

Learning Resources Programs in Exemplary Community Colleges

by A. Beverley Gass

Nearly twenty years ago, I made a career move and became a community college librarian. In addition to gaining an understanding and acceptance of the culture of the community college, it was also helpful to understand the concept of the learning resources program since the library was organizationally a part of one. As defined by the American Library Association, a learning resources program is an "organizational configuration which provides library and media materials and services. It can provide various specialized services and perform other instructional responsibilities."¹

During my tenure at the community college, the learning resources program was totally dismantled. Each of its components was organizationally assigned to various college administrators instead of one single dean. Later the learning resources program was reinstated in the college. These changes seemed to make little difference to the college itself or to its success. How could this be? What about other community colleges and their learning resources programs? What were learning resources programs like in excellent community colleges? How were they contributing to the college and its success? What examples of excellent practice could they offer those of us in the field?

These questions inspired the research project leading to the dissertation entitled "The Contribution of the Learning Resources Program to the Excellence in Community Colleges."²

The study was conducted at three sites selected from among the member colleges of the League for Innovation in the Community College, a North American consortium of sixteen community college districts that include thirty-eight public institutions located in Canada and in thirteen states in the United States. Founded in 1968, the League has achieved eminence within community colleges for the innovative projects it supports and the quality of its member institutions. For the purpose of my research, I assumed that membership in the League for Innovation, the elite body of community colleges in North America, attested to the excellence of the parent institutions selected for the study.

The methodology used was case study. Although it was the hypothesis of this study that exemplary community colleges might be expected to have exemplary learning resources programs, the hypothesis did not prove true. None of the programs examined could be considered exemplary.

The *Standards for Community, Junior and Technical College Learning Resources Programs*³ promulgated by the American Library Association provided a framework for analyzing the data. The results were presented in three case studies with the colleges identified only by fictitious names derived from the names of famous American educators: Horace Mann; John Dewey; and William Raney Harper.

Determining whether or not the colleges had a learning resources program proved to be somewhat problematic at each

site. I concluded that none of the three community colleges had a learning resources program as described in the Standards. This was the most significant finding of the investigation and the only one to be described here.

Despite the absence of any organized program of learning resources, each college did have units which typically are identified as being a learning resources program. All three had libraries and audiovisual components, while Dewey had two additional components: the college prep/learning lab and academic computing and educational technology.

Although the reasons for the apparent failure of the programmatic construct of learning resources cannot be fully ascertained, the intricacy of the organizational model presented by the Standards may have effectually hidden libraries and other basic level component services such as audiovisual from the larger parent organization. The complex organizational configurations of learning resources programs, where they have been implemented, may have created a situation where it appeared that these more basic service components were receiving adequate funding or faring well enough, particularly when institutional administrators had been encouraged by the Standards to think about "programs" of learning resources and not individual units. It is possible that the perpetuation of the model may only serve further to alienate important and valued components from the centrality of instructional support and hinder their effective contribution to the instructional mission of their parent colleges.

Because the Standards were developed by a pre-computer generation, the recommended model of service delivery incorporating computers and telecommunications may have been too speculative and may not have been adequately adjusted since its inception.

Having been broadly and vaguely defined twenty years ago, the learning resources program model may have allowed local college administrators too much latitude in defining the program and may now be inappropriate in an era of specialization. Perhaps the programmatic concept of learning resources is no longer relevant and only distracts community college leadership from attending to the needs of libraries and audiovisual units.

Because the model as displayed in the Standards is so broad, the buildings of the 1960s and 1970s, typically designed to house learning resources programs, actually may have been what held these components and programs together. However, despite their centrality to the program configuration, buildings are not enough to keep a program vital in a changing environment. A space necessary for an earlier vision of learning resources with large collections and diverse services may have begun to appear empty and too large by administrators trying to accommodate other programs moving into their colleges. It is likely that facilities, which once held learning resources programs together physically and even organizationally, will not be greatly ex-

panded or replicated.

As community colleges become increasingly decentralized, flagship campuses will no longer be built. Whether or not the future will require smaller physical campuses, electronic classrooms, the linkages of students to electronic colleges, or other scenarios yet unimagined, decisions about how best to deliver library or other instructionally supportive services will have to be rethought. The incorporation of computer and communication technologies may become more important in the emerging community college than buildings and campuses and will also become the basis for the delivery of, and access to, library services, audiovisual services, and other academic support services. How the professionals administering these units utilize technology and deploy human resources will determine the quality of services offered to students and faculty.

This research should be replicated at other community colleges. Possible sites could include other colleges that are members of the League for Innovation in the Community College as well as community colleges that do not belong to the League. Such investigations should include colleges whose student full-time equivalency enrollments are both smaller and larger than the colleges of this investigation. Likewise, replication of this research at single campus colleges, rural colleges, and those in more urban areas than those of this investigation could prove meaningful.

It might be particularly useful to investigate how learning resources units are being planned for these future electronic colleges. How will learning resources units be configured for a future in which students and faculty assemble not physically but electronically? Are there community colleges that have already begun to create or restructure learning resources units? What are

these units doing in the community colleges where students no longer have to come physically to the campuses to receive instruction but can take numerous courses or complete associate degrees electronically?

Replication of this research at colleges known to have exemplary learning resources units would be also useful. Identifying these Learning Resources Programs exemplary units could require nomination or some selection process that recognizes the locally focused missions of community colleges and the concomitantly locally focused learning resource program units. It may also be useful to learn how libraries within four-year colleges and universities where electronic instruction precludes the traditional physical attendance of students on campus are delivering or planning to deliver library services.

Other investigations that examine the concept of "services" versus "programs" might be valuable to the profession. Lee Hisle in his dissertation entitled "The Role of Learning Resource Services in Selected Community Colleges"⁴ suggests that the configurations of libraries, audiovisual units, and other instructionally supportive units are linked because of their provision of services to instruction instead of any really significant "programs" as described in the Standards. Which of these models is more useful for libraries and other units for whom the Standards have been promulgated?

This investigation seems to have raised more questions than it answered about the future and the viability of libraries, audiovisual services, and other units traditionally included within the definition of learning resources by Standards. Other research is imperative for the professionals in the field and for community

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Over to You . . .

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

For about two years I have read an electronic bulletin board called Computers & Composition Digest. The participants are, for the most part, writing instructors in colleges and universities in New England and the Southwest, with a few people scattered in other regions. I participate because I am interested in learning how they are using computers as part of instruction.

I was pleasantly surprised to see the following message as an FYI item on October 21st. Written by Paul Kramer, it originally appeared on the New Paradigms in Education List and was forwarded to C&CD by Eric Crump:

I just sent this information to one person, but with a second person asking about telecommunications in schools maybe more people would be interested in knowing that the current issue of **North Carolina Libraries** is devoted to telecommunications and in addition to excellent articles has references to some very useful books on the subject.

The fame of the journal continues to spread! Congratulations to you and guest editor Bill Stahl for a noteworthy issue.

Sincerely,
Angela Murphy-Walters
Curriculum Librarian
Hunter Library
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723

Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Address correspondence to:

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colleges if libraries and these units are to contribute meaningfully to their colleges and their students.

References

¹"Standards for Community, Junior and Technical College Learning Resources Programs," *C&RL News* 51 (September 1990): 757.

²Gass, Alice Beverley, "The Contribution of the Learning Resources Program to the Excellences in Community Colleges," (D.L.S. dissertation, Columbia University, 1992.)

³"Standards for Community, Junior and Technical College Learning Resources Programs," 757-67.

⁴Hisle, Wendell Leon. "The Role of Learning Resource Services in Selected Community Colleges," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1988.)

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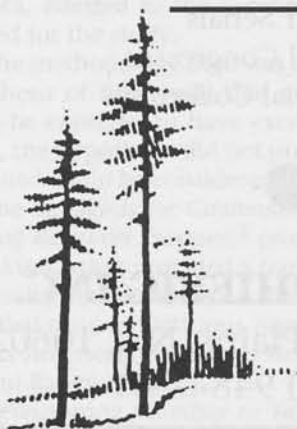
familiarity with the material, academic librarians should be working collectively to assure that collections are being amassed now to meet the needs of the popular culture scholars of tomorrow.

The challenge of expanding the traditional view of collection development in academic libraries will require librarians to change their attitudes. They will be forced to break out of the "cultural ghetto" in which they have traditionally operated. Many librarians have already done this, but others are still bound by a narrow definition of culture, and their collections are shaped from that perspective. In an age of anticanonical and multicultural studies, collection developers must look beyond traditional standards if they are to meet the needs of their constituencies. If future scholars are to understand today's society, they must have access to today's popular materials. If academic librarians do not collect and preserve these materials, who will?

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for popularizing codependency, ecstasy within marriage, and the natural healing powers of the apricot pit than anything imaginable. Not surprisingly, public libraries often feature these titles in their non-fiction collections. Is anyone seriously suggesting that these be the focal point of our collections in psychology or medicine at the university library?

Popular culture is not static, and popular culture materials are meant to be read and used rather than collected and stored. Libraries are not museums, and while we take pride in being society's storehouse of knowledge, we're not its attic. It is time to consider seriously the place of these materials in our collections and it's time for greater cooperation between public and academic libraries. And perhaps, before public libraries so willingly discard and sell their "worthless" paperbacks, they might yet find a good home at the university.



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