VISION FOR THE PROJECT
(Discussion Draft)

Purpose:

This project will develop a new service model in the context of the most recent and innovative developments in information technology, such that students' individual differences, geopgraphic location, and level of technological infrastructure are evaluated and accommodated in a customized support program, by library specialists dispersed throughout the consortium, working as a team. This project will develop and support library specializations. The team will be instrumental in developing and maintaining a distance education Web gateway for Novanet.

The level of support that we envisage would be impossibly costly for most post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia, but may be cost-efficient and effective if provided jointly by members of the Novanet Consortium, using shared virtual core collections, electronic library services, equipment and expertise. It is intended to supplement existing services and provide a guaranteed minimum uniform level of service across the Consortium.

The underlying purpose is to improve the ability of distance and continuing education students to successfully complete courses and programs at Novanet institutions, and utlimately to increase the numbers of students who successfully complete courses and programs at Novanet post-secondary institutions.

Principles for improved services:

- individualized information access : e.g. bookmarks / Nomadic software (e-mail management)
- collaboration
- customization
- automated processes whenever possible
- team approach to an individual needs assessment
- team approach to providing support

Some services that will be evaluated may include:

- electronic reserves
- electronic book collections
- interactive reference online
- full-text database access
- interlibrary loan services
- document delivery
- online indexes, abstracts, reference databases
- online tutorials and help sheets
- customized user instruction
- IT remote user technical support
- toll-free phone line to library support
- answering machine for off-hours
- e-mail and attachments, spreadsheet, word processing

An initial approach will be to identify the distance education group as a distinct population with special needs. We have not yet identified exactly what these needs are and expect that they will vary considerably from student to student. These students are already licensed for access to materials held by their respective institutions. For the purposes of the pilot, we would like to create a support that utilizes the strengths of the home institution as well as value-added services, support or resources. It may be possible, where warranted, to top-up existing licenses for specific resources so that they are made available to all distance education students across the consortium, in order to create a core collection for distance education students.

Values of the project are:

1. It is innovative and can serve as a model for other library consortia around the world:
     - this project will design a process for first developing and then sustaining a centre of expertise in the creative uses of technologies to support the Distance and Continuing Education student.
     - this project will provide guidance and support for an established community learning network to transform an area of its operations that interfaces directly with a diverse and geographically dispersed client group.

2. It focuses on an under-served student population in an educational "growth sector":
     - Distance and Continuing Education students are a specific client population of Novanet.
     - The purpose of this project is to improve students' ability to succeed in their courses. This encompasses the informal skills and knowledge that will enable a student to graduate with strong information literacy skills, competent in locating, managing, reading, evaluating and citing, and communicating appropriate information.
     - Novanet assists students to be successful in their academic career and later in their working and professional lives, regardless of their geographic location. This project seeks to ensure that the student studying at a distance is not disadvantaged in accessing appropriate information.

3. It explores new uses of learning technologies in a collaborative environment:
     - this project's objective is to test a new approach that acknowledges disparities in access to technological infrastructure in the distance and continuing education client population.
     - this project will identify barriers that distance students experience in accessing supports available to on-campus students.
     - this project seeks to support the efforts of faculty and instructors to enrich their courses with material newly available in digital formats, and to ensure that distance and continuing education students are able to share in the advantages of evolving digital and virtual libraries.