
The Educational Preparation Available for LRC Professionals

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The learning resources center of the two-year college gets very little attention from the research sector of librarianship, especially compared to the academic, school and public library. The reasons for this can only be guessed at: our practitioners are busy and problem-oriented people, and library school professors seem to find other areas more to their taste.

One of the few things that seems to be generating research into the learning resources center is the much dreaded "master's paper" that is still required in many MLS programs. One of the authors of this article recently went through this familiar ordeal, concentrating her attention on the LRC—specifically on the educational preparation available for the two-year college librarian.

In reviewing the literature on the subject, the investigators encountered a recurrent theme. Two-year colleges were different in substantive ways from other types of academic institutions and had a different sense of mission that required a different way of doing things. This carried over to the learning resources center. Research reports and academic writings reflected a strong belief that this new library form required a type of library education different from that which was traditionally available. Other research probed the curricula of library education and found a scarcity of courses that were aimed at preparing the LRC librarian.

This phenomenon—the gap between the perceived need for special preparation and the actual availability of special preparation—became the focus of this piece of research. A questionnaire was sent to all fifty-nine of the ALA accredited library schools in April of 1985. It sought information about curricular and noncurricular offerings, and also probed educators' attitudes towards this particular area of professional education.

Review of Past Research

A review of pertinent research done over the

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past twenty years in response to the development of the learning resources center program should help the reader to understand the present-day problem.

In 1968, Fritz Veit recognized that junior colleges were changing, that public junior colleges were becoming larger institutions with a community orientation and that this changed the nature and extent of library services.¹ Concerned with the preparation of librarians for junior and community college work, he collected data on the offerings of ALA accredited library schools. He submitted to each a short questionnaire which drew information on special courses offered, workshops and institutes for practicing librarians, etc.

All schools responded to this survey and it showed that not a single school included a course designed for this type of library. Two schools offered seminars and two held or co-sponsored workshops, institutes or conferences on the junior college library. Schools having courses dealing with specific types of libraries advised students to take the college and university libraries course. In a considerable number of schools more specific attention was given through the option of directed reading or the selection of pertinent reports.

Veit concluded that educators felt preparation for community and junior college librarianship was essentially the same as for four-year college librarianship. It was recognized that each had its own characteristics which deserved special consideration. He did not foresee the addition of courses in the near future. He expected the general college library course, with directed reading and selected reports, to continue to be the type available. It seemed probable that seminars in the junior college would be offered to supplement this course. In reporting his research Veit stressed to library educators that the professional librarian in most junior colleges held faculty status and therefore should have acquired teaching skill and should know the characteristics of the student body and the total academic environment.

As community colleges continued to grow

and develop, the library distinguished itself as a center for all types of resources for teaching and learning. The "AACJ-ACRL Guidelines for Two-Year College Learning Resources Programs" were adopted in 1972. The role of the librarian was expanding and attention turned to community college library professionals to identify the types of preparation that would be most useful.

Two researchers, Elizabeth Matthews² and Shirley Edsall³, made nationwide surveys in 1972 and 1973 respectively. Though differing in focus somewhat, these confirmed that basic core library courses were regarded as very valuable preparation. Those surveyed in these studies also expressed a need for preparation in audiovisual materials selection and administration, community college education, library and learning resources administration, educational technology, design and production of media, curriculum design and computer science.

As a result of Edsall's research findings and a grant awarded by the U.S. Office of Education, the University of Indiana Library School sponsored a program to prepare persons of minority background as community college librarians⁴. The program objectives focused on knowledge of the philosophy of the LRC; its relation to the total educational program of the college; and the attainment of skills and competencies to run a center. The program offered regular library school courses based on the needs expressed in the previous survey research. There were also courses on the community college and on LRC librarianship. The external evaluator's report said that the program could be used as a model by library schools to develop a community college library course as part of their masters degree program.

The growth trend continued through the 1970s. The increase in the size and number of community colleges together with the 1979 ALA quantitative standards and the revised guidelines promoted further innovative developments in the LRC. At the same time, changes were also taking place in library education. Consequently a second study of the status of community college librarianship in library schools was made in 1980. Ruth Person⁵ polled schools using a questionnaire similar to that used by Fritz Veit. Person reported that six schools had a course for community college librarians and that thirty-six offered an academic library course which included the community college library. About one-half of these schools also offered courses identified by Matthews and Edsall as being important preparation. Three encouraged students to enroll in general

education courses in the community college and several offered a practicum.

In 1982 Marilyn Lary collected data from the directors of Florida community college learning resources centers⁶. This survey inquired about the most obvious weaknesses in the preparation of professional staff and about the competencies that would be sought in future employees. Respondents most often named lack of computer awareness as a weakness. Lack of expertise in design and production and curriculum design were also frequently given. Competencies that would be sought after in the future were identified as reference service, bibliographic instruction, computer operations and applications, media design and production and curriculum design.

Methodology

Given the changes in library education, the two-year college LRC and the employment situation since the late '70s, a new survey was designed to shed light on how American library education was responding to the needs of would-be LRC professionals. In April of 1985, questionnaires were mailed to the deans of the 59 ALA accredited library schools and 52 of these were completed and returned for a response rate of 88%.

The questionnaire used was composed of two parts: Part I seeking information about the practices of the library school and Part II seeking some indication of educators' attitudes toward two-year college librarianship as a speciality. The six questions in the first part asked about courses that were included in the curriculum, noncurricular offerings, and interdisciplinary or other courses recommended to an interested student. Respondents were asked reasons for not including special courses and encouraged to add general comments.

Part II was composed of six attitude statements concerning the need for special courses, the obligation of the profession to support this area of librarianship, and the future outlook for the community college and the learning resources center. Two statements reflected each concept, one expressed in a positive way and the other negatively. Structured responses were "strongly agree," "tend to agree," "tend to disagree," and "strongly disagree."

Results

It is difficult to identify strong trends or significant correlations when the current research is compared to the previous studies described

above. Certain differences from the Veit and Person findings will be noted, and new information on curricular offerings, etc., will be presented. Among the most helpful data were the comments of the respondents, which will also be represented below.

Veit found in 1968 that no schools had yet offered courses focused on the two-year college, but that library schools seemed to be aware of a developing need since institutes and workshops were being considered by a few. Person reported in 1980 six schools with special courses. In 1985 only three schools regularly teach courses, while three teach courses if there is sufficient interest. In 1968, schools offering courses dealing with specific types of libraries advised students to take the college and university libraries course. Person said in 1980 that thirty-six schools included the two-year college in the academic library course. In the current survey, thirty-two advise taking such a course. Only four mentioned that the LRC received significant attention in the course, however.

Veit reported that students were able to follow a special interest through directed reading and special reports. In 1985 this is still a means of individualized learning where special courses are not taught. Person's study showed that three schools encouraged students to enroll in general education courses and that several had a practicum for community college experience. In reply to the current survey, nine schools indicated they would suggest an interdisciplinary curriculum, two specifying education courses. Twenty-two schools would offer a practicum, internship or field study.

Two-year colleges were different in substantive ways from other types of academic institutions and had a different sense of mission that required a different way of doing things. This carried over to the learning resources center.

When the courses now offered by schools giving special attention to two-year college librarianship are compared to those identified by Matthews, Edsall and Lary, one finds a correspondence. Courses now being taught in these three schools are:

Introduction to the Theory and Practices of the LRC in Higher Education and Industry

Media and Learning Resources Centers in Post Secondary Education and Industry

Media Center Administration

Management of Information Agencies

Instructional Development

Theories of Educational Communication

Microcomputer Courses

Although there was no question to elicit information about courses in the general curriculum that would satisfy needs found by these three researchers, several respondents mentioned the following:

Nonbook Acquisition and Cataloging

Media Utilization and Production

Information Systems

Microcomputers in Libraries

Reference and Bibliography

Attitudes of Library Educators

When the responses to Part II, the attitude statements, were evaluated as a whole, it was found that the mean attitude toward the community college librarianship was essentially neutral. The mean score was calculated to be very close to 2.5, based on a 1-4, negative to positive, scale. Of the statements, those concerning the need for professional commitment scored slightly more positively than those concerning the inclusion of special courses and the future of the community college. When grouped according to the treatment of two-year college librarianship in the curriculum, it was seen that schools actually offering courses scored most positively, with those offering courses according to interest scoring somewhat less positively. On the scale of 1 to 4 these were 3.28 and 2.97 respectively.

Schools offering the academic libraries course and other options averaged a score of 2.3; while those offering only the academic libraries course scored 2.28, the lowest mean score. The group of schools that offered no academic library course, but offered a practicum, internship, independent study or other options scored 2.45 and schools showing no specific options scored 2.49. The table below represents these relationships in more detail.

Comments added by respondents to this survey revealed a lack of agreement concerning the degree of specialization needed to prepare for community college librarianship, and also the appropriateness of this specialization in a mas-

Table of Average Scores of Paired Attitude Statements

Group	N	Attitudes			Mean
		Toward Special Course	Toward Professional Commitment	Toward Future of Community College	
1	3	3.33	3.5	3	3.28
2	3	2.92	3.25	2.75	2.97
3	18	2.11	2.4	2.4	2.3
4	13	2.06	2.34	2.45	2.28
5	7	2.17	2.86	2.32	2.45
6	8	2.13	2.87	2.47	2.49

Group 1: Schools Offering Special Courses
 Group 2: Schools Offering Special Courses if Demand
 Group 3: Schools Offering Academic Libraries Course and Other Options
 Group 4: Schools Offering Academic Libraries Course Only
 Group 5: Schools Offering Other Options Only
 Group 6: Schools Offering No Specific Options

ter's degree program. While the opinions representing schools presently having courses were quite positive, those not teaching courses regularly showed a less committed attitude. One educator wrote:

"I don't offer my course [regularly] because there's just no demand. Also, I think that 4-year academic libraries have adapted some of the practices and forward-thinking ideas of LRCs which mean that old differences between 2-yr. and 4-yr. colleges are becoming less distinct. I don't think they [LRCs] are as unique as they were 10 years ago."

A large group expressed the belief that the requirements are not significantly different from other academic libraries. The academic libraries curriculum—with perhaps the addition of independent study, a practicum or internship—was felt to be adequate preparation. A respondent explained:

"We now offer a course in 'Academic Libraries' which is actually a practicum designed to respond to the students' specific interest in that broad area of service. If a student is interested in LRC service, the practicum is designed in that environment."

Another said:

"... student can basically design his own program taking media courses, management, academic libraries, technology and independent study."

One North Carolina respondent commented:

"There is enough flexibility in our program to accommodate the occasional student through higher education here and at NCSU."

A group who acknowledged having had experience in a learning resources center, or who had studied it extensively, does believe the diversity of its clientele, resources and services set it apart from more traditional college and university libraries. However, a few of these see it as a composite of library types—academic, school, technical school and public library. These would approach the need by advising diverse type-of-library courses. One respondent wrote:

"My entire professional career was spent in the community college library. I feel strongly that community college librarianship is a mix of public and academic librarianship. We have courses in both those areas which I recommend community college-bound students to take. I think their preparation is adequate."

A different approach suggested was the abandonment of type-of-library courses. One respondent who had studied community college librarianship extensively felt that it did not receive adequate attention in the confines of the academic libraries curriculum. The solution proposed was to replace the type of library course with administrative courses that focus on community analysis and planning. From the group not having type-of-library courses, one respondent expressed a similar concept:

"Our curriculum is aimed at providing a general theory base, some tools courses—i.e., needs assessment, systems analysis, research methods—and opportunities for in depth study in such areas as the educational function of libraries and other information systems... We do not offer courses by type of library... The specific techniques associated with an LRC are best learned through continuing education programs, on the job, or through practicum experience (which we encourage)."

The feeling that LRC librarianship is too specialized for concentration at the master's degree level was expressed by several educators. One said:

"... In my experience students may tell us (or themselves) that they plan to work in an LRC, but they will apply for whatever job becomes available ... I cannot believe that this level of specialization is appropriate at the basic master's degree. Perhaps as part of continuing education or training."

One school that does have special courses does not at the present offer a full concentration which, in its opinion, deals effectively with the LRC concept. The respondent noted that:

"To be truly effective the LRC concentration would require more emphasis on instructional design and application of media technologies—we are probably talking about 42-48 semester hours. The job market has not been sufficient to justify a longer MLS degree or an M.Ed. in instructional design. The ideal might be a joint master's in library science and instructional design."

In summarizing the comments, we could conclude that student interest is the most often named factor determining the inclusion of courses for two-year college librarianship. Interest dovetails with employment opportunities. In 1985, the lack of a job market has not completely obliterated the slight trend toward special courses that began in the 1970s, but it has taken its toll. It has become less practical for students to concentrate in a narrow area. Consequently it is less feasible for schools to offer this narrowly focused type of library course at the master's level.

One way of filling the gap, at least partially, is the greater flexibility in programming that is now found in more and more schools. It was shown that the number of schools offering a practicum, internship and advising interdisciplinary education courses has increased since 1980. Another expression of flexibility is found in the philosophy of emphasizing similarities rather than differences, and teaching students to assess the environment and to solve individual problems using basic knowledge.

This study suggests that there is an area for cooperation between LRCs and library schools which might be considered more seriously—that of making internships and practicum opportunities more widely available. An ongoing dialogue between library schools and LRC administrators might enlighten the academicians as to the realities of life and enable schools to meet the needs of

continuing education for professionals more effectively.

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Conclusions

Looking at the rather "luke-warm" attitudes of library educators toward the LRC and taking into consideration the thought and analysis expressed in their descriptions of the different curricula, we might draw a few general conclusions. First, the two-year college LRC can not count on much support from library education, at least as far as specialized course offerings are concerned. Second, there is general agreement that LRC librarianship does have its own needs that should be met in one way or another.

This piece of research, as other research before it, focuses our attention on the options of continuing education and staff development. Perhaps the next step is the practical one of developing the necessary linkages between practicing librarians and the various educational arms of the profession.

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