Wireless library instruction

Library instruction is not mandatory at Canisius College, so our library needed a way to promote the service to faculty. Our solution was to establish a wireless lab.

Wireless technology works with a radio transmitter that is physically connected to the campus Ethernet. Our library instruction room is equipped with a permanent transmitter and 12 IBook laptops.

This wireless environment allows students to move around the room with their laptops; the radios "cover" the entire room. This physical setup lends itself to group learning.

Reference librarians conduct library instruction classes either by demonstrating databases and then having students do their own searching or by having students do guided group searching (working from a series of questions) and then having the groups present results to the rest of the class with the librarian guiding the ensuing discussion.

The wireless lab has freed the librarians from demonstration-only classes. This allows the librarians time to help students with individual search questions and problems. It turns part of every library instruction class into the equivalent of one-on-one help typical of what is received at the reference desk, yet it does so in a classroom environment where students have the additional opportunity to learn from each other. The emphasis of wireless library instruction is therefore on student-centered learning rather than on teacher-centered control of classroom time.

Technical problems with the wireless lab have been minimal. The biggest problem is not having a laptop for every student. As it currently stands, two-to-three students often must share one laptop. A future development may be the ability of the librarians to move the equipment into classrooms where the class normally meets. This would give us added flexibility in scheduling and delivering library instruction sessions.—*Karen Bordonaro, reference librarian, and Joel Cohen, associate vice president for library and information services, at Canisius College, e-mail: bordonar@canisius.edu and cohen@ canisius.edu* ∎