Louisiana network links libraries

By Nancy E. Nuckles

Collaboration leads to statewide network

Access to information and to the Internet are hot topics these days. Not only is equipment needed, but also the money for connection via subscription through a service such as Compuserve, or to an agency such as a university.

Cooperation among libraries

During the 1980s Louisiana State University (LSU) and A&M College, the LSU Medical Center in New Orleans and Shreveport, Southern University in Baton Rouge, and Tulane University implemented the NOTIS integrated library management system. A few libraries among the other public institutions of higher education in Louisiana had automated with local systems or with systems which only automated some functions of the library. When the coordinating board for the universities appointed a Task Force on Libraries and the academic library directors began discussing automation, plans to automate the remaining functions and libraries began.

The membership of LALINC, the Louisiana Academic Library Information Network Consortium, includes representatives of all of the academic libraries in the state. One project of this group is LOUIS, the Louisiana Online University Information System, which automates and provides access to some of these libraries' catalogs.

The NOTIS system at LSU-Baton Rouge, which already had been used to automate the LSU Hebert Law Center, is the home for this project. The Phase I libraries on the network are: Louisiana Tech, Ruston; Nicholls State University, Thibodeaux; Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe; Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond; and the University of New Orleans. Their automation was funded by each local campus, by private companies, and by the Louisiana Academic Library Network (Louisiana Education Quality Support Fund-Enhancement Program 1991–1992, July 1, 1992–December 31, 1994: $824,816).

The Phase II schools are: Delgado Community College, New Orleans; Louisiana State University at Alexandria; Louisiana State University at Shreveport; McNeese State University, Lake Charles; and Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches. These schools have access to the Phase I schools' catalogs; their own catalogs will be added in the summer of 1994. Their equipment to connect to the network was funded by Louisiana Academic Library Network (United States Department of Education, Title IID: College Library Technology and Cooperations Grant Program-Networking, October 1, 1992–September 1994: $162,469).

Other organizations which are providing support are the Louisiana Office of Telecommunications Management, the Louisiana Consortium for Higher Education Networking (LaCHEN), the State Library of Louisiana, IBM, and Wellfleet.

Services the network will provide

The LOUIS network will be expanded tremendously by the Louisiana Libraries Network Project, funded by the United States Department of Education, Title IIB: Library Research and Demonstration Program, Statewide

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Multitype Library Network and Database, January 1, 1994–March 31, 1995: $2,480,000. A major part of this expansion will be the provision of equipment for one library in each of Louisiana's 64 parishes (counties) to have access to LOUIS. The same will be provided for 18 K–12 school libraries, each of which will be paired with a LOUIS academic library or parish library for training and support.

In addition, the LOUIS staff will load the catalogs for Phase II libraries. LOUIS will purchase equipment to make network-ready the four Phase III libraries: Louisiana State University at Eunice; Nunez Community College, Chalmette; Southern University at New Orleans; and Southern University at Shreveport/Bossier City. LOUIS will purchase one terminal each for LOUIS access for Grambling State University and for Southern University at Baton Rouge, which have automated systems separate from LOUIS.

LOUIS has been recommended for funding from the Louisiana Board of Regents grant programs for the following enhancements: loading the catalogs of the Phase III libraries; additional equipment for some Phase I and II libraries; complete retrospective conversion for some sites; and authority records for the central site. Another proposal will fund additional databases of particular interest for the six schools with engineering programs.

PACLink software from NOTIS Systems, Inc. will provide a Z39.50 transparent connection to search Z39.50 compliant systems, and will support patron-initiated interlibrary loan between LOUIS sites. This will allow LOUIS users access to catalogs such as Melvyl, NOTIS sites with PACLink, database providers such as CARL, and to OCLC FirstSearch if the LOUIS library has an account with them.

LOUIS participants will be able to track the Louisiana state legislature bills by using the LEGISCRIBE database. This has previously been unavailable except by subscription to the service, and only accessible by dial-up with a modem, not on Internet.

Statewide access to information

The LOUIS project began by automating the public academic institutions and, with the U.S. Department of Education grant, will provide parish libraries and school libraries access to the system. Many special libraries already use LOUIS via dial-up to their nearest academic library. No account or logon is required for dial access or Internet access, so many people make connections this way. For example, in March, 1994, 24,586 searches were performed on the LSU catalog from outside the LSU Libraries; 6,041 of these were from Internet.

Ongoing funding

The LOUIS project is funded by grants through March 1995. Each year a proposal is submitted for continuing funding to the state legislature. We have high hopes of success this year, as some members of the Louisiana legislature have already expressed interest and support for a bill in 1994.
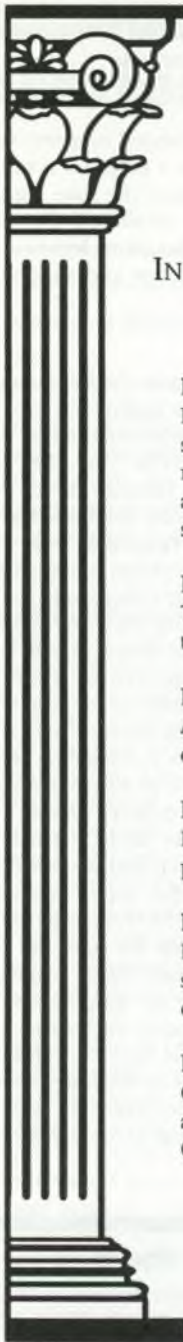
Plans and ideas

Of course, all this is only the beginning! We realize the need for the agricultural experiment stations and libraries with stand-alone systems in the state to use LOUIS. The other schools are: Tulane; the LSU Medical Center in New Orleans and Shreveport; Southern University in Baton Rouge; and Grambling State University. We would like to obtain funding to make the unautomated private colleges and some special libraries in the state a part of LOUIS. We would like to provide access so the visually and physically challenged can use LOUIS. There are also plans for multimedia support. LALINC, which includes LOUIS libraries and is often spurred on by them, is investigating other cooperative projects such as a shared storage facility and a statewide delivery system.

NOTIS markets other products which would be of use to the project, and we persist in requesting funding in the hopes that we may purchase them. Since NOTIS has developed a graphical user interface for staff and for the public, and a Unix-based library management system (Horizon), we are keeping up-to-date on these for consideration for Louisiana.

Projects such as this take a lot of time and effort, but the benefits to the state, communities, and institutions involved are well worth the effort. It is rewarding to see our efforts succeed. ∎

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