.

Once the program began, other challenges became apparent. One student had to leave work and go to the local PREL Service Center in the middle of her workday to participate in required class chats. One moved to another island for the duration of the program, because she did not have stable Internet access on her home island. There were long postal delays in receiving materials by mail, power outages that lasted for days, typhoons, and threats of missile attacks from North Korea that disrupted the cohort’s educational progress.

Communication and cultural issues proved most challenging of all. We all have cultural influences that we bring to our relationships and workplaces. These differences can hinder us when working cross-culturally. Learning about those differences and how to accommodate them in the classroom was important to the success of the LEAP students. The Pacific entities are challenged not only by political and economic diversity but also by cultural and linguistic differences; at least nine different Pacific cultures are prominent in the region. English may be a second, third, or even fourth language for the students.

These students had different priorities than the average U.S. student. The Micronesian cultures are very family-oriented (Ratcliffe, 2010); many could not leave their homes or families for the two-year block needed to obtain the MLIS. For students from the Pacific Islands, their immediate families are their first priority, followed by extended family, community obligations, religion, culture, jobs, which all come before school work (Heine 2002). Students who spend two hours in dance practice after working all day may not have enough time to do homework. One of the students left the program after the first semester because she was unable to meet the family obligations that are traditionally handled by the unmarried daughter.

Customs related to terminal illness, death, and burial rituals plague faculty and students in every culture. There are many jokes in the U.S. about the number of grandparents who die when a major assignment is due, or at exam time. Jokes aside, even when it does happen most U.S. students are not involved in two weeks of rosaries and funerals that last six weeks.

The Western “me” versus islander “we” orientation was evident in classes as islanders work well together in groups and are not inherently as competitive as North American students. Most of the Pacific islanders tend not to be highly competitive, which we knew some faculty might see as “not trying hard enough.” If several students resided on the same island, they naturally formed study groups to support one another. Not all of the students were able to do this; in four entities, the LEAP cohort member did not have fellow students on the same island, exacerbating the communication and support network challenges.

Pacific islanders have a strong desire to please. They will often try to answer the question with what you want to hear. So when asked if they were working on a project they would reply yes, when in reality they hadn’t started yet and may have had no intention of starting it for a few weeks. However, since they know you want the answer to be yes, that is the answer you get.

In Pacific cultures, communication styles reflect a tendency to defer to others, especially those in authority, elders, and males. Saving face is another very important factor. Indirect communication where people talk around a topic and try not to offend is generally favored over direct communication
where people say exactly what they mean, and they see silence as an uncomfortable moment that needs to be filled with conversation.

While the confusion caused by communicating across six times zones caused some time problems, the vastly different views of time caused even more. Islanders tend to work on a cyclical clock where time is unlimited, deadlines are flexible, and tomorrow doesn’t necessarily mean tomorrow just not today. U.S. faculty operate on a linear clock in which schedules are determined and deadlines are firm (Culture Crossing, 2013).

**Workshops**
The workshops to enhance the students’ experiences and knowledge of the profession also distinguished this cohort from other UNT distance cohorts. The first of the professional development workshops designed to meet the goals of the project plan was held at the Web Institute. The second workshop was held in March 2012 and covered the topic of “Importance of Advocacy and Leadership in the Library Profession.” The panel of speakers was led by Dr. Herman L. Totten, UNT Vice President for University and Community Affairs and Dean of the College of Information, who flew to Guam for the workshop and spoke on the “Importance of Cultural Diversity.” The event was co-sponsored by the Guam Library Association, the Guam Department of Education, and the University of Guam Robert F. Kennedy Library. Dr. Yvonne Chandler spoke on “Advocacy and Communication – Promoting Your Library and Librarianship.” All of the LEAP scholars living on Guam attended the workshop. Wimba Live technology was used to deliver the workshop to the remaining scholars on the other islands. During the visit to Guam for the workshop, the LEAP scholars hosted Dean Totten with visits to their libraries, a tour of the island, and its historic locations, and a dinner.

Throughout the program, Jane Barnwell met with both individual students and groups of students to conduct informal and formal workshops, offer professional mentoring and support. In some cases she hand carried textbook orders and other program materials to the students. Ms. Barnwell also conducted focus groups to complement other methods of program evaluation. Her program of work at PREL includes a number of library development, training, and outreach activities that require her to conduct work on site throughout the islands. This was advantageous to the LEAP program as we were able to leverage funds to minimize costs to the program for this important face-to-face work with the LEAP students.

**Mentors**
Students who received LEAP Scholarships were paired with UNT Librarians who served as mentors for the duration of the two-year degree program. The librarian mentor concept was developed due to the extreme distance and time zone differences of this cohort, Internet accessibility challenges, cultural uniqueness of the student group, and the lack of access to standard UNT support services.

Many of the UNT librarian mentors were also graduates of the UNT/DLIS master’s degree program, so they were able to give advice and tips on assignments and classes. This focused assistance was unprecedented and went beyond the normal reference and instruction interaction.

Throughout the program, the librarian mentors received training during several face-to-face meetings held by the lead mentors, Beth Avery and Cindy Batman. Jane Barnwell, PREL, visited UNT to meet the librarian mentors, talk about the challenges of technology on the islands, and discuss cultural and communication norms that would be challenging for the librarian mentors. Barnwell started them thinking about how they could help the students adjust to the different expectations the faculty would
have, and how to help the faculty understand how to work effectively with this group of students. Throughout the two years, regular meetings were held to discuss challenges in particular courses, students in jeopardy, and the effectiveness of the mentoring taking place.

We thought that the mentors would be more approachable if they were perceived as not just librarian role models, but also as persons with interests similar to those of the students. We developed questionnaires for students and mentors that asked about education, jobs, and personal interests such as hobbies, reading preferences, and favorite kinds of music. The survey enabled respondents to share interests they considered important for someone else to know about themselves. The matching of librarian mentors and students was done through analysis of this information. In spite of the many differences there were similarities in areas such as undergraduate majors, previous jobs, hobbies and interests in cooking, comics, or sports.

The anticipated benefits of the mentor program were that each student would have one person at UNT who remained a constant source of support throughout the program. The mentor would help them with using library resources, understanding UNT culture, knowing what was expected in their courses, and directing them to UNT resources they might need for extra help. The mentors were expected to maintain regular contact with their mentees to discuss issues, answer questions promptly, and attend regular meetings of the mentor group to exchange ideas on working with the students and to work on solutions to common problems. Communication with students began before their classes started and lasted through degree completion in August 2013, and continued to the final submission of conference presentation articles to the UNT Scholarly Works Repository.

At the Web Institute, Avery and Batman introduced the librarian mentor concept, showed pictures and introduced the librarian mentors. Students were encouraged to get to know their mentors, contact them for help with reference questions, access problems, search strategies, and research design.

On their return from the Web Institute, Avery and Batman virtually introduced the LEAP students to the librarian mentor teams. They showed pictures of all the students, discussed their personalities, reactions to the courses, any special issues that might be anticipated, and suggested common topics of concern. The mentor librarians were coached to communicate with their two students frequently, especially during the first semester. They wrote to introduce themselves to the students, told a little about their personal and professional lives, and tried to find common ground.

Multiple avenues were provided for communication between students and librarian mentors. The primary contact with students was by email, but mailings and phone calls were also utilized. Avery and Batman, the lead mentors, communicated with mentors as a group in the LEAP Blackboard course, Wimba Chats, or through Outlook in the library office. Batman, as the LIS liaison, could communicate with the LEAP students in individual LIS classes depending on the question, assignment, and time of the semester. One of the surprises of the program was that the hotspot for reference questions turned out to be Facebook! In addition to just saying hello how are you, frequent reference discussions occurred via Facebook chat.

The principal investigator and LEAP Project Research Assistant managed a Facebook page for LEAP Cohort students, faculty, and staff. The page is still accessible and being used to exchange photos, communicate news about their professional jobs, personal lives, and to catch up with friends developed over the two year cohort program. The URL for the LEAP Facebook page is
Some students asked their mentors for course advice, how to work with specific faculty members, help with problems with assignments, and assistance getting textbooks. Librarian mentors were heavily involved in the final deliverable of the program. Students were required to make a presentation at the PEC/PIALA conference where their graduation ceremony would take place. Students chose topics and subsequent stages of the presentation were sent to their mentors for approval: the topic sentence, abstract, PowerPoints, and the finished paper, which was then submitted to the UNT Scholarly Works Repository. Many of the librarian mentors were very supportive with this final project, assisting the students with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) live subjects approval process.

The mentoring program had its successes and its misses. Avery and Batman enjoyed close relationships with the students based on the foundation of the Web Institute’s ten days of enforced togetherness. Some of the students preferred to contact them instead of their assigned UNT librarian mentor because an in-person relationship had been formed. This is consistent and not at all unexpected given cultural norms.

For the most part the librarian mentors who had a virtual relationship only did not form strong ties. It was difficult for them to get responses from their mentees and the mentees sent them very few questions. Even resources developed specifically to help students received little response. The most productive area for communication was Blackboard Discussion areas and Wimba Live Classroom synchronous chats and archives.

In discussions with the mentors on why they thought the relationships did not develop as anticipated, the lack of actual face time was mentioned. This might have been lessened by the wider use of Skype or other face-to-face communication online methods. However, the time difference may still have been an issue, as some of the instant messaging (IM) chats on Facebook occurred when mentors were online at unusual hours at night, such as 2:00 – 4:00 a.m. Central Standard Time.

Sustainability
One of the persistent concerns of distance education courses is the challenge of creating sustainable educational communities in an online environment. The faculty team anticipated that relationship building with the librarian mentors would be strong and that students would want to maintain those connections after graduating. One detriment to life-long learning and professional development is that few alumni will ever be able to match the depth and breadth of electronic resources available from the UNT Libraries.

Graduates often stay connected to their alma maters for the contacts with faculty members who will write reference letters to employers. Some career development presentations were done during the Web Institute by professional organizations in the Pacific islands. Students were encouraged throughout their course work to look for opportunities to volunteer, observe librarians, interview practicing librarians, join appropriate listservs and professional organizations, attend and present at professional conferences, and publish to enhance employability.

During the course of the two year program and immediately following degree completion, several LEAP students have taken on greater responsibility in their jobs, moved into paraprofessional jobs, or have been promoted to professional librarian positions, all quantifiable evidence of the immediate success of
the program on the lives of these individuals, their families, and their communities. A number of LEAP scholars received promotions or were hired in new positions as a result of their graduate studies. LIS graduate Elvis Zodiacaal was named as Director of the American Samoa Community College (ASCC) Learning Resource Center. Leap Scholar Jennifer Hainrick was named Director of the Learning Resource Center of the College of Micronesia – FSM Library. Eric San Nicolas was promoted to Principal of Tinian Jr./Sr. High School. Ronald San Nicolas was elected as Vice President of the Guam Science Foundation.

Natalie Hill was appointed as the English Language Learner Instructor in Saipan. Maria Ornes is serving as Librarian at Saipan’s Kagman High School, and Debra Duenas has been appointed to the Guam Public Library Board of Directors. Justin Maga was hired as Cataloger for the Feleti Barstow Public Library in American Samoa, and the Palau Ministry of Education has created a new position of Specialist, Library and Computer Labs for Imengel Mad.

**LEAP Program Impact**

Since they would be unable to travel to Denton for the official UNT August Graduation Ceremony, the LEAP cohort had their closing experience in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands during the week of July 13–20, 2013. The graduation was planned as part of the scholars’ participation in two consecutive professional conferences – the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries, Archives, and Museums and the Pacific Educational Conference.

The Graduation Program on July 19th was a celebration for the entire USAPI library community. Representatives from each of the islands and Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, including President and CEO Dr. Sharon Nelson-Barber, participated in the program. The address was delivered by Dr. Judith T. Won-Pat, Speaker of the 32nd Guam Legislature. She reminded the students:

“...although the technology is changing and we live in a global community, publications, information, indeed history, will always have to be organized, sorted, catalogued and distributed be it in digital form, or hard copy.

*Somehow, someway, knowledge must be preserved. And you all have learned the intricacies of this process.*”

An inspirational video message was delivered to the graduates by Mr. Daniel J. Peacock, former Director of Library Services for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, on the value of maintaining cohesiveness of the group post-graduation.

As of the August 2013 graduation ceremony in Denton, 19 LEAP scholarship students completed all requirements for the Masters of Science degree in library or information science awarded by the Chancellor, President, and Dean of the College of Information of the University of North Texas. Two scholars will finish their studies by May 2014. When the remaining two students complete all requirements to earn their degrees, the Pacific region will gain 29 qualified librarians able to contribute to the development and improvement of libraries, educational programs and community activities.

After completion of their courses, eight scholarship and three self-paying students were initiated into Beta Phi Mu, the Library and Information Studies Honor Society. This organization recognizes and encourages scholastic achievement among library and information studies students. Eligibility for membership in Beta Phi Mu is by invitation of the faculty from an American Library Association accredited professional degree program.
Many students earned graduate academic certificates in addition to their MLIS. Four students earned graduate academic certificates in “Advanced Management in Libraries and Information Agencies,” seven students completed the certificate in “Digital Content Management,” and six earned certificates in “Youth Services in Libraries and Information Agencies.”

The goal of this project was to increase the number of graduate educated librarians with the skills and knowledge to implement high quality, innovative, useful, and credible educational and informational programs in the US affiliated Pacific region. The group will improve library and information services throughout the islands by their higher level of understanding of what librarians can provide.

**Visualizing a Bright Future**

What do our experiences with this class means to us, the librarians and researchers, who are working across cultures? First and foremost we need to be culturally aware of ourselves. Then it is imperative that we get to know one another’s cultural differences and become aware of the technical difficulties we might encounter before we embark on joint projects. We need to understand the cultural background we each bring to a project, be clear about our expectations, understand the technical difficulties in difference countries, to be aware of the realities of working together, and be willing to step outside our comfort zone to work in unfamiliar ways. Librarians can have a significant impact by working with faculty and researchers to develop cultural sensitivity and new teaching methods to enable this diverse community of future lifelong learners and cross continent research.

“We all have different paths to journey upon, but these paths lead to and cross one another.” (Won-Pat speech)

**References**


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