Service Proposal for a Netbook Lending Service at Brookens Library

Abstract: This proposal addresses the implementation of a netbook lending service at Brookens Library, University of Illinois Springfield. Services such as this have been in existence at academic libraries since the mid-1990s. It behooves our service mission and our positive reputation to catch up with our peers and institute such a service. Based on the needs of our students, however, our service will differ from most others by allowing for overnight checkout. This proposal details the purchasing, circulation, technical requirements, staffing, marketing, budgeting, and sustainability of this service.

*"Working together creatively and using technology ingeniously, we provide excellent information resources and services to the UIS community."* -Brookens Library Vision Statement

## Brookens Library

University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) is a public liberal arts university which was founded in 1969 as Sangamon State University. The 2,000 graduate students and approximately 3,000 undergraduates are taught and supported by 220 faculty members. Demographically, the student population as of fall 2009 is as follows: 55% women, 45% men; 72% of students identify as White, 13% Black/African American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Hispanic, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1% international (remaining 7% not reported). 91% of UIS students are from Illinois and many transfer into UIS from the nearby Lincoln Land Community College.

Brookens Library is the only library on the University of Illinois Springfield campus. With over half a million volumes, Brookens Library has a rather large collection for such a small university. Brookens Library provides access to well over 100 public use computers, with most of them located on the main floor and others housed on the upper floors for increased privacy and quiet.

## Need for Laptop Lending Service

Of the undergraduate population at UIS, 42% are over the age of 25. Since UIS students tend to be older than undergraduates at other institutions, and therefore not necessarily digital natives, their

ability to succeed in a technologically-advanced college environment may be compromised. Furthermore, the high number of students transferring into UIS from the local community college indicates that UIS students may be lower-income since community colleges are known for their affordable education. Given the unique demographics of our campus, enabling our students to succeed by providing them with access to relevant technology should be one of our top priorities.

Although the demographics of the campus illustrate the general need for excellent technology support, the motivation for the specific laptop lending service comes from communicating with the students. Through the April 2010 Snapshot Day survey of students and faculty, many students expressed a desire for the Library to extend its hours. In further discussions with individual students, it has been revealed that the primary factor driving this request is the students' need for computer access. Although the Library is open until midnight Sunday through Thursday, we do close at 6 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and do not open until 1 p.m. on Sunday. These hours can be inconvenient for students who have to work during the day on Friday and Saturday, as well as for students in online classes who may have assignments due after 6 p.m. on these days. These circumstances lead many students to ask about alternative locations for computer access at close each night. Unfortunately, there is no twenty-four hour computer lab on campus and most of the labs operate during the exact same hours as the Library. Without other options, we are forced to tell the students that their only real options are to find a friend who has a computer or to pay to use the computers at Kinko's.

In order to provide students with greater computer access, Brookens Library has explored a couple of options. Unfortunately, because of the layout of the Library, there is no way for us to close off a certain section for twenty-four hour swipe card access. After careful consideration, we do not think that the demand would be great enough to warrant staffing the Library and keeping it entirely open overnight. We then went to Information Technology Services (ITS) to see if they would consider equipping one of the computer labs under their management with twenty-four hour swipe card access. They said that they had contemplated this in the past, but, after discussion with University Administration, decided that the

security risks were too great. Brookens Library also asked if ITS would consider extending their current Laptop Lending Service to allow for overnight checkout. The Director of ITS communicated that he did not want the responsibility for enforcing policies regarding lost equipment and that the ITS laptops were primarily intended to be used by visiting conference speakers and in other sorts of unique situations. Since all of our other options resulted in dead ends, Brookens Library has decided to embark upon its own Laptop Lending Service with the goal of facilitating the educational needs of UIS students by providing access to relevant technology.

**Netbook Lending Service (NLS) Implementation**

A review of the literature indicates that academic libraries have been lending laptops to their students since the mid-1990s. A 2003 publication reporting on a survey of academic libraries and their laptop lending services found that 13% of respondents with such a service had implemented it between 1993 and 1997, 37% between 1998 and 2000, and 50% between 2001 and 2003 (Kwon and Soules, 2003, p. 25, cited in Holden and Hsieh, 2007, p. 264). A survey conducted in 2005 suggests that 79% of academic libraries lend laptops to their students (Holden and Hsieh, 2007, p. 263); this percentage is likely much greater today. Although coming late to the laptop lending table means that our students may have been comparatively technologically-disadvantaged over the last fifteen years, it also means that we have a long history laptop lending services upon which to base our own service.

Although most of the laptop lending services have dealt in traditional laptops, we have decided to go with the Samsung N150-11 netbook. Netbooks are in general much smaller in weight, screen, and keyboard size, have a significantly longer battery life, and are much cheaper than laptops. Since, due to high use, lending laptops are in poor shape after two to three years, the decreased initial cost outlay of netbooks will allow the Library to upgrade the fleet as frequently as necessary and probably save money over both the short and long term (Sharpe, 2009, p. 341). To minimize wear and tear, we chose the Samsung N150-11 which is reviewed as one of the sturdiest netbooks on the market and an all-around

good value (Ackerman, 2010). For the rollout of this service, we will purchase ten netbooks, evaluating further needs after a trial period of one academic year.

Circulation

Like Sampson-Livermore Library at UNC Pembroke, we will catalog the netbooks and their accessories (chargers, carrying cases) as reserve items with pop-up messages to remind circulation staff to check for each part at check-in and check-out (Power, 2008, p. 198). A barcode will be affixed to each item to facilitate this process. The published literature suggests that although most libraries initially required the borrower to sign a liability agreement for each laptop check-out, the circulation staff quickly became annoyed with the time-consuming nature of this process. While some libraries chose to do away with the agreement altogether, we will follow the lead of Sampson-Livermore Library and institute a once-a-semester agreement form (Power, 2008, p. 199). This form will list overdue and replacement fees and notify the user that their use of the netbook requires compliance with University Computer Use policies. These signed forms will give the Library something which the user can be legally held to in the event of loss or damage.

Like many other laptop lending services, we will lend the netbooks on a first-come, first-served basis and have a loan period of three hours. Renewals will be granted for a period of one hour only if there are no other students waiting for a machine. Where we differ from other libraries is in our willingness to loan netbooks overnight. Although Holden and Hsieh (2007) found that only 23% of libraries allowed their laptops to leave the building, we are adamant about allowing any and all of the netbooks to be loaned over night because of the significant need for UIS students to have computer access after Library hours (p. 266). Overnight checkout will begin two hours before the close of the Library, with the machines due 30 minutes after the Library opens the next day. Netbooks will not be available for loan over breaks.

Technical Support

Upon acquisition, the netbooks will have to be equipped with software such as Microsoft Office Suite and Adobe Acrobat Reader, which can be done fairly easily using Symantec Ghost, a disk cloning and backup program. We will also install Deep Freeze software on each of the netbooks, which reduces necessary maintenance by blocking malware, minimizing hardware degradation, and erasing user files upon shut down.  The netbooks will also need to be configured to connect to the campus wireless network and set up for wireless printing to Library printers. Ongoing technical support and maintenance should be only a slightly larger challenge, consisting primarily of routine upgrades and troubleshooting. Seventy-five percent of the respondents to Holden and Hsieh's (2007) survey reported that less than 10% of their laptops were out of service at any one time (p. 267). In order to catch any unreported technical problems, the circulation supervisor will perform a check of each machine and its accessories upon opening the Library.

Staffing

Although ITS declined to implement an overnight laptop loan service themselves, they have graciously agreed to supply technical support for our endeavors. With our initial rollout of 10 netbooks, ITS estimates that the extra workload caused by this service will be negligible and not require any new staff members. ITS has also agreed to teach our two evening circulation supervisors how to troubleshoot common netbook problems so that students can have a source of support when the ITS help desk is closed.

NLS is likely to make the circulation desk a busier place. Student assistants will have to manage frequent check-outs, check-ins, and renewals, taking care to account for all netbook accessories at each step. Circulation supervisors will take on increased troubleshooting responsibilities and perform the nightly check of the equipment. With only 10 netbooks, however, our current staff should be well-positioned to handle the extra workload.

If we increase the fleet of netbooks considerably or technical support turns out to be a greater challenge than anticipated, increased staffing may need to be considered after the trial period.

<u>Marketing</u>

Although one might assume that word-of-mouth marketing would be enough to raise awareness about a free laptop lending service, Holden and Hsieh (2008) found that this was not the case. The authors undertook a study to determine to determine why their institution's laptop lending service had been underused in the four years since its implementation in 2003. Many of the respondents indicated that the survey constituted their first notice of the service. Once Monmouth University Library undertook a traditional marketing campaign, they saw a "sea change in laptop lending" (Holden and Hsieh, 2008, p. 433). In order to avoid the pitfalls experienced at Monmouth, Brookens Library will pursue multiple marketing avenues early on. We plan to advertise the service through traditional print media, such as the campus newspaper and fliers, posters, and table tents across campus. We will also publicize the service heavily through the Library's online presence, including tweets, Facebook updates, and blog posts. Of course, we do hope that positive word-of-mouth marketing will play some role as well.

<u>Evaluation</u>

A period of formal evaluation of NLS will be conducted approximately one academic year after the rollout of the service. At this point, Brookens Library will analyze and review the netbook circulation statistics and gate counts and conduct a student opinion survey. We can easily configure our ILS to track circulation of the netbooks by hour of day and day of week, allowing us to see the peaks and valleys of usage. Gate counts will be reviewed to see if NLS brought more people into the library. The survey will be as simple and brief as possible in order to encourage participation, asking how they heard of the service, how often they use it, why they do or do not use it, technical problems encountered, and so on. This survey will be emailed to the student body and incentivized with a drawing for small gift cards to local restaurants and shops. The circulation statistics and survey responses will allow us to determine

whether the service should be continued as-is, and if not, what changes should be made. Changes made at other libraries after an initial trial period have included purchasing additional accessories for the netbooks, increasing technical support, and purchasing more netbooks (Power, 2008). Holden and Hsieh (2008) remind us that "while common sense would have us research and plan carefully for any new service, what is learned after roll-out of the service will be at least as important…flexibility is critical" (p. 431). We will therefore welcome and respond to any feedback from staff, faculty, and students throughout the trial period, along with actively observing reactions to the service.

Budget & Funding

| Item | Quantity | Price per Unit | Total Price | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Samsung N150-11 Netbook | 10 | $349.99 | $3,499.90 | Price quote from Best Buy so no S&H. May be cheaper through campus retailer. |
| Timbuk2 Small Fry Netbook Case | 10 | $29.99 | $299.90 | Price quote from Amazon.com. Free S&H. |
| Promotional Fliers and Posters | | | $250.00 | |
| Survey Completion Incentive | | | $100.00 | |
| **Total** | | | **$4149.80** | |

The library already owns enough site licenses of Microsoft Office Suite, Adobe Acrobat Reader, Symantec Ghost, and Deep Freeze to cover the 10 netbooks so these software packages are not included in the budget. Future budgets will need to account for these site licenses as necessary. If Brookens Library continues this service, we will invest in a locking laptop storage and charging cart, priced between $600 and $2,000, for security and convenience. Based on survey responses, we may also find it necessary to purchase additional accessories such as external CD and DVD drives since the netbooks do not have optical drives, and USB or wireless mice if some students may have difficulty using a touch pad.

The Library currently has more than enough money in its technology budget to cover the costs for the trial period of NLS. If we decide to continue and expand this program next year, we will propose

raising the Student Campus and Library Technology Fee by an extra $2, from $132 per year to $134 per year. This would provide an extra $10,000 for the purchase of netbooks, software, accessories, a storage cart, and extra staff if necessary.

Timeline

Due to other projects occurring during the academic year, and the potentially overwhelming demand for NLS, we have decided to launch this service during Summer Semester 2011.

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| Order netbooks, cases | May 1, 2011 |
| Draft & submit newspaper ad, design fliers & posters | May 16-20 |
| Run newspaper ad, distribute posters & fliers, online advertising | June 6- |
| Begin circulating netbooks | June 13- |
| Commence 2nd marketing campaign for Fall Semester | August 12- |
| Student satisfaction survey distribution | March 19, 2012-April 19 |
| Student incentive drawing | April 20 |
| Report on Continuance of Service Due | May 1 |

## Conclusion

We expect the netbook lending service to be a popular and well-used service at Brookens Library, resulting in an improved opinion of the Library across campus and increased overall student satisfaction. To strive closer toward our vision statement, catch up with peer institutions, and, most importantly, serve our students better, Brookens Library submits this proposal for a netbook lending service.

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