To bring about systemic progress in teaching and learning, a shift in perspective is always necessary. Sometimes that shift is in institutional perspective about where critical activities and resources are, as was the case at Pennsylvania State University (http://www.psu.edu/). Sometimes the shift is in institutional perspective about who the students are, as was the case at Fairleigh Dickinson University (http://www.fdu.edu/), where the student is seen as a global citizen.

Where’s the Library for This Course? Moving the Library to Where the Students Are

Each year, colleges and universities spend thousands of dollars on databases, on maintaining subscriptions to scholarly journals, and on storing and organizing print and digital information for the purpose of scholarly research. So why is it that when Jane, a typical college freshman at a local state university, is asked to research and write a paper on homelessness in 20th-century America, the first thing she does is type homelessness into Google?

Turning to commercial Web-based search engines is an obvious choice for students. But when Web searching replaces scholarly research, students become disconnected from high-quality scholarly materials, and their ability to use those resources to enhance their learning is diminished. John Harwood and Loanne Snavely described an innovative Penn State plan that brings library guides straight to the student.

For years, paper versions of guides have been available to help students and faculty locate appropriate resources in the libraries’ collections. As PSU discovered, even when those guides are available on the Web, students are more likely to turn to commercial search engines, which represent their comfort level. But doing so limits development of their research skills, or, as Harwood calls it, information fluency. “We want them to use
much more than Google,” said Snavely. “But to students, the library is ‘over there.’ They’re used to having resources come to them.”

Inspired by a question posed by David Cohen in a 2002 EDUCAUSE Review article (http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0239.pdf), whose title Harwood and Snavely borrowed for the session, PSU put into motion an ambitious plan: within a year, every section of every course that uses ANGEL (http://www.cyberlearninglabs.com/Products/), the institution’s course management system, will have easy access to library guides appropriate to that course. In essence, the e-reserves would be pushed to the students’ desktops. “A link doesn’t guarantee learning,” said Harwood, “but you can wrap resources around a link.”

It was an entirely new idea: provide a direct link through the institution’s course management system (CMS)—which doesn’t include libraries out of the box—to a set of relevant resources. “Higher education has made an enormous investment in library resources,” said Snavely, “but they weren’t being connected to courses through course management systems.”

To accomplish their goal, PSU identified partners among the university’s Teaching and Learning, Information Technology Services, and Administrative Information Systems departments, and they solicited librarians, who’d identify source materials that should be linked to courses. In essence, they took guides that were formerly in print and now already available on the Web, and put them directly in front of the students by way of a CMS.

To push forward with the plan, Harwood’s team held discussions with librarians about what was needed and what would make a good product. Then they got the ideas translated by instructional designers. “We didn’t just want to link to existing guides,” said Harwood, “we wanted to be able to create new guides easily. This meant we needed a flexible structure in order to be able to customize the guides according to different disciplines and users.”
In the long term, PSU is anticipating that every ANGEL course will come with a library guide. But getting there is not always smooth sailing: different departments have different planning requirements, which makes it difficult to work together. “It’s important to know this when you work with partners,” said Harwood.

The effort required no additional funding—only a reorganization of staff time. The result, however, is that PSU is training students to use library resources and to be choosy and selective about their research rather than taking the path of least resistance. “Through this,” said Harwood, “students can be shown how to save time by getting directly to the right resources.” See annual meeting session, “Where's the Library for this Course? - Moving the Library to Where the Students Are”, (http://www.educause.edu/asp/doclib/abstract.asp?ID=NLI0315).

Ubiquitous Distributed Learning and Global Citizenship

According to Michael Sperling, for Fairleigh Dickinson University, the path toward systemic progress was a case of “transforming a mission statement into a sense of mission.” When the university opened its doors at the start of World War II, it had an ambitious goal: to provide its students with an education “of and for the world.” The university has reaffirmed that original goal in its new mission statement to be “a center of academic excellence dedicated to the preparation of world citizens through global education,” and to reach that end, it intends to prepare students as global citizens who can operate successfully across cultures and environments in an interdependent world and in an unknown future characterized by diversity, nearly universal digital information access, global interrelationships, and rapid change.

The carrying out of that mission is requiring massive shifts in institutional budget allocations, faculty work patterns, support resources, and academic culture. And this is, indeed, systemic change.
Global citizenship is a complex issue. What does it mean? Is it a process or an outcome? Part of this university’s unique answers have been (1) to require that all undergraduates take one online course per year of study and (2) to build a Global Virtual Faculty Program, wherein scholars and practitioners from around the world partner with Fairleigh Dickinson on-site faculty in these online courses. Global education and online learning are no longer merely provocative ideas that a few niche institutions need consider. Sperling argues that “Today virtually all institutions of higher learning need to reckon with their implementation in some form, even if not using them as guiding constructs.”

Going beyond the common view of distance (or distributed) learning (that includes a sense of it as a useful and convenient teaching, communication, and research tool to reach new student audiences), Fairleigh Dickinson sees it as a (value-added) learning and collaboration tool that gives access to global resources (information and faculty) and that helps the institution imagine the unimaginable. Such a view has helped the institution go beyond the traditional (and wrong) question, “Is distance learning better or worse than in-class learning?” and to the right question: “Which pedagogies will produce the best student-learning outcomes in a given medium or environment?”

Key systemic impacts that can be generalized to other institutions include (1) reevaluation of pedagogical technique, (2) adopting a learning outcomes paradigm, (2) promoting responsibility taking by students, and (3) developing global awareness. For more information, see http://www.globaleducation.edu/ and the NLII Annual Meeting session, “Ubiquitous Distributed Learning and Global Citizenship”, (http://www.educause.edu/asp/doclib/abstract.asp?ID=NLI0322)
EDUCAUSE provides an annual Award for Systemic Progress in Teaching and Learning (for information, see http://www.educause.edu/awards/tl/). The award embodies the philosophy of the NLII. The application process is, in itself, intended to be educational and can be the basis for fruitful self-evaluation whether or not an institution applies for the award or receives the award. Systemic institutional transformation is a key area of NLII research toward designing education that is active and learner centered, dynamic and lifelong, collaborative, cost-effective, high quality, and accessible (see http://www.educause.edu/nlii/keythemes/systemicprogress.asp).