
An Opportunity and a Challenge

Mertys W. Bell

Communication—the sharing of information—is a primary challenge as we seek to satisfy the need for a literate society and for lifelong learning for the adults of North Carolina. We take advantage of the technologies which permit easy creation, transmission, reception, storage, retrieval, and replication of information. To quote Stanley Huffman, Jr., of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, “How symbolism is created, how the appropriate medium is selected for transmission of ideas, and how such resources are made accessible on a broad base is what communication is all about.”¹

In designing learning experiences, learning systems, and learning materials, we must consider the varied interests, abilities, and needs of individuals so that large numbers of people may be served effectively. I would like to relate these considerations to a brief synopsis of the development and purpose of community colleges, especially in North Carolina, and their learning resources centers, and follow up with a description of the interrelationships of community colleges, their learning resources centers, and the Division of Educative Services of the UNC Center for Public Television.

The *comprehensive community college* is acknowledged to be one of the most dynamic sectors of higher education, and is uniquely American. Serving learners at all levels of preparation and scholastic abilities—the “open door policy”—necessitates a multimedia approach. Non-traditional students need new instructional techniques. The obvious need for supportive resources and diverse services for instruction actually led to the development of *learning resources centers*.

North Carolina was slow to develop public community colleges. In 1952, the Hurlburt Commission's study pointed out the need for community colleges in North Carolina, but its recommendation was not passed by the 1953 General Assembly. It was not until 1957, during Governor Luther Hodges' administration, that the General

Assembly passed the Community College Act. At the same time, funds were made available to provide an educational program in industrial education—initiating a statewide system under the State Board of Education of area industrial education centers (IECs) offering technical and skilled training to selected high school youths and adults. By 1961, there were eighteen IEC's and two in the planning stage. At the same time, six community (junior) colleges were developing, reporting to the State Board of Higher Education. Seeing the need for better planning, Governor Terry Sanford appointed the Carlyle Commission (the Governor's Commission on Education Beyond the High School), which in 1962 recommended that the two types of institutions be brought into one administrative organization under the State Board of Education.

Among the notable members of the Carlyle Commission were Dallas Herring, Chairman of the State Board of Education, and William C. Friday, President of the University of North Carolina. In July, 1963, the General Assembly enacted General Statute 115A, which provided for the establishment of the Department of Community Colleges—a comprehensive community college system—with Dr. I. E. Ready as Director.² Between 1964 and 1968, all of the industrial education centers became technical institutes or comprehensive community colleges. After 1979 legislation, many technical institutes became technical colleges. In 1981, the responsibility for community colleges was placed in a State Board of Community Colleges.³

According to the *Biennial Report, 1976-1978, of the North Carolina Community College System*, “The purpose of the North Carolina Community College System is to fill the gap in educational opportunity existing between high school and the senior college and university. In carrying out this role, the technical institutes and community colleges offer academic, cultural and occupational education, and training opportunities from basic education through the two-year college level, at a convenient time and place and at a nominal cost, to anyone who can learn and whose needs can be met by these institutions.”⁴ Quite a challenge!

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A comprehensive curriculum ... new courses and new techniques ... remedial programs ... occupational training ... adult and continuing education ... low tuition ... community orientation ... Community colleges were "reaching out!" A new pattern of integrating working and learning was evolving to meet the needs of a new student clientele. With a current enrollment in 58 institutions of over 600,000 (one in seven adults in North Carolina), today's community college students are older, 51% female, and are working and learning at the same time.

An average of two new public junior colleges in the United States opened each week between 1965 and 1970—the heyday of two-year college growth. Also in the late Sixties, the importance of the learning resources concept began to emerge as the role of the library in instruction received increasing acknowledgment and emphasis. Dr. Louis Shores' Library-College concept and his definition of the "generic book" set the stage. He defined the "generic book" as "the sum total of man's communication possibilities. It includes all media formats, subjects, and levels."⁵ A comprehensive Learning Resources Program is a cooperative, college-wide effort to provide a diversity of options for study, research, and cultural development of students, faculty, staff and the adult community. Besides integrating the various types of media, the learning resources concept implies a systematically developed program that allows materials, equipment, and techniques to be accessible, effective, and efficiently used.

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Following a national trend, in North Carolina various resource components were combined or evolved to fill specific needs, resulting in an administrative unit called the "Learning Resources Center," with a chief administrator to centralize, manage, and coordinate the various services (components). Library services, audiovisual services, then a variety of instructional services were added. In North Carolina, learning labs (now often called "learning centers") were introduced in 1964 to provide a programmed systems approach for individualized learning. These learning centers joined with other instructional servi-

ces which have been coordinated through the LRCs, such as tutorial programs, instructional design, and development, telecourses, Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI), self-instructional courses, testing, career centers, and special labs. These have been exciting and challenging years! From about 1968 to 1978, new learning resources centers were developing throughout the North Carolina Community College System. In 1979, Dr. Ernest Tompkin's study of the 57 institutions then in operation revealed that 53 had LRCs with two or more components.⁶ Many four-year institutions have also developed learning resources centers.

Related professional associations reflected changes in the roles of libraries and learning resources centers. The North Carolina Community College Library Association, organized in 1967, changed its name to the North Carolina Community College Educational Media Association to show the integration of all types of media. Then in 1973, when the association adopted the learning resources concept, its name was changed to the North Carolina Community College Learning Resources Association (NCCCLRA). In 1985, NCCCLRA renewed its commitment to the concept and published a position paper for reference and distribution.⁷ Offering resources (print, non-print, human) with instructional services enhances the entire educational program of an institution. ACCESS, SERVICE, and INSTRUCTION are the primary functions of an LRC—an information network and instructional support system. More efficient management of resources and services, greater flexibility in the utilization of staff, facilities, and budget, financial accountability, coordination and cooperation—these are some of the "payoffs." The potential of a Learning Resources Program is far-reaching, including services to adults pursuing lifelong learning, especially Adult Basic Education, Adult High School and General Educational Development (GED) programs, services to the business and industrial community, and participation in consortia for resource and information sharing.

The North Carolina Consortium for Instructional Telecommunications (NCCIT), begun in 1978 and initiated by Durham Technical Institute, is an excellent example of networking in this state. The support services for instructional telecommunications which have been provided by the UNC Center for Public Television have been and are a notable contribution to education in North Carolina. The UNC Center for Public Television was created in 1980. *Telecourses* are now being offered through the combined efforts of the UNC Center for Public Television, the North Carolina

Department of Community Colleges, and other participating colleges and universities. Courses are offered on the semester system and range from eleven to fifteen weeks in length. Students register at their local participating college or university. Surely telecourses are a viable, convenient, and flexible option for learning—for college credit or for self-development. *Teleprograms*, such as "Just Around the Corner" (ABE), "Another Page" (Pre-GED) and "GED" are televised instructional programs which are serving adult learners at all levels and aiding in the fight to eliminate illiteracy in North Carolina. It is still shocking to realize that nearly a million adults in North Carolina (virtually one adult of each three) have only eight years of formal education or less, and almost a third of a million have no education beyond the fifth grade!

Teleconferencing is another important support service in the area of instructional telecommunications being offered by the UNC Center for Public Television. Teleconferencing—the transmission of a picture and sound to many receivers—allows groups to gather and participate in meetings, instructional programs, or workshop sessions. The Center has a portable satellite receiving dish which is available upon request (as scheduling permits) for member institutions of the University system, community colleges, and other state government agencies.⁹ Placing these components—telecourses, teleprograms, and teleconferencing—under one umbrella (the Division of Educative Services) is another illustration of increasing coordination and cooperation by combining similar and vital components for efficient management and provision of quality instructional telecommunications for North Carolina adult learners.

In most of the North Carolina community/technical colleges and technical institutes, the Learning Resources Centers' personnel with their expertise have acted as local coordinators, liaisons, managers, and/or promoters of telecourses, teleprograms, and teleconferences. Of course, the curriculum department chairmen make the selections of courses to offer and the instructors, who register, meet students for orientation and exams; but the Learning Resources Center is always heavily involved in the dissemination of information about telecourses, the design and production of brochures, etc., and is customarily the "agent"

who interacts with the Center for Public Television. It is usually an LRC staff member who arranges for leases and copies of the telecourses to be available for students who miss a "class" or need to review televised lessons before exams, and who distributes information from the Center for Public Television. The mechanics of telecourses are in place and may vary from institution to institution.

Hand in hand, the Learning Resources Center, the local college, and the Center for Public Television work together to provide the educational option of instruction by telecommunications. This partnership ensures a smoother operation and promotes communication, coordination, and cooperation within the institution and statewide. There is a similarity in the two: in both the Division of Educative Services of the UNC Center for Public Television and in the Learning Resources Center, similar functions have been amalgamated and coordinated so that the public can be better served. Through telecommunications North Carolina is exemplifying a partnership in education which meets the needs of a diverse group of people and institutions. This is another case of maximizing resources and services—an OPPORTUNITY and a CHALLENGE!

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