

Reflective Essay:

Link+ as an Essential Tool for Distance Learning

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LIBR 200-21, Information and Society, November 16, 2010

I am a first year masters student in library and information science at the University of California, San José. Before classes began this fall, I had never paid attention to Link+. Now that I am nearing the end of my first semester I have come to depend on Link+ as one of the crucial sources of research materials for my on-going research.

Link+ is an interlibrary loan service that connects 40 participating academic and public library systems across California and Nevada (Alameda County Library, n.d.). Books can be checked out for three weeks with a possibility of one renewal and there is a late fee of \$1 per book per day and \$115 replacement fee for lost or damaged books as stated on the warning sticker on each Link+ book.

Before September, all I knew about the service was what I had read on the sign stuck to either of the automated check-in kiosks outside: "Return Link+ materials in the drop box to the left" every time I returned books to the library. It wasn't until I started my term paper research that I came to appreciate the importance of Link+ to my success as a distance learner.

Journal articles are easy to download through the King Library and are available in HTML and PDF. Books though are trickier. As a distance learner, my local public library branch is where I can access the books I need for research. If I am lucky, my branch has the book I needs. If I am only slightly lucky, a different branch does and I can put the book on hold and have it be delivered to my branch. The local countywide collection is good as long as I don't need the sort of books most often found in an academic library setting.

Link+ helps bridge the gap between my academic needs and the convenience of my local public library branch. When a search through the online catalog returns no results, I see instead "Your book would be here" with a secondary link: "Search Link+". With a click through on the Search Link+ link, I can see if my book is accessible through the service. If it is, I tell the site

which library system I am a member of, my library card number and which branch I wish to have the book delivered to. Then I get a confirmation screen that tells me where the book is coming from. From there I can go back to my library account and track the book's progress through the steps: request, en route and available for pick up. Most often the books I request end up coming from the King Library at San José State.

The Link+ process takes only a couple days for the book to arrive and most Link+ books seem to arrive faster than the intra-branch holds do. My first time picking up a Link+ book I wasn't sure how to do it but the librarian at the circulation desk was able to help and find my book. Now as the semester has progressed I'm typically making two trips a week to pick up Link+ books.

Link+ has for me moved beyond a novelty to a regular part of how I use my library. While the vast majority of them have been research requests, I am also finding it a useful service for picking up books that have been on my wish list for years. Link+ has therefore helped to make distance learning possible.

References

Alameda County Library (n. d.). "Link+ Interlibrary Loan" Available at

<http://www.aclibrary.org/library/default.asp?topic=Library&cat=>

[LinkplusInterlibraryLoan](http://www.aclibrary.org/library/default.asp?topic=Library&cat=LinkplusInterlibraryLoan) and accessed November 11, 2010