

*Hurricanes Close Libraries but the Service Doesn't Stop*

It has been a difficult Fall here in South Louisiana. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita interrupted the education of over 75,000<sup>1</sup> higher education students, displaced faculty and staff, damaged campus facilities and ruined library inventory. That's the bad news. The good news is that most sites are planning to hold classes in January 2006 and some were able to offer online courses for the Fall 2005 semester.

Right after Katrina came through, the LOUIS staff gathered to decide how we could help these sites. The LOUIS Disaster Recovery Plan was written to cover emergencies at our office but it did not include procedures to follow if our customers libraries were damaged and closed for an extended period of time. Our office did not receive any damage and the libraries that use the Sirsi Unicorn Library Automation System stored on our servers, still had an online catalog available for their patrons. We added a note to their catalog search screen stating that the site was closed but the catalog was still available for searching. The patrons were unable to check out the physical materials but they could get access to online resources like NetLibrary.

One of the most important items on our agenda was to create a web page with links for our system administrators. We included information about how we could handle the reports that their systems would continue to process and gave them options for handling the electronic load of government document and other bibliographic records that would continue to arrive from the vendors. The page also included links to special Katrina pages on the ALA and Solinet web sites plus a list of alternate phone numbers and e-mail addresses for the system administrators and other displaced library personnel.

The LOUIS office also began receiving calls from vendors wanting to help. EBSCO and Elsevier provided access to additional medical databases that were not part of any contract. These were resources that were needed by the health-care workers assisting patients in the temporary clinics and hospitals that were operating across South Louisiana. The

information was distributed through statewide listserves.

Other databases licensed by the libraries and LOUIS were still available for library patrons but the library web pages that contained the links to the web sites were unavailable. Directing the patrons to the LOUIS database links proved to be difficult. It wasn't long before our contacts at the closed campuses began the process of retrieving their servers and relocating them to a different location or recreating their web pages on new servers. In some cases these library staff members were in different states but still working and committed to serving their patrons.

The generosity of the undamaged libraries has been tremendous. Many sites were able to provide office space for the displaced library staff members and we saw University of New Orleans staff working from Louisiana State University Libraries, Delgado Community College staff at Baton Rouge Community College, and Southern University New Orleans staff at the Southern University campus.

In the coming months, we are looking forward to working with and helping libraries as they evaluate the damage to their collections, begin the recovery process, update their catalogs, and check out materials.

<sup>1</sup>Louisiana Board of Regents Statewide Student Profile System. "Student Credit Hour Production." Fall 2004-2005. Louisiana Board of Regents. 5 Dec. 2005

<<http://as400.regents.state.la.us/pdfs/ssps/fall04/spschfte204.PDF>>.

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