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Cooperative virtual libraries: training via internet of librarians and editors

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Summary:

The development of virtual libraries that offer the user access to the complete documents requires the team work of librarians, editors and webmaster. In this presentation, Dr. Dominique Babini, coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Virtual Library of Social Sciences of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), proposes the option of cooperative virtual libraries and describes how they organized a distance learning course via Internet for the training of librarians and editors of 18 countries of Latin American and the Caribbean, pointing out the factors that must be considered for the organization of courses via Internet.

Good morning. I am grateful to the Management and Marketing Section of IFLA for this invitation to share with you our experience in the management of the Virtual Library of Social Sciences of Latin America and the Caribbean and, in particular, to comment on the development and implementation of a distance learning course via Internet for the training of librarians, editors and webmaster of our collaborating/participating libraries in 21 countries in the region.

I am Argentine, from the city of Buenos Aires, and for the last few decades – following my doctorate in the national information policy – I participated actively in the formation of information networks in social sciences, in our country and in Latin America. It is a pleasure for me to share this meeting with professionals from other countries and regions of the world.

Content

Strategies: virtual library as a response to:

- Geographical context
- Difficulties of access to document
- Opportunities of the new technologies of IC
- Changing role of the librarian

Management of online training for the training of librarians and editors

- Selection of platform, contents, teachers, participants
- Management of the course, achievements and difficulties

I'm going to present themes that refer to those who are interested in virtual libraries and need to organize courses to be given via Internet to prepare the personnel of digital/virtual libraries. In our region we refer to virtual libraries when the user receives the usual services of a traditional library via Internet: can consult the catalogue online, can read the complete texts of documents and consult to a reference librarian.

First of all, I'm going to describe the context that motivated the necessity and the strategy of organizing a cooperative virtual library. This arose from geographical conditionings, from the difficulty of accessing primary documents and the opportunities that the new technologies afford us so as to develop services that would permit the user access to the complete document in a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost. To provide these services requires a change in the role of librarians who must now work in a team together with editors and webmasters.

I'm going to share with you how we've developed an online course for librarians, editors and webmasters of our cooperative network, and which are the more important aspects to be kept in mind for those who wish to organize courses through Internet.

CLACSO Member Centers:



I represent "Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales" (CLACSO), a Latinamerican non-governmental organism created 35 years ago, that clusters 160 investigation centers and social science post-graduate programs in 21 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean nowadays. The main Universities from Latin America and from the Caribbean belong to our network, as well as an important number of NGO's that do investigation/action in the community.

Our member centers as a whole publish thousands of books, articles and work documents yearly. Our challenge is to get all this production known and available in full text through Internet for students, professors, researchers and social actors that work in the region and in other regions of the world, and who are interested in Latin American and the Caribbean problems.

Cooperative bibliographic data bases

- Language
 - UNESCO / IDRC / UN-ECLAC
 - ISIS
 - Training
 - National / International Networks
-
- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| - Agricultural (AGRIS / FAO) | - Education (REDUC) |
| - Health (BIREME / OPS) | - Social Sciences (CLACSO) |

In our region we've the advantage of understanding each other in Spanish and Portuguese, a factor that greatly facilitated the formulation of cooperative bibliographic networks among countries in order to interchange bibliographic information. With the support of UNESCO, Canadian IDRC, The United Nations Commission for Latin America as well as specialised international organizations, bibliographic information networks were created with free soft "ISIS". A great deal of capacitation activities was developed, and, as a result of it, solid professional groups were created in each country so that they are in charge of bibliographic rearrangement for the supply of national subject networks that are members of international subject networks such as bibliographic information networks in Agricultural, Health, Education, Social Sciences, and many other subjects. We can assert that Latin America is one of the more advanced regions of the world in respect of the development of thematic bibliographic networks, that are updated thanks to the cooperative effort of librarians from each country of the region.

Difficulties in accessing documents

- Reduced edition of academic publications
- High prices of postage

High cost of interlibrary loans

* between cities

* between countries

Discontinuity in academic publications

Discontinuity in library collections

However, after the enthusiasm for the construction of large bibliographic databases all over the region, the ninety's faced us with an unkind reality. Although we had got fantastic bibliographic databases built in a cooperative way among libraries of all countries of the region, and many of these regional databases are accessible online nowadays through Internet, we'd have to find the manner of making it possible for the user to access the documents at a reasonable cost and in reasonable time. That is very difficult in our region, because it is almost impossible for a user or for a library to access books or serials located in libraries of other cities, so much the worse if they are in another country. In fact, we see that:

- So long as only an average of 600 samples of academic magazines is printed, it becomes very difficult to find copies in the libraries of the region
- Insufficient budget in academic institutions in order to pay the courier that allows the distribution of publications among libraries of other cities and countries, attempts against the diffusion of academic production of the countries in this region
- Interlibrary loans between cities and countries is the exception, because there is not budget for this service -habitually-, due to exceedingly high prices of postage
- And in the particular case of the Social Sciences in our region -and I suppose it may be similar in other regions in development too-, discontinuity in the support of investigation reflects in discontinuity in academic publications and in the library services of Social Sciences institutions.

Opportunities offered by electronic edition and communication

Redaction of originals (Author)

Editorial process (Institution)

- sending and revision of manuscripts
- electronic edition
- electronic diffusion
- diffusion on the Web
 - * on line commercialization
 - * Open-access

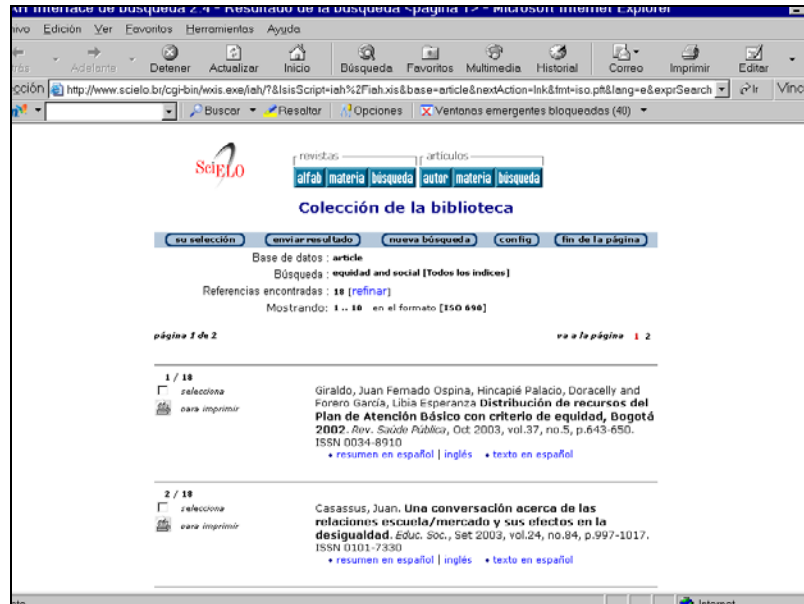
Virtual Libraries

- > institutionals
- > portals

That's why the enthusiasm surrounding Internet was so great when it arrived in Latin America. We finally had a platform that allowed us to think about new patterns to communicate and to disseminate academic production.

Starting from the generalized use of computers and electronic communication in the academic sphere, researchers write their books and articles in their computers, so institutions get those documents in electronic format before they become printed. Thanks to new programs for editing, academic institutions are able to do all the editorial process on those documents, since the revision of the texts on the part of colleagues, design, edition through Web, and diffusion of the publication, whether it be for selling the printed version or digital version. Also, institutions can choose to authorize the free diffusion through the Web (open access) of full texts. That is how virtual libraries arise; they may be of a single institution that disseminate full texts of its documents through the Web, or they may be virtual libraries of a group of institutions, and we can also find portals for access to the production in full text of a great number of institutions.

The case of SCIELO:



A good example of portals in Latin America is SCIELO, which is coordinated from Brazil and it offers full text access to serials with references from several countries of the region. We see here a search example where results show bibliographic citation and we can access the summary both in the original language as well as in English, and to full text in the language in which the article was written.

Example from SCIELO

(Translator's note: there's an empty square here in the original file)

Full text appears as in the following example.

Example from CLACSO virtual library

Here we see CLACSO Social Sciences Virtual Library from Latin America and the Caribbean where, in its Reading Room, we offer more than 4,000 whole texts corresponding to books, articles from academic serials, and work documents. In this case presented below, for the book intitled "Tiempos violentos" we can see the Table of contents, and then we can choose an article.

Full text access from CLACSO Virtual Library

And to access the full text.

Both SCIELO and CLACSO are entering, for each full text, information about how to cite the document, assuming that the user can only see an article or a chapter and he has not the complete magazine or book to hand. It is of great assistance to explain how each document published in full text on the Web ought to be cited, so that they can be referred to by those who mention them in their own works. There are millions of documents on the Web, but only a few of them include bibliographic information that allows one to cite them.

Library's Role

*** Metadata**

*** Virtual Libraries**

- Online catalog
- Link to full text from bibliographic references
- Reading Room: full texts
- Online Reference Service

Starting from electronic distribution of full texts, new challenges arise from libraries. From users' viewpoint, we see users accustomed to advanced Web searchers and who expect the same from their libraries, users who find in the Web thousands of documents in full text published by academic institutions, and who expect from their libraries the same service but of greater quality. With regard to edition, we see our academic institutions publishing on the Web digital versions of books and articles, to be accessed freely or paid. What then is the library's role in this process in which academic institutions publish on the Web directly?

This question produced a large international discussion, and it is not the subject of this presentation, but we ask ourselves if in development regions with so many difficulties to access documents cited in bibliographic data bases, shouldn't it be our role to act as a link in the chain that enhances accessibility to electronic full texts. This is so inasmuch as the majority of academic authors and institutions in development regions wouldn't raise the question of copyright, but rather have problems in divulging their academic production.

Libraries can give assistance by contributing with a value added that allows: to construct metadata for electronic publications, to develop virtual libraries so as the user may be able to consult online catalogs and, from the bibliographic reference in itself, to have a link to the full text and, in case of doubt, to be able to consult a reference librarian "as if" he were personally at the library.

In regions such as ours, where bibliographic information networks have improved so much, it sounds reasonable that libraries add to each bibliographic reference the URL field, providing a link to the full text when the document is available on the Web, whether it be free or paid. In our network we ask for the authorization to publish full texts and, generally, we obtain this permission because academic editions are very small issues and publishing the full text allows a greater diffusion of the work. In the case of books published by CLACSO in Buenos Aires, open access version on the Web is available always before its print version. And, contrary to what had been thought, print version sales have highly increased because the electronic version acts as a sales promotion.

Digital / Virtual Libraries

Necessity of training staff

Editor

Library

Webmaster

Informatics

With regard to the concept of virtual and digital library, the American Society for Information Sciences (ASIS), in its Thesaurus of Information Sciences (1998) defines *virtual library* as: “systems in which information resources are distributed by way of networks rather than having them in a physical location”. And it defines *digital libraries* as: “libraries whose contents are mainly in electronic format and which are accessible through computers. Contents may be available locally or be remotely accessible through communication networks”.

There's certain preference, for the same services, to use the terms “*digital library*” in U.S.A., Canada and Mexico; “*electronic library*” in U.K., and “*virtual library*” in Spain, Argentina and Brazil.

Whereas traditional libraries are, or will be, providing virtual services through Web as a value added to its traditional services, it's important to offer librarians the opportunities of getting abilities required for their fulfilment in digital/virtual libraries.

On the occasion of the 5th. World Conference on Continuous Professional Education for Library and Information Sciences Professionals (IFLA, Scotland, August 2002) it was mentioned that “librarianship and information sciences schools produce few graduates yearly in proportion to the total number of professionals in the discipline, so effective actions for professional development will probably constitute a change agent, offering professionals updated information, knowledge and abilities so as to be prepared to face new challenges. Future professional leaders will arise from the rows of those who are continuous education consumers today.”

We need to prepare these protagonists that in each institution are the ones who may produce the necessary change to advance towards the development of virtual libraries. Certainly, virtual library development necessarily implies the participation of editors, librarians, webmasters and information technologists in each institution.

To obtain a solid virtual library requires of a teamwork: the publishing area that prepares texts, the library that adds metadata and manages the virtual library, the webmaster that designs and manages interfaces, and information technology area that administers networks and servers where the documents are lodged. This teamwork requires a cultural change, and it may take some time to get it, but training activities can be an aid to fasten the times in this sense. Sometimes, it's enough to train a one single person who then becomes the project leader within his organization.

Centers that are member of CLACSO

How do you train librarians, editors and webmasters of a network integrated by institutions distributed around 21 countries? That's why we thought in Internet as a way to train a group of leaders in no more than two years, so that they could help us –each one of them from his own country- to achieve the objective of spreading academic production in full text.

When the people to be trained live in different countries, as in our case, it's impossible to organize presential courses because of the high costs involved for fares and accommodation as well as the cost implied to any institution because of the absence of its personnel during 15 days.

Strategy: distance learning course

- To define the objective of the course
- To determine the participants
- To choose the platform
- To establish the duration of the course
- To design the contents of the course
- To select the teachers
- To define responsibilities and dedication
- To evaluate results

There arose in CLACSO the strategy to profit the fact that most of its member centers use Internet to offer a course for librarians, editors and webmasters interested in understanding what are virtual libraries and get the know-how to operate an virtual library online.

I will share, with those who are interested in offer Internet courses, our experience in each stage of the course: to determine the courses objective, the participant's profile, the platform to dictate the course and its duration and contents, to choose the teachers, and decide each one's responsibilities and roles and how to check the result of the course.

To determine the objective of the course

*To accompany the investigation centers of
Social Sciences of Latin America and the Caribbean
to use the virtual platforms to organize their production,
diffusion and access to books, articles and documents.*

To determine the objective of the course, in our case, it was connected with the investigation centers of Latin America and the Caribbean to make a good use of the virtual platforms to organize the electronic edition and diffusion by Web of the books, magazines and work documents in full text.

To determine the participants

*Responsibles of publishing, edition, library,
webmaster in investigation centers of social sciences.*

2002 and 2003 courses:

- Participants from 18 countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Puerto Rico, Uruguay)
- Registration: free for member centres
- Participants in each course: 30
- Approved: 61 %

We established that the participants have to be librarians, editors and webmaster from institutions because they are the main protagonists in the development and update of the virtual libraries.

We offered one course during 2002 and 2003. We had participants from 18 countries in groups of 30 or 40 participants in every course. The 61% of participants passed the theoretic requirements and the practice of the courses

To choose the platform for training

Internet

- E-mail
- Web site
- Virtual campus in web : It allows to create “virtual” spaces to carry out regional activities: courses, grupal chat with teachers, teamwork, shared edition , etc.

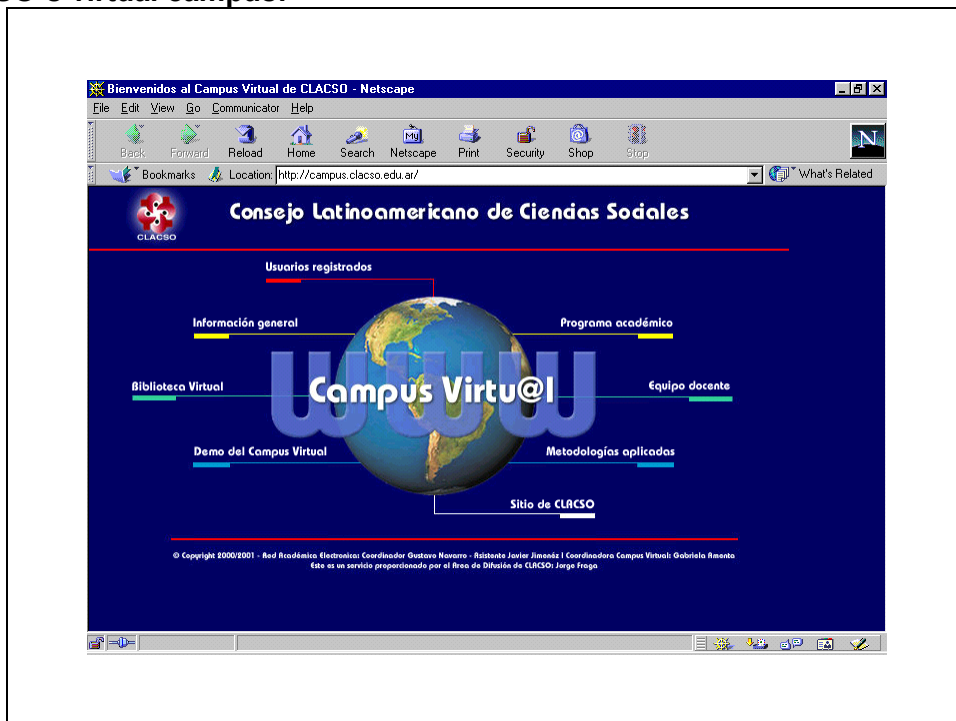
To dictate the Internet course we can choose the e-mail to send the classes and to receive the students works. Also, we can organize the course from a web site where the students can get in to download their classes, the bibliography and participate in the course. This is the way distance courses are dictated for example in Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata and other universities of the region.

In our case we chose to dictate the course in a virtual campus platform that is accessible on the web because virtual campus allows to create spaces for classrooms, group chat, virtual library of the courses and other spaces that remember us the available services in traditional campus.

In case of choosing a virtual campus platform we can do it installing the software in our services and managing the campus or requiring or renting a space in another virtual existent campus.

There are different software options available to develop virtual campus, like for example WebCT, Blackboard, First Class, Lotus Learning Space, Top Class, among others.

CLACSO's virtual campus:



In our case we dictate the course in the Virtual Campus of CLACSO where we dictate every year courses about Social Sciences. The advantage is that the Virtual Campus has a solid management that offers all the services and the necessary support for participants and

teachers to use the campus services without any difficulty and to count with a permanent technical support to solve problems. CLACSO 's virtual campus works with the software First Class. Nowadays CLACSO is investigating to migrate its virtual field to a platform of free software provided that institutionally CLACSO adheres to the international movement of free software.

Here we see the entry page to the Virtual Campus of CLACSO, where an average of 20 courses are dictated every year in Social Sciences and 1800 participants from all the region have participated. Our course about "Virtual Libraries and Social Sciences" have averaged nearly 40 participants from 15 different countries each course, during 2002 and 2003.

To know the limitations

- More slowly process of the group integration
 - There's no body language
 - Cultural-geographical diversity of the group
- Teachers and students are exposed to a greater dedication than it had been foreseen

To have participants from different geographical regions and professions puts in action challenges at the time to work in an Internet course.

There must be taken into account these limitations in a distance education at the time to organize and supervise an Internet course. The main limitations to balance by the management of the course is the slow process of the group integration because of the absence of body language and the cultural and geographical diversity of the participants.

The Campus Coordination organizes initial meetings where every participant introduces themselves and shares his expectancy about the course, to balance the slowly integration process. Afterwards, a chat is organized every week with an informal initial moment previously the debate theme starting. This interchange makes easy the integration process.

Other challenge is that teachers and students are exposed to much more dedication than that they have arranged. Students receive explanation about the dedication estimated from the beginning, but it doesn't include additional hours to chat with another student, read optional bibliography, nor read all the messages between the teachers and other students. The student who has available time, dedicates to read and to comment the item prepared by another student of the course for every class.

Is unavoidable more dedication from teachers who haven't enough experience to manage virtual student groups. As long as this experience increases, the teachers find more effective and efficient ways to organize the work, and then, to carry out the objectives of the course.

In a traditional university teachers are limited by a very strict timetable to contact the students. At the virtual campus, students can contact the teacher by e-mail or chat at every time of the day or the night!! It is always necessary to establish rules from the beginning for avoid abuses. For example, during the first course we dictated with 35 participants during 3

months, we had to process 1.100 messages that circulated. We learned the lesson and now we know that these are situations that ought to be prevented with clear established rules.

To establish the duration of the course

Average course in Virtual Campus CLACSO:

- 3 months (5 hours a week)
- 10 classes
- 2 weeks previously
- 1 week for evaluation

We consider proper to estimate a dedication of 5 hours weekly during the 3 months of the course, because the participants are librarians and editors that take the course without leaving their works. The participants take 10 classes, one each week, with 2 weeks at the beginning to learn how to use the campus services and one week at the end to the course evaluation process.

To design the contents of the course

The course “Virtual Libraries and Social Sciences”

Theoretical modules

- characteristics of the virtual libraries
- products and services of the virtual libraries
- productive process in the virtual libraries

Practical

- interview users
- online visits to selected libraries
- online input of registers and full texts in virtual libraries

Every institution must take into account the objectives of the course when they design the contents. In our case, as the course concerns about “Virtual Libraries and Social Sciences”, we organized theoretical classes and others where the participants carry out practices.

The theory themes of the course include:

- Characteristics of the virtual libraries
- Products and services of the virtual libraries
- Productive processes in the virtual libraries

In order to the practices the participants have to:

- interview users of traditional libraries to know which services they would like to receive by e-mail
- to visit selected virtual libraries to check every service that they offer on line
- and, the most important thing is that participants make several practical sessions to input the information online in the virtual library.
-

To select the teachers

Elements to take into account:

- the expertise in the theme of the course
- language
- knowledge about geographical and cultural diversity
- vocation and interest in distance courses
- dedication to the course

2002 and 2003 courses: Universidad de Colima (BDIC-UNESCO),
Universidad de Guadalajara, CLACSO

The great advantage of the courses online is that we count with the collaboration of teachers in every place around the world provided these teachers have:

- experience in the subject
- master the language of the course
- experience in the management of groups with cultural diversity participants
- vocation and interest in distance courses
- dedication to the course like it was contract before, because the teachers continue with their habitual jobs in their cities and they have to add this extra task.

During the courses we dictated in 2002 and 2003 we had teachers from Universidad de Colima (that are in charge of the Digital Iberoamerican and Caribbean Library with methodology sponsored by UNESCO), teachers from Universidad de Guadalajara (also in Mexico) and teachers from CLACSO. I had the academic coordination of the course and the dictation of classes.

To define responsibilities and dedication

Academically team coordinator

2 hours a day

Teachers

Prepare their classes and select the bibliography

2 hours a day during the week of their class

Previous training, given by the Campus

Student

5 hours a week

It is also necessary to define the roles in the course team. For example:

The coordinator with an estimated dedication in two hours a day:

- He coordinates with the teachers of the course all the contents and the bibliography

- He controls the participation and the entrance of the students into the Campus.
- He dissipates student's doubts and questions
- He supervises the compliment of the academic requirements
- He incentives the students to participate

The teacher:

- He prepared the classes and selects the bibliography previously sent to the coordinator
- He reads and answers all the student's comments
- He incentives the students to participate
- He corrects the practices
- He directs the debates (online or outline)
- He evaluates the students

And the students dedicate an average of 5 hours weekly to the course.

Example of a weekly class

Friday: download the class from the Campus and the bibliography in full text

From Saturday to Friday:

- read the class and obligatory bibliography
- put the comments inside the Campus
- make the weekly homework
- read teacher and student's comments

Weekly Chat

Here we see an example of a typical week for a participant of the course: On Friday he downloads the weekly class from the Campus and the full text of the bibliography (we do it on Friday because the participants have more time during the weekend)

From next Saturday to Friday:

- he reads the class and the obligatory bibliography
- he makes comments inside the debate spaces of the Campus
- he makes the weekly homework
- he reads teacher and student's comments
- he participates in the chat about weekly classes

Evaluation

Requirements to pass the course

- to read 100% of the theory classes
- to pass 80% of the theory and practical
- to participate in obligatory chats

The participants also fill an application form testing

- academic offer
- virtual campus platform

2002 and 2003 courses: satisfaction 95%

Every institution that dictates Internet courses anticipates the kind of testing to pass the course.

In our case we established: to read the classes, to pass the 80% of the theory and practical and to participate in the obligatory chats. 61% average of the participants approve the course.

At the end of the course we ask the participants to test us filling an application form with their opinion about academic offer and the virtual campus. During 2002 and 2003 courses we had 95% of satisfaction, perhaps because our contents and platform are a real novelty and the courses are free for CLACSO's centers members.

Key elements

Definitions (candidate's profile, contents, expected results, dedication of teachers and students)

Pro-active attitude in teachers and coordinator

Training teachers and students for the use of the Campus

Obligatory bibliography in the participant's language

To finish we would like to share with you our experience about some elements that make the success of an Internet course: Be clear, at the time to design the course, about the candidate's profile, the contents, the expected results, the profile and dedication of the teachers and the students.

Another elements are:

- The pro-active attitude of the teachers and the coordinator
- The training of teachers and students during the use of the Virtual Campus before the beginning of the course; so that they feel comfortable in it.
- The obligatory bibliography ought to be in the participant's language and in full text before the beginning of every class.

Cooperation to multiply the effect

To share the experiences, difficulties and solutions

To share academic contents in Spanish and Portuguese

To explore free-access software

To train the staff and teachers of virtual campus

To develop regional virtual campus

I would like to utilize the end of this presentation to insist in the importance of the international cooperation about this themes to complement the regular training with Internet activities. It is necessary to find areas:

- to share experiences, difficulties and the solutions that are being found
- to share the academic items with countries with the same language
- to explore free-access software
- to announce opportunities to training staff and teachers of virtual campus

- to develop regional virtual campus to be a training for librarians that work in virtual and digital libraries. It is a challenge for University Librarian Schools.

Contact CLACSO Coordinators

Social Sciences Regional Virtual Campus

Gabriela Amenta

Difussion Area (digital and printed publications, website and virtual library)

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If there's an institution here that needs more information about our experience, here are our contacts.

¡¡¡Thank you very much for your attention and enjoy Buenos Aires!!!

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