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**First Annual Joint UK and USA Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
(SoTL)
Kensington Town Hall
June 6th 2001-06-01**

David Bawden and Lyn Robinson

Department of Information Science
City University London

Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB

Phone 0207 477 8390
Fax 0207 477 8584
E-mail dbawden@soi.city.ac.uk
 lynrobinson@cs.com

Title: **Multicultural library science education; towards distance learning**

Conference Theme Three: Outcomes

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Multicultural library science education; towards distance learning

This presentation describes a case study of an action research project, aimed at determining the appropriateness of distance learning provision for a short course in library/information science, aimed at postgraduate-level participants from a wide variety of cultural and professional backgrounds, and a wide geographic area.

The project was carried out under the auspices of the Summer University (SUN) programme of the Central European University (CEU), Budapest. CEU provides postgraduate courses, largely in the humanities and social sciences, primarily for students from central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Mongolia. SUN provides courses of between two and four weeks duration, with scholarships provided for students from the CEU region, and also from some countries of Africa and Central America; students from other countries are accepted on a fee-paying basis.

For four years, from 1997-2000, a two week SUN course in the library/information science area has been offered; originally entitled 'Libraries and the Internet', and in 2000 re-launched as 'Digital Literacy for Open Societies'. This has proved highly popular with teachers, researchers and practitioners from a total of 26 countries [1]. The course team comprises a mix of academics and practitioners from the UK, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Given the high demand for SUN courses, with usually about four applicants for every place, and the very large geographical region served by CEU, the University has, a strategic aim, to introduce distance learning as a major feature of its provision. The course team providing the Digital Literacy course were asked to investigate the feasibility of providing this course partly or wholly by distance learning in 2001, to act as a 'demonstrator' project for SUN. This course was chosen partly because of the expertise available within the course team, and partly because of the nature of the subject, which it was thought might lend itself well to a distance learning approach.

The project involves four stages:

- an analysis of the educational, technical and economic feasibility of providing distance learning to participants across this region - bearing in mind the very great differences in culture, access to technical resources, and educational and professional backgrounds, and in this subject; leading to a decision whether or not it should be attempted

assuming that the decision was to proceed with some form of distance learning

- choice of the distance learning environment to be used, optimal division between distance and face-to-face provision, and recasting of the learning materials and activities into a partly or wholly distance learning format
- delivery of the course
- evaluation of its success

The results of the first stage, which included an analysis of distance learning in the context of short courses for library/information science[2], were positive, and the conclusion from the second stage was that a mixed format of approximately equal contributions from face-to-face and distance learning was optimal.

The course will be delivered between June and October 2001, with an initial distance learning phase followed by a seven-day face-to-face phase in early July, and then a follow-up distance learning phase. The success of the initiative will be evaluated by a variety of means, including: comparison of the work produced by students this year and in previous years; analysis of use of the distance learning environment; comparative analysis of students' evaluation forms; in-depth interviews with students from this and previous years; and reflective evaluation by the tutors.

References

- [1] L Robinson, R Kupryte, P Burnett and D Bawden, Libraries and the Internet; a multi-national training course, Program, 2000, 34(2), 187-194
- [2] L Robinson and D Bawden, Distance learning and LIS professional development, to be published in Aslib Proceedings, 2001