

# UPOU Library Plans

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## About the University of the Philippines Open University

The University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) is the 5<sup>th</sup> autonomous university of the University of the Philippines System. It is the autonomous unit mandated to offer distance education programs. Other units offer residential, on-campus programs. The UPOU has 20 program offerings. These are in the fields of health sciences, education, management, entrepreneurship, and science. These programs are offered in 27 UPOU learning centers — 26 in the Philippines and one in Hong Kong.

Delivery of instruction is primarily through printed self-learning modules supplemented with other media including video, television, and computer networks. The students assume autonomy over the learning process. They study on their own time and place. Learning support is provided through study sessions in the learning centers where students may also access other instructional, supplementary materials, and reference books. To further support the information needs of our students, we send them copies of the materials they need or 'readers' before hand. In our Ph.D. program, students are provided with books which they can use for the whole semester.

We are aware of the importance of having a library of our own to support the information, reference, and research needs of our students. We know that our students need to have the knowledge and skills in locating, accessing, retrieving, evaluating, managing, and making use of information in a variety of fields. They will also need to be exposed to updated information.

How do we plan to support the information needs of our students?

## Factors Considered in Planning Our Library System

We consider the following factors in planning and setting up our library system.

### I. Distance Education Students' Geographical Location

Our students are scattered all over the Philippines. The cost of transportation is therefore quite expensive for students to travel from their province to the UPOU library. For most students going to the learning center is also a hassle because some have to cross bodies of water and pass through rough roads.

## **2. Access to Technology**

Most distance education students have no access to computers. Unstable electricity is also a problem in some areas in the Philippines. Means of communication — telephones, fast mails — are not reliable or available in some locations. Internet is also quite new in the Philippines. Internet service providers have not reached most of the islands in the Philippines, thus, some of our learning centers and students do not have access to the Internet.

## **3. Students Computer Background**

Technology literacy is also something we have to consider. Since not all students are reached by this technology, some students are still computer illiterate.

## **4. Students Study Time**

Our students mostly are part time students. They work from Monday to Friday, 8 hours a day. They are usually free during weekends or after office hours. It is most convenient for them to visit the library during their free time.

## **Possible Means of Library Services**

Considering all these factors, we came up with a list of possible means of providing library services. We considered each way's effects to the students and the problem we could encounter based on the experiences of other universities.

The following are the ways we can support our students' information needs: readers, learning centers' reading room, electronic library, and consortium with local libraries.

### **1. Readers**

Readers are compilation of information resources and readings that are provided to the students. As mentioned earlier, we are already using this method to provide the students the necessary information they need for their studies. This is the easiest and cheapest way of providing them more information.

This system has been effective in supporting our students in their learning. However, some reports manifested that providing or giving out all information affects the development of students learning skill. Watson (1997) reported that this approach encourages rote learning and retards the development of critical life-serving information seeking and information gathering skills. Students miss the opportunities for broadening intellectual stimulation that prescribed documents and predetermined readings do not support. It also hinders the acquisition of knowledge in tangential and related areas of interest to individual students, which access to quality library and information stimulates. The approach also reduces the need to develop contacts with libraries and staff. It hinders the development of providing quality library and information service to distance learner.

## **2. Learning Centers Reading Room**

A collection of references and textbooks will be stored in all the learning centers for immediate access for students. However, the book collections will be limited to references or text books required by the courses offered in the learning center. The books will be for room use only since only a limited copies of books will be provided. A reading room type library will be maintained in the learning centers because of the following reasons:

- 1) It would be very expensive to maintain a library in all learning centers especially when our enrollment increases. Purchasing books in multiple copies is very expensive for the university;
- 2) If we have all these libraries we would need to hire several librarians to keep and maintain the collections. The learning coordinator and staff will not be able to do all the tasks of administering the modules, exams, assignments, other communications while keeping the library;
- 3) Our learning centers do not have enough space to keep these materials. There is a minimal possibility for these learning centers to expand because we are utilizing the facilities of other institutions.

In our experience, some learning centers returned the text books sent to them when the course requiring the book is not offered. Their reason for returning is that they do not have space to store the books.

## **3. Electronic Library**

The UPOU plans to maintain its own library in the central administration. The catalogs and abstracts of the collection will be computerized. Students will have access to the catalogs and abstracts through the Internet. Request for copies of the information could be made through e-mail, phone, or fax. Materials could be sent through fast mail, e-mail file attachment or fax. Computers and modems would be made available in all learning centers. In places that do not have Internet Service Provider (ISP) they could dial up to the nearest place where there is an ISP.

To increase our collections we plan to join the Department of Science and Technology - Engineering and Science Education Project (DOST-ESEP). The DOST-ESEP is a consortium of eight academic libraries. It aims to increase the number of faculty members and research staff in eight academic institutions with masters and doctoral degrees in the following fields of specialization: biology, chemistry, computer science, earth science mathematics, molecular biology and biotechnology, pharmacology, physics, and statistics. The role of the library is to provide information support to the students, faculty, and research staff involved in the project. They develop the collection through cooperative acquisition of multimedia materials including electronic resources. They also acquired databases on CD-ROM for faster access of information. The library services were computerized.

The DOST-ESEP scheme is to stock books in the libraries depending on the subject areas assigned to them. When clients need materials housed in any of the libraries outside their own, copies are requested through phone or e-mail. Articles are sent by fax while books are fetched or delivered. Iden-

tification cards are issued to students of any member institution under the program to enable them to use all the member libraries. Under this networking scheme resources are shared by the 'holdings' library with the 'accessing' library.

#### **4. Linkage with Local Libraries**

For students who are far from the learning centers and who have good local libraries near their places could probably visit and utilize these libraries. A linkage between UPOU and other libraries could be established. The method of borrowing and loaning used by the DOST-ESEP could be adopted by the UPOU for its linkages with local libraries.

There could be objection from these libraries for reason of overloading their reference staff, which could be a disadvantage for their own students. However, linking with other local libraries could be a good opportunity for these libraries to improve their library services. Since electronic library is still rare in the Philippines it is an opportunity for local libraries to be exposed to this technology. The experience could be a start for local libraries to improve and develop their libraries to a more advance system using new technology.

In summary, the UPOU plans to use all these system simultaneously to make up for the insufficiency of one system. For example not all students can visit their learning centers regularly. As an alternative, students can just go to the member library nearest to them. The learning center would also be used as a center for communicating to the central library. Computers with modems and internet access would be made available in the learning centers. Readers packages will be minimized to encourage students to utilize the libraries. Systematization of the four systems will be an efficient way of supporting the information and reference needs of the students.

Details on how to make this plan systematic and efficient are still being studied by the UPOU. Attending conferences such as the AAOU Round Table for Librarians would help us a lot in planning our library system.

#### **References**

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