

FLORIDA DISTANCE LEARNING REFERENCE AND REFERRAL CENTER

Planning

Florida Distance Learning Reference & Referral Center
Library Services for Florida's Distance Learners

Ask-A-Librarian
1-888-772-8033


Student
Services

Faculty
Services

Florida
Libraries

About
the RRC

Site
Map



This Chat Reference service is for Florida's distance learning students. The Reference & Referral Center serves students enrolled in distance learning courses at 73 regionally accredited colleges and universities in Florida. If you're not a distance learner at one of [these schools](#), use our [County-by-County Library Locator](#) to see what libraries are located in your area, and visit or contact their reference desk for help.

Getting Started:

1. Type your name (with no spaces) in the box below labeled **Your nickname:**
2. Type your email address in the box labelled **Your email address:**
3. The box labelled **Room** should read **#rrcdesk**, leave this as-is.
4. Click on **Connect**.

Once connected, type in the text box and hit **Enter** or **Return** to send your message.

To quit, type **/quit** and press **Enter**.

Connect to RRChat! [Chat Help](#) [Chat Hours](#) [Do's and Don'ts](#) [Contact Us](#) [RRC Home](#) [New Browser Window](#) [RRChat Survey](#)

Your nickname:

Your email address:

Room:

Please specify a nick:

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University of South Florida, Tampa Campus Library
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History and Mission

The Florida Public Postsecondary Distance Learning Institute was founded in July 1996 to coordinate distance learning efforts among the state's public universities and community colleges. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on July 12, 1996, by the State Board of Community Colleges and the Board of Regents outlining the Institute's purpose, governing board, administration, and duties. The Institute ceased operations and was replaced by the Florida Virtual Campus (FVC), housed at the University of South Florida (USF) in 1999, as a result of the "Virtual Institution Design Team Report" issued in January

1999. The report includes detailed recommendation for academic programs and services; student services; institutional, faculty, and staff support; marketing and promotion; administration; location; staffing; and a budget of \$360,000 for fiscal year 1999-2000. FVC maintains an online course catalog of distance learning courses offered in Florida, a listing of degree and certificate programs, and links to resources including library services.

In 1997 the Florida Distance Learning Library Initiative (FDLLI) was established to provide new, statewide programs that would leverage services already provided by existing libraries (Smith). More disparate and decentralized than KYVL, FDLLI coordinates the efforts of the various institutions and organizations within Florida that provide library service to distance learning students and faculty.

FDLLI consists of five components: reference service through the Florida Distance Learning Reference and Referral Center (RRC), instruction (also provided by RRC), access to electronic resources through FirstSearch, document delivery through a statewide courier service managed by the Tampa

<http://sun6.dms.state.fl.us/institute/mou.html>

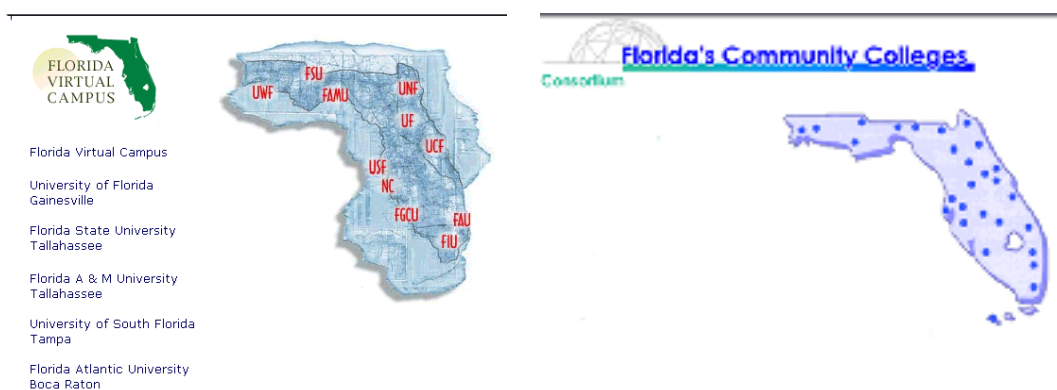
<http://sun6.dms.state.fl.us/institute/vdtreport.html>

Florida Distance Learning
Library [http://
dlis.dos.state.fl.us/dlli](http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/dlli)

Reference and Referral
Center (RRC) [http://
dlis.dos.state.fl.us/dlli/
reference.html](http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/dlli/reference.html)

Bay Library Consortia (TBLC), and reciprocal borrowing privileges. RRC “provides centralized reference and referral services to students enrolled in off-campus courses offered by the State of Florida’s public universities and community colleges. The Center’s services are designed to complement the primary services provided by the distance learner’s local library” (RRC mission statement). To accomplish this mission, RRC has two primary goals: to provide access for all distance learners to library reference services, and to develop and maintain a database of information regarding resources and services relevant to distance learners. RRC resulted from the winning RFP response to the initial proposal to establish and provide the services of the distance learning library initiative reference referral center. Since its establishment, RRC has become the *de facto* clearinghouse for FDLI.

Participation



Institutions participating in FDLI include the 10 public universities of the State University System (SUS), 28 public community colleges, and 35 independent colleges and universities (for whom access is limited to RRC services).

Management and Funding

Organizational Structure

Distance learning policy within Florida is made by FVC, which also maintains the electronic catalog of distance learning courses. FDLI is managed by the Distance Learning Library Initiative Steering Committee with representation from the College Center for Library Automation (CCLA), the Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA), the SUS libraries, the community college libraries, the State Librarian, and the Director of the Florida Public Postsecondary Distance Learning Institute. Plans for a central FDLI office were cancelled due to funding constraints during the second year of the initiative. RRC, the only component with regular staffing at the time, filled the resulting void by taking on the unofficial role of clearinghouse for FDLI information. This role has thus far been primarily informational as questions are funneled through the Director. RRC, however, has taken over the FDLI Web site with plans to update and keep it current. The RRC Director reports to the Dean of the University of South Florida (USF) Library System and annually to the Joint FCLA/CCLA meeting as well as providing reports on request to the FDLI Steering Committee.

www.floridavirtualcampus.org

Reference assistance, however, remains the primary focus of RRC as part of FDLI. RRC is housed at USF, whose successful response to an RFP established the Center in 1997. Staffing includes five full-time librarians and two part-time graduate assistants from the USF School of Library and Information Science. Although initially a separate service, Library User Training Service was merged with RRC when its coordinator left.

Funding

First-year funding of \$2 million in 1997-98 was approved by the Florida Distance Learning Network (FDLN), the Board of Regents, and the Board of the Florida Institute on Public Postsecondary Distance Learning to support startup of FDLI. This appropriation funded the subscription to a set of common databases, two document delivery pilot projects, the planning for reciprocal borrowing agreements, and the establishment of a reference center and user training service.

An additional \$2 million was authorized for electronic database access during the second year with additional funds for RRC and user training provided by the Institute on Public Postsecondary Distance Learning. Instability of first- and second-year funding forced the prioritization of salaries so that high-quality service would be available. Surplus funds from the FDLN assisted and resulted in the extension of RRC service to Florida's private colleges and universities. Third-year funding brought more stability with direct funding so long-term planning could take place. A matching LSTA grant funded the document delivery and courier service. Funds for RRC are currently distributed from the state through the FVC, which also negotiates contracts for course management software. As of publication, funding for the entire initiative was in jeopardy and it is uncertain how and if it will continue beyond December 2001.

Technology Infrastructure

Similar to KYVL, FDLI leveraged existing systems to make up its technology infrastructure. NOTIS is used as the FCLA gateway and DRA as the CCLA gateway to FDLI indexes as well as institution-specific catalogs and databases. Authentication is handled separately by the two consortia; FCLA runs a proxy server and CCLA uses ID validation. Individual universities within the state university system use IP address authentication for institution-specific indexes and individual community colleges distribute passwords for individual subscriptions.

FDLI has experienced similar technical difficulties as KYVL in integrating and bridging various systems. In FDLI's case, sharing of patron information to allow reciprocal borrowing was a difficulty due to the use of different vendor systems. A work-around was created by the systems group. The two consortia are in the process of selecting a new ILS that will be shared.

A University of South Florida Web server was initially used to house RRC services; it migrated in January 2000 to a new UNIX server maintained by the USF Library Systems Department. Although all RRC staff are responsible for Web page coding, one librarian is primarily responsible for Web site maintenance. No guidelines for management or maintenance of the site are in place; templates are used for content creation with the expectation that style sheets will be implemented during the next site revision.

www.notisnet.org

www.otra.com

Content and Service Development

Service provision reflects the distributed nature of FDLI with focus on coordination and enhancement of existing services at participating institutions. The community colleges and universities maintain separate online systems through separate consortia. Fewer common indexes are subscribed to through FDLI than KYVL, and access to institution-specific databases is required either through the community college or state university system libraries. The courier service is managed by Tampa Bay Library Consortium and the reference and instruction services are managed by RRC. RRC also maintains the information pages for FDLI, acting as a central repository.

Catalog, Indexes, and Databases

CCLA maintains the common catalog (DRA) for the state's two-year community colleges while FCLA maintains the common catalog (NOTIS) for the State University System (SUS). Both systems provide a gateway to FDLI indexes as well as other consortial and institution-specific databases.

During the first year of FDLI, Encyclopedia Britannica and 61 FirstSearch databases were accessible. Although databases were available for free to participating libraries, some demand was placed on individual institutions to provide additional hardware necessary for access. During the second year database access was cut due to price increases, but during the third year, additional funding became available for indexes to be restored. Appropriation language was also changed to require the state library to pay for the costs of public library subscriptions, resulting in their eliminating academic indexes. The effects on distance learners was hoped to be mitigated by remote access availability in public libraries through authentication methods.

Resource Sharing

Two pilot projects for document delivery took place during the first year of FDLI. UMI patron-initiated document delivery ended in May 1998 after three months due to low use and the finding that almost all requested items were available from Florida libraries. The second pilot, a statewide courier service among more than 100 primary and more than 75 secondary sites throughout the state, aimed to improve ILL within the state and provide courier service to all state public academic and most public libraries. This service resulted from a successful response to an RFP by the Tampa Bay Library Consortium in 1998. The courier service has since received funding through a Library Services and Technology Act grant from the State Library. Procedural information for the project, including delivery list, procedures manual, and statistics reporting forms are maintained on the TBLC Web site.

Reciprocal borrowing was established with the signing of the Library Borrowing Privileges Agreement by all FDLI institutions in 1999. This agreement set the ground rules for fiscal responsibility but left many details to be decided locally. As a result, some institutions have extended distance learners the same privileges as students enrolled in their institutions but others have instituted more limited services.

UMI is a division of Proquest Information and Learning (www.umi.com or www.proquest.com). Patrons may request interlibrary loans directly (electronically, through the UMI (Proquest) databases.

Tampa Bay Library Consortium <http://snoopy.tbtc.lib.fl.us>

www.fcla.edu/FCLAinfo/sus/borrowing-agreement.html

Training

Library instruction is available from RRC in many ways: course management software, face-to-face, *RRChat*, or video broadcast. In 2000, 1,000 students took part in 85 sessions and in 2001, 258 students participated in 16 sessions through May. An information literacy tutorial has been under discussion but is not yet implemented due to staffing concerns.

Faculty may request that course-specific Web pages be designed by RRC staff for their classes, a service that is increasing in popularity as more faculty become aware of it. A form is provided on RRC's Web site for faculty to request a Web page. RRC also maintains a database of contact information as well as information for participating universities' guidelines for placing materials on electronic reserves.

Reference Help

RRC provides reference help through a 24-hour toll-free telephone number (with voice mail during hours RRC is closed), Ask a Librarian e-mail form, and a chat interface. Reference service is available for use by Florida distance learners; others are given brief answers and referred to their home institutions. Questions are answered immediately during regular hours and within 24 hours when RRC is closed. Technical support questions will be answered by RRC librarians; however, they may refer students to their home university for technical support related to proxy server issues, ID validation, and specific ILL/document delivery questions. They do not answer questions about specific courseware packages in use at individual institutions.

RRC also maintains a database of information about library services provided at selected colleges and universities with links to information on their Web site. In addition, research assistance is provided through online research guides for individual classes, tutorials and user guides for specific electronic resources, as well as guides for using library services such as document delivery. As such, RRC has become the central point of service for the FDDLI.

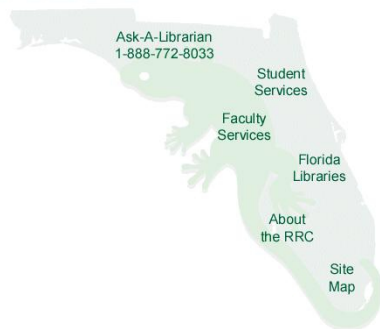
RRChat began as a pilot in the spring 2000 semester with a java-based chat program from WebMaster, Inc., called Conference Room Professional

Edition. Selection criteria for this product included ease of use, user cost, number of simultaneous users, and cost of the software. This software allows for 1,000 simultaneous users, and comes with a profanity filter and the ability to silence or remove users from the room. There is no client program for the user to download or install, and the

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Please bear with us as we update the look of our web page... if you can't find something, please use the [Site Map](#) or [contact us](#) for help.



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WebMaster, Inc.
www.conferenceroom.com/home.cgi

software is run on a UNIX Web server. Multiple chat rooms may be created and users have the ability to send private messages.

RRC is one of the leaders in the use of chat technology for library reference service with its *RRChat* service, added in April 2000. Chat, however is just one of four methods that RRC uses to provide reference assistance. Reference assistance has been available since January 1998 by telephone, e-mail, and the Web-based form.

The number of questions has steadily increased each year, from 808 in 1998 to 891 in 1999, and 927 in 2000. 2001 statistics show the same trend of increasing use with 655 questions asked during the first six months of the year. *RRChat* has been a large part of that increase. From April 15, 2000, through December 2000, *RRChat* answered 74 questions. Over the first six months of 2001, the number of questions received has increased to 216. Currently, *RRChat* is the second most used method of requesting reference help behind phone contact.

RRC selected WebMaster's Conference Room software after examining several products. Conference Room is a java-based chat product that allows for multiple connections and rooms, private messages, and is easy to use for both staff and end-user.