

# Virtual Medical Library: A New Era in Medical Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Touro University-Nevada, a branch of Touro University-California, whose parent institution is Touro College in New York, opened its doors to 87 College of Osteopathic Medicine students during the first week of August 2004. Touro University-NV educates caring professionals to serve, to lead, and to teach. The College of Osteopathic Medicine prepares students to become outstanding osteopathic physicians who uphold the values, philosophy, and practice of osteopathic medicine, and who are committed to primary care and the holistic approach to the patient. The College advances the profession and serves students and society through innovative education, research, and community service.

The medical library is a necessary and integral part of a student's medical education. Traditionally, it is a place where students "live," studying countless hours during the first two years of their medical school experience. Most established academic medical libraries across North America employ some electronic resources to supplement their massive book collections, which evolve over years and cost millions of dollars to purchase and to store. What if the Library Director only had seven weeks and a limited budget to open a library?

Touro University-NV seized a rare opportunity to innovate by starting a virtual medical library from scratch. The library employs 45 databases making accessible 70 medical textbooks and 140 allied health books electronically in full text plus 6,900 full text electronic journals. This provides students with tens of thousands of biomedical journal pages at their fingertips. Additionally, the netLibrary database alone provides 8,500 proprietary and 3,400 public domain e-books, thousands of which are medical. In contrast, the library holds a small reserve print collection of just 407 books and 25 journal titles.

## METHODOLOGY

Touro University-NV addressed two start-up issues: Selection of E-Resources and Enhancement of E-Resource User Services. The Library Director scoured the internet to find the most comprehensive biomedical e-resources, which culminated in subscriptions to full text book and journal products such as EBSCOhost, ProQuest, STAT!Ref, and MDConsult plus purchase of pertinent CDs and DVDs such as Acland's Atlas of Human Anatomy, and Voxel-Man 3-D Navigator to name a few. From the internet, approximately 60 free web sites of value and interest to students and faculty not only for ready reference but access to books were identified and bookmarked. PubMed's Bookshelf and PubMed Linkout, for example, are popular sites. All of the library's e-resources can be located through the library's web page. To view them, go to <http://www.touro.edu>, click on libraries, choose virtual, and then select RED Hot Sources.

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E-resources were enhanced in two ways. First, e-resources were made readily accessible to students and faculty campus-wide and via remote login and password from anywhere in the world any time of day or night. Second, the Library Director gave "hands on" training in their use during 90-minute new student (and faculty) orientations, which were built in to the College of Osteopathic Medicine curriculum during the first week of the academic year. The Library Director designed this orientation to electronic resources so that students could get a running start with their studies. The Library Director also created and distributed an annotated list describing each available e-resource. At the same time, the Library Director nationally recruited an Electronic Resources Librarian, who would catalog and assist the Director in developing and maintaining e-resources, plus recruited a Library Assistant, who would staff the reference desk and circulate the small reserve book collection.

The library contracted with OCLC for automated cataloging services and Innovative Interfaces for the integrated library system including the online catalog. To ensure that all e-resources remained live and accessible at all times, the library forged a close professional relationship with the Information Technology (IT) department.

To test the viability of the virtual library, we conducted a Student Body Survey in November 2004 after only 90 days of operational use. Based on our results, the virtual library has been well received thus far (Fig.1).

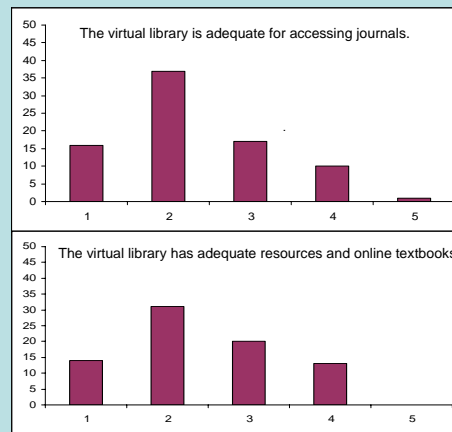


Fig.1: Data is based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being Strongly Agree & 5 being Strongly Disagree.

## CONCLUSION

Around the world, virtual medical libraries already enjoy success on the national level in Germany (German National Library of Medicine), Finland (National Electronic Library Program, FinELib), Scotland (NHS Glasgow e-Library) and England (National electronic Library for Health, NeLH).

Touro University-NV library's uniqueness stems not from being one of a handful of academic virtual medical libraries, but from the fact that Touro's virtual library works.

Today, the library consists of an active computer lab and reading room. The lab offers 20 computers with CD/DVD combo drives, four equipped with CD burners, and a scanner, two high end duplex printers, a telephone, and a pair of electric hole punchers. The reading room's focal point is the reference desk, where library patrons get answers to reference questions, check out library materials and receive bibliographic instruction in connection with the e-resources. The reading room offers 12 computers, one high-end duplex printer, study seating for 58, a high-end Canon photocopier, and a work table outfitted with office products. A wireless access point rests in the ceiling of the reading room enabling students to use their laptops to access the computer network, including all e-resources, without interruption within 500 feet. Both sides of the library are used for lectures and classroom instruction of biomedical literature searching to students during the online component of their curriculum plus to orient faculty to the electronic resources including search techniques.

With no time and physical space constraints, students demonstrate their high comfort level in this virtual environment 24/7, each day of the year. Many students came to school with a laptop tucked under one arm and didn't need to be won over to the virtual library as the student survey shows. Faculty skepticism evaporated during library e-resource orientation. A recent accreditation team observed the virtual library and now highly recommends it. The future of the Touro University-NV's virtual medical library is prosperous with ever-expanding e-resources to benefit students.

