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## Leverage Locally for Effective Distance Education

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# Leverage Locally for Effective Distance Education

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Contemplating the theme of “doing more with less”, I asked classmates in my fully online MLIS program what they felt they had “less of” than their on-campus peers. They cited:

- Interaction with other students
- Interaction with instructors
- The physical library’s resources
- In-person reference assistance
- Opportunities to get to know professors well enough to ask for references and develop informal mentoring relationships

Despite these disadvantages, there are ways an online library science student can do more with what he or she has:

## **Go to classes, workshops, and events for librarians offered in your community**

These are great ways to meet and interact with librarians and library science students. In my first month of library school, I attended a free PubMed Training offered by the National Library of Medicine. At this training I met the librarian who offered me my first paid library position. Northwest Central (<http://www.nwcentral.org/>) lists library classes, workshops, conferences and events. Email lists for local and regional professional library associations are good resources as well. The more of these you can attend in person, the more relationships you can develop with other students and professionals.

## **Attend conferences**

Conferences, both large and small, provide opportunities to meet other library students and professionals, while learning more about practices in the field. Don’t be deterred if conference attendance is not in your student budget. Find and apply for conference scholarships and travel stipends. Professional organizations offer them to students, as do many LIS programs. My first conference was the annual conference of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of Medical Library Association. Because it was a smaller conference, the atmosphere there was conducive to meeting new people and engaging in conversations with them. I met librarians who encouraged me to contact them after the conference about volunteering and interning.

## **Volunteer and intern**

This can help you to develop informal mentoring relationships. Additionally, this work provides access to a physical library, something that many of my classmates wished they had. Seek out unadvertised internships and volunteer positions where you want to work. Volunteering and interning can be an excellent way to explore different areas of librarianship. Talk to your intern or volunteer supervisor about what your duties will entail, and offer to help in areas where you see a need.



Near the end of my academic library reference internship I heard that the consumer health reference section hadn't been weeded in a few decades. Seeing an opportunity, I volunteered to do the weeding project. Armed with the collection development policy, I learned as I went, meeting periodically with librarians to answer the questions I had. When the project was done, the library had a spreadsheet with my recommendations of which books to: keep, toss, replace with newer editions, move to the circulating collection, and also, new title suggestions to update the collection. Through this project, I gained more experience and a better understanding of yet another area of librarianship.

In conclusion, make the most of being a distance learning student through resourcefulness and involvement in activities going on where you live. Go to professional workshops and classes. Apply for conference scholarships. Volunteer and intern. Find opportunities to participate in your local community of librarians. Let your inner librarian shine! 🌟



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