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## Stepping into e-Learning: An Area and International Studies Librarianship Course Goes Online at Indiana University

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### **Abstract:**

*In the spring of 2016, the Area Studies Department of the Indiana University Libraries taught a semester long, online graduate level seminar, entitled Area and International Studies Librarianship. This collaboratively taught course is the outcome of a recognized national need for training for new area studies librarians. The department taught the course for the first time in 2015, but transitioned to the online format in order to make the course available to a broader student audience. In the transformation from in-person to online, the department faced multiple challenges, from incorporating international collaborators, to facing new instructional technologies. Throughout the experience, the six-person group of co-instructors relied on their strong history of collaboration and a pedagogy directed at actively engaging students and individualized study.*

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*An abstract with 100-300 words should appear on the first page, after the name(s) of the author(s) and the contact information of the corresponding author(s). In a chapter titled "Abstract:" (without chapter number. It should be a summary of your paper, single-spaced, with Times New Roman font, 11 point size and italics (assuming the paper is written with Latin-script). Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic), Chinese (Simplified Chinese) and Russian language scripts should use the layout of this template and choose suitable fonts and font sizes.*

**Keywords:** area studies librarianship, online teaching, collaborative teaching, e-learning, international studies librarianship.

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In the United States, online education has taken root not only in the private business sector but also in higher education. E-learning has flourished in recent years as a viable and lucrative means for providing education and training to both academic and business constituencies. A recent report by Docebo, a provider of e-learning products and services for employees in the private business sector, predicted “fast and significant” growth in the e-learning market on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> During the 2011-2016 period, Docebo estimates an annual average growth rate in the order of 7.6%, representing a steady increase in revenue from US\$35.6 billion in 2011 to US\$51.5 billion by 2016. These trends vary by world region and, within regions, by countries. With a growth rate of 17.3%, Asia leads the e-learning global market, followed by Eastern Europe (16.9%), Africa (15.2%), and Latin America (14.6%). Within Asia, growth is led by India, China, and Australia, whereas Russia is driving the growth in Eastern Europe. Developing countries have adopted e-learning as an alternative to promote literacy and provide greater educational opportunities to their populations.

While the growth rate of e-learning in Western Europe and the United States has been the lowest in recent years, the e-learning market in these two regions is not only mature but it has the highest revenues, especially in the United States. Compared to Asia (17.3%), the annual growth rate of the US at 4.4% seems to be low. However, in terms of revenue, the US far outpaces the Asian market, with projected revenue of US\$27 billion in 2016 as opposed to US\$11.5 billion in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

From 2002 to 2014, the Chronicle of Higher Education reports, the percentage of students who took at least one course online rose from 9% to 28%.<sup>3</sup> Increasingly, college and university faculty members are engaging with online education, improving the quality of courses in post-secondary e-learning.

As higher education continues to make inroads and develop the e-learning environment, those of us who take international learning into consideration can easily see the opportunities that the online format affords to learners across the globe. It is through this lens that the Area

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<sup>1</sup> “E-Learning Market Trends & Forecast 2014-2016: A Report by Docebo” (March 2014), 4, accessed May 31, 2016, <https://www.docebo.com/landing/contactform/elearning-market-trends-and-forecast-2014-2016-docebo-report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> “E-Learning market Trends,” 11, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Phil Hill, “Distance Ed’s Second Act,” The Chronicle of Higher Education, May 24, 2016, accessed May 31, 2016, <http://chronicle.com/article/Distance-Ed-s-Second-Act/236571/>.

Studies Department of Indiana University (IU) Libraries approached the development of an online course on Area and International Studies Librarianship.

Pedagogically, online teaching requires a re-examination of the appropriate methods to achieve learning outcomes. Course design is a paramount concern. Both independent and collaborative learning are viewed as core components of today's online learning experience, and the pedagogy that informs these courses is seen to undergo significant transformation.<sup>4</sup> An online environment characterized by place and time independence, as well as access to interactive and collaborative resources and tools, from blogs to learning managements systems, introduces elements that require the adoption of teaching approaches that diverge from the conventional models used in a physical classroom setting. In this online environment, the pedagogical model shifts from a conventional transmission approach to a learner-centered approach. In the transmission approach, the educator generally exerts the role of the provider of knowledge, communicating content on students in a unidirectional way. In learner-centered, students play a significant role as active learners, while educators serve as curators, stimulating learners to explore and create knowledge. Built on interactive and collaborative premises, our Area and International Studies Librarianship course exemplifies this learner-centered pedagogy.

The 3-credit graduate seminar is taught through Indiana University's Department of Information and Library Science. The idea for the course began to emerge in 2011, when six members of the department worked on a SPEC Kit<sup>5</sup> survey, published through the Association of Research Libraries. The findings of the survey exposed that many academic libraries lack qualified candidates who have both language proficiency and library training, key competencies necessary for area and international studies librarians.

In 2013, the need for training for future area studies librarians was more clearly developed during a two-day workshop on Area and International Studies Librarianship that was hosted by the IU Libraries Area Studies Department. One of three themes for this nationally attended event was the recruiting and training of area studies librarians.<sup>6</sup> As stressed by workshop participants, it has always been difficult to fill the area studies and international librarian positions because of the lack of qualified candidates. Workshop speakers raised questions about training and necessary competencies for the future of area and international studies librarianship. These ongoing concerns illuminated a nationally recognized need in the field.

From this recognized need, we developed a multi-year collaborative project, including the online course. The Area and International Studies Librarianship course is intended to provide an overview of issues related to area studies librarianship, including collection development, reference and outreach, partnerships and collaboration, website development and access, traditional information sources as well as emerging technologies, and space. The students don't need to be fully conversant in any area studies languages in order to do well. However, it is designed to prepare students for training as an area studies subject specialist; therefore, knowledge of global and international studies is preferred. Our content focused on important

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia Arinto, "Issues and Challenges in Open and Distance e-Learning: Perspectives from the Philippines," *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 17, no.2 (2016), accessed May 31, 2016, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v17i2.1913>; Evrim Baran, "The Transformation of Online Teaching Practice: Tracing Successful Online Teaching in Higher Education" (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2011), accessed May 31, 2016, <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3134&context=etd>.

<sup>5</sup> Wookjin Cheun, et al. *Collecting Global Resources*. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Area Studies Department, IU Libraries. "Collaboration, Advocacy, and Recruitment: Area and International Studies Librarianship Workshop," 2013, accessed June 9, 2016, <http://www.indiana.edu/~libarea/main.html>

tools for working with area and international studies collections, and an understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing area studies librarianship. In the spring of 2015, we collaboratively taught the course as a traditional, in-person class.

The next step was to transition to an online format, which was supported by a Mellon Innovating International Research, Teaching and Collaboration (MIIRT) Innovative Curriculum Development Fellowship, awarded in February 2015. This fellowship allowed for even greater collaboration among the members of the department, as well as with national and international colleagues. Additionally, it required restructuring the course syllabus, learning how to navigate multiple technological challenges, and marketing to a wider student body.

We used the award to accompany each other to conferences outside of our respective area studies' fields. Between March and December of 2015, all six members of the department attended various area studies librarians' association conferences. This built on the collaborative goal of engaging in discussions with national colleagues about the project, provided the opportunity for ongoing feedback, and enabled the recording of some of our guest speaker lectures that we planned to use in our online course.

As we faced the technological reality of teaching online for the first time, we began engaging with other units on campus for some education of our own. Each of us attended training sessions for the new learning management system on campus. Additionally, we invited key education and technology experts on campus to work with us in our preparations. Some of us also attended extended workshops and training for online course design, and for specific software that we expected to use in our video recording and editing process.

Part of the process of expanding our collaboration to the national level, and of redesigning our syllabus to reflect national area and international studies concerns, was accomplished through a two-day workshop with six invited national colleagues. During this workshop, we held in-depth discussions on themes, topics, and specific skills that we could teach through our course, along with expanding our list of potential expert guest lecturers.

While this workshop gave us insight and direction for the content of the course, we still had to grapple with one of the major challenges of e-learning specifically. As one professor in higher education stated:

A truly memorable college class, even a large one, is a collaboration between teacher and students. It's a one-time-only event. Learning at its best is a collective enterprise, something we've known since Socrates. You can get knowledge from an Internet course if you're highly motivated to learn. But in real courses the students and teachers come together and create an immediate and vital community of learning. A real course creates intellectual joy, at least in some. I don't think an Internet course ever will. Internet learning promises to make intellectual life more sterile and abstract than it already is — and also, for teachers and for students alike, far more lonely.<sup>7</sup>

Course design, a key element for any course, would be crucial in combatting these recognized issues, and in finding ways to create a community of learning within an online environment. Having just completed teaching our traditional, in-person version of the class, we understood some of the challenges that we would face. During this class, we witnessed and participated in lively students-led discussions of assigned articles, in which it was easy to hold students

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Edmundson, "The Trouble with Online Education," New York Times, July 19, 2012, accessed June 9, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/opinion/the-trouble-with-online-education.html> .

accountable for completing course materials. In the online environment, this feature is replaced by online discussion; students work on course materials and reply to questions on assignments anywhere and anytime. Instead of classroom reports, lectures, discussion, and in-person accountability, the class became a combination of video lectures, online discussions, guest speaker presentations, and video conference sessions. The flexibility and the freedom for time management is thrilling at the beginning. The reality is that both students and instructors have to adhere to a well-structured syllabus.

As with any class, our goal was to be clear about grading, assignment requirements, and deadlines. For our online class, we found this doubly important because of the lack of face-to-face interactions. We sent weekly reminders for deadlines, and provided a short written or video introduction each week in order to give the student's some context as they transitioned to a new topic, and to provide an overview of that week's requirements. This served as a way to double-check our own preparation of materials for that week, and gave us the opportunity to make any last-minute revisions or additions to that week's readings, videos, assignments, and discussion topics. As instructors rotated from week to week, this also helped us re-engage with the material for the course, and became an ongoing record of any changes to the materials.

In our course redesign, we strove to take full advantage of the benefits offered by the online environment in order to balance the limitations. Our students were able to interact with experienced speakers and librarians from other institutions through video conference sessions. Strictly speaking, they had six co-instructors, but through these sessions, our students received the expertise and multiple viewpoints of numerous colleagues beyond the borders of our institution. Our redesigned syllabus featured twelve recorded guest lectures, and three synchronous video conferences that featured Melissa Gasparotto (Rutgers) on search engine optimization for research librarians, Vickie Doll (Kansas) on collection evaluation and assessment, and Jon Guillian (Kansas) on assessment issues and processes for area studies materials.

Our collaborative teaching enabled us to assign a semester-long project that gave the students the opportunity to interact with a librarian one-on-one. Their major assignment for the class was an interview and research project, through which they could focus more deeply on a region and subject of their choosing. Students were allowed to work with any of us, or even with another practicing area or international studies librarian. This built meaningful engagement for the students, and provided them with the opportunity for direct interactions, either online, over the phone, or in-person.

The use of online discussions in place of the in-person seminar discussion is a critical piece to address in e-learning. Because the instructors of this course were committed to making it available beyond the confines of the university campus, we knew we would need to find a way to navigate this issue. Regular synchronous discussions were also not ideal, as they would add another layer of difficulties for international students, and limit the benefits of e-learning's flexibility. Instead, we opted for a regular, weekly asynchronous discussion board.

Each week, students were given two to three questions based on that week's readings and videos. They were given a deadline to write a response to each question, then a second deadline to write replies to each other's responses. At the start of the semester, the students were given very specific guidelines and expectations for their discussion board posts. This included word length requirements, as well as more general 'netiquette' for the online environment, such as using appropriate writing style rather than emoticons and text-speak. These guidelines resulted in high-quality, well-written, and thoughtful responses from the

students. In fact, overall we found that discussion responses in the online version of our class were of a better quality, and stayed more on topic, than in-person discussions.

The new challenge, however, was for the instructors to keep pace with responding to the discussion boards. We remained flexible about these responses so that each week's instructors could approach it in a way that they felt would be most manageable and most successful. At first, we attempted to keep up with all of the student responses and insert ourselves where we felt it was appropriate, either to answer questions or to encourage further thinking. However, it was challenging to keep up with the discussion board in a timely manner, since there were only two days between when students were active on the discussion board, and when they moved on to the next week's assignments. We found it difficult to remain active with all of the various conversations on the board, and to do it in a timely manner that allowed students to read our posts before moving on.

As the semester went on, we attempted two other methods: one a cumulative written response, and the other a video response. Both of these discussion responses allowed the instructors a bit more time for responding, and served to synthesize issues that came up on the discussion boards. We found that these methods effectively allowed us to engage with the topics, while not getting mired in the ongoing back and forth of the student discussions. We also used this as an opportunity to clarify any confusions or answer any important questions that arose in the context of the discussions.

The other major piece of ongoing work for the instructors were the weekly video lectures, and the guest lectures that supplemented them. With guidance and training from other units on campus, we were able to create our weekly video lectures using standard best practices for online learning. We gave guest speakers best practices guidelines, as well. For example, we kept our videos short at ten or fifteen minutes total, and broke longer videos into segments when needed. We also kept the videos engaging by generally including a picture-in-picture format that included the speaker's face. We aimed for clarity in slides used in the lectures, and gave introductory overviews of the information about to be covered in the video.

As we went through our technology trainings in preparation for the course, we quickly discovered that we would not find a single recording software to suit everyone. Fortunately, options abound, and this worked in our favor as we sought out and created recordings with national and international colleagues for guest lectures. By working with multiple technologies to create videos, we were able to offer guest speakers flexibility to suit their needs and preferences. Guest speakers were able to create the videos themselves and send us a file if they preferred. On the other hand, some speakers were more comfortable having the course instructors control the recording, which we were able to do in-person or through online meeting software. Other guest speakers asked for some guidance and training, recorded on their own, then came to the instructors with any troubleshooting needs, or handed off a rough cut video for us to edit. By remaining flexible and willing to work with multiple technologies, the instructors enabled a smoother experience for our guests, while giving our students access to broad expertise.

From the gestation of the idea for the course, to the actual development and teaching of it, to its online transformation, the centrality of collaboration throughout this project is hard to overstate. This level of collaboration is in keeping with our department's long-lasting appreciation of collaboration as a *modus operandi* for projects. Beyond the previously mentioned publication and workshop projects, we engaged as a team in a web archiving project to preserve web resources pertaining to endangered languages, and have been co-presenters at IU Libraries' annual intra-library conference for several years. At the same time, the choice of a collaborative approach to this course reflects our appreciative awareness of

the ongoing national discussions about research libraries in the 21st century, and some of the more salient conclusions emerging from them. One recent national conference of librarians, scholars, and other stakeholders might well capture the preponderant atmosphere of the discussions thus far: noting the current environment of rapid and transformational change, which largely militates against boundaries and accentuates interdependence, the conference report recommended that collaboration should “undergird” all development plans.<sup>8</sup> We believe that this resonance with the national conversation surrounding collaboration was one factor that facilitated our communication with our library administration, and helped garner their support.

A deep and innovative collaboration allowed for many of the benefits of the course itself. First, our departmental collaboration was beneficial for us as course developers and instructors as it decreased workload, especially in the e-learning environment where new course development can be very time consuming. As one presenter at the 2013 Indiana Workshop put it, “people in [our] positions are being stretched mighty thin.”<sup>9</sup> Additionally, our collaboration allowed for in-depth, area-specific knowledge to be taught throughout the course, and enabled students to specialize in their area of interest. In the disconnected environment that e-learning can create, collaboration allowed our students to receive one-on-one attention that was intentionally and individually focused.

Second, our collaborations extended far beyond our own department, and offered other benefits to our students, as well. Through the MIIRT grant, national colleagues were able to assist us in defining core and critical issues for area studies librarianship. Their input guaranteed that our course would address national concerns, better reflecting the needs of our students. The e-learning environment itself made it possible to extend collaborations even further. In our recorded guest lectures and our synchronous virtual meetings, we were able to include nationally known and international experts in area studies librarianship. The synchronous sessions with librarians who authored articles assigned for the class enabled the students to interact with and ask questions of the authors themselves. Through e-learning, we brought global expertise directly to the students.

Last but not least, our collaborative community included traditional institutional members. We found that institutional support was critical to the development of this course and its transformation to an online format. This was available to us not only in the form of the MIIRT fellowship, but also through key on-campus resources that helped us navigate multiple technological challenges. For our potential students, we found institutional support to be critical. We received a large number of queries from potential students and supervisors of potential students at both the national and international level, however ultimately those who were able to enroll were those with institutional support.

The goal of the Area and International Studies Librarianship course project was to address the need for the training of a new generation of area studies librarians. Librarians responsible for area studies collections face a need for diverse qualifications: they must be competent collection managers who also have strong subject backgrounds in the disciplines, and they need to be conversant in current technology as well as new trends in publishing in their respective world areas. With the need for such a diverse skill set, area studies librarian

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<sup>8</sup> Council on Library and Information Resources, *No Brief Candle: Reconceiving Research Libraries for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2008), p. 10;12, accessed June 3, 2016, <https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub142/pub142.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Davis, “Response 2.” Talk presented at the Collaboration, Advocacy, and Recruitment: Area and International Studies Librarianship Workshop, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, October 2013, accessed June 3, 2016, <http://www.indiana.edu/~libarea/response2.html>.

positions are notoriously difficult to fill, and as a generation of area studies librarians is nearing retirement, the need for the training of their successors becomes more pressing. This is not a new realization. Programs such as CLIR and Mellon Fellowships for the training of area studies librarians, for example, have tried to address this problem in the past, and some library schools offer dual degree options for students to major in library science and an area studies discipline. However, perhaps due to the relatively low enrollment of students interested in area studies library careers, a library school program tailored specifically to the needs of potential new area librarians does, to our knowledge, not exist. With the transformation of our Area and International Studies Librarianship course into an online class, we wanted to give Indiana University students as well as the growing number of students across the United States interested in area and international studies librarianship the opportunity to acquire the library skills needed to qualify them as area studies librarians. Transforming our class into an online course not only meant a complete restructuring of its content to fit the online environment. It also meant that we needed to structure it as a highly collaborative project designed to incorporate the expertise of experienced area librarians and library administrators beyond IU. We believe that we have succeeded in our effort – student evaluations and feedback from colleagues at the national level all indicate that the class fulfills a missing piece in the training of new area studies librarians.

Although initially conceived to address the lack of new area studies librarians, expressions of interest in response to the online course announcement suggest that the need for such a class among diverse student populations is greater than anticipated and might require a more differentiated approach. For example, in addition to the expected students enrolled in both area studies and library science programs, librarians already in the profession were interested in the class as a professional development opportunity. Other categories of interested groups include Ph.D. students in an area studies discipline interested in switching to a library career, as well as international students. Clearly, there is a wide range of students whose interest in area studies librarianship cannot be met in the traditional on-campus curriculum framework. Our online class is a first step to address this need. Possible future steps might be the development of online programs and/or certificate options in partnership with area and international studies campus units.