

# The Learning Resource Center's Role in the Community College System

Doris Cruger Dale

*Librarians in a community college system must accept the role of teacher if the library is to become an essential part of the college. The objectives of the library must include bibliographic instruction to provide students with the opportunity to master library skills. There are too many library-independent courses being taught in community colleges and too many dusty books on the shelves. Only if the librarian accepts a positive role as a teacher can this situation be turned around.*



Let's start with a basic question: Why is there a library in the community college? The answer is quite simple: tradition.

Can anyone envision an academic institution without a library? Universities have libraries, four-year liberal arts colleges have libraries, high schools have libraries, and some elementary schools have libraries.

The first public junior college still in existence was organized in Joliet, Illinois, in 1901 as a two-year extension of Joliet Township High School; and the college students used the high school library. It was not until L. W. Smith's administration from 1919 to 1928 that a separate college library was established with Pauline Dillman as the first college librarian.<sup>1</sup> It was simply assumed that the college would have a separate library, and a librarian would be in charge. From this early beginning, community colleges developed quickly, especially during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Community colleges offer many opportunities: (1) liberal arts and professional courses that can be transferred to other

colleges and universities and applied toward a bachelor's degree; (2) technical and occupational courses leading to certificates and associate degrees in arts and applied sciences; (3) special programs for adults who wish to expand their cultural and leisure experiences or earn a high school equivalency diploma; (4) professional courses for persons improving their skills; (5) remedial courses to qualify students for other curricula; and (6) counseling services.

These opportunities are spelled out in a variety of ways, but there are no statements about libraries or the need to learn library skills or reference strategies. Sometimes that idea is expressed in such documents as a list of library objectives or the book selection policy. It should be included and stressed, not only in the objectives of the college and the library, but also in the mission statement.

The history of the community college library or learning resource center as an instructional service is traced by Gloria Terwilliger in the spring 1985 issue of *Library Trends*, the first issue of that journal

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to be devoted to community college libraries since October 1965—a twenty-year gap.

Terwilliger uses the term *learning resource(s) center*. In this article I will use the terms *library* and *learning resource(s) center* (LRC) interchangeably. The terminology is still in a state of flux. Many community colleges use the term *library*, and I visited one that called it a *library LRC*. The names *learning resources*, *learning resources center*, *learning center*, and *educational resources library center* are also used, as are the terms *instructional resources* and *instructional services*. *Library media center*, which is used by many school libraries, is also found. Richard Rowe suggested in *American Libraries* that librarians should now be called chief information officers.<sup>2</sup> The change of name is probably an attempt to indicate to the faculty and students that the role of library services in community colleges is changing, but it doesn't always work. The name "Learning Resources Center" may be engraved in stone over the door, but the sign on the door reads "library hours." The receptionist may answer the phone "LRC," but if you want to meet a friend, you say "I'll meet you in the library."

Terwilliger begins her history by mentioning B. Lamar Johnson's experiments at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, when he tried to bring about a closer relationship between library and classroom. In the 1940s the forty-second yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education was written by a Committee on the Library in General Education. The statement was made that the library should be the resource center of the college.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a tremendous growth in the number of comprehensive community colleges. Each had a learning resource center, although it was often built without consulting the librarians. In the 1970s, the LRCs became involved in instructional development and computer-assisted instruction. The 1972 "Guidelines for Two-Year College Learning Resources Programs" influenced the development of the LRCs. Terwilliger states: "Learning resources center systems, services and materials

have been designed and structured as supports for achieving institutional instructional objectives."<sup>3</sup> In most of the statements about libraries or learning resources centers in community colleges the term *support* appears again and again.

Most librarians would agree that the primary task of any library in an educational institution is to provide materials and facilities to carry out the instructional program of the school. The library must reflect the basic purpose and philosophy of the community college. Harriet Genung in 1953 called the community college library the "heart of the college."<sup>4</sup> This idea was further developed by Louis Shores when he outlined his library-college philosophy. The concept of the library-college as conceived by Shores was composed of two parts: (1) independent study by the student was to be the essence of the library-college, and (2) the sum total of humanity's community possibilities in all formats, levels, and subjects was to be provided to the student.<sup>5</sup> These are rather grandiose ideas, given current budget restraints and the realities of the situation today.

In a very perceptive article written in 1931, Edith Coulter listed the following three functions of the community college library: (1) teaching—students must learn how to discover information for themselves and must become self-reliant library users; (2) professional needs—some specialized materials must be provided for faculty members to keep up-to-date in their fields; and (3) community needs—the adults in the community must be provided for (although the community college library should not attempt to replace other information centers such as the public library); it should make available to the community specialized information not obtainable elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> The first function—teaching—is the most important, but it is not stressed enough.

One way to examine the philosophy and goals of most community colleges is to examine their catalogs, which also project the image of the school's library. In many instances the philosophy of the college is stated in broad terms with no concrete meaning for library services. For example, Lincoln Trail College

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belongs to the people whom it serves and who support it. The college strives to be responsive to individual and collective needs of its citizens. LTC seeks to meet the diverse educational needs of all the people in the geographical area it serves. Comprehensive programs are offered to meet the educational needs of the district by preparing students for a full participation and active involvement in their society. The college serves as a stimulus to raise the level of intellectual and cultural aspiration and achievement of the people in its area. Lincoln Trail College is committed to the pursuit of excellence in a context of concern for all.

Lincoln Trail College is dedicated to providing educational opportunities which will permit persons of all ages to enrich their lives and advance their careers to the limits of their desires and potential. Students are challenged to become competent in their area of study, to develop and exercise independent judgement which results in responsible citizenship, to think logically without bias and prejudice and to seek wisdom as well as pursue knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

This is a tall order for any academic institution. In a few instances, the objectives of the library are also listed in the college catalogs, although frequently the section devoted to the library merely lists services and materials available.

I developed a scale for evaluating the image of the library reflected in the college catalog. The highest possible score was six, computed as follows: one point if the library or learning resource center was mentioned in the table of contents, one point if either term was found in the index, one point if the description of the library was less than 225 words, two points if the description was more than 225 words, and two more points if the description included information about services, staff, and especially the objectives and philosophy of the library. Of the twenty-nine college catalogs I examined, none achieved a score of six, and three scored zero. Seven scored five, one scored four, three scored three, eleven scored two, and

four scored one point. Two additional studies by Mari Ellen Leverence and Roland Person confirmed this dismal picture.<sup>8</sup>

Very few catalogs spell out the specific objectives of the library. In the Rend Lake College catalog, the objectives of the LRC are only hinted at: "The Learning Resource Center plays a vital role in the instructional process of Rend Lake College. Students, faculty and other district residents are encouraged to make full use of its facilities for study, research, leisure reading, class preparation and browsing."<sup>9</sup>

Two questions emerge from this general study: (1) Is the LRC fulfilling its teaching function? (2) Is the LRC providing sufficient materials to meet curriculum requirements? The literature on library orientation and instruction is very extensive. An annual conference on library orientation is held each year at Eastern Michigan University (the first one was held on May 7, 1971). Tours alone are of little value, although librarians persist in giving them at the beginning of each academic year. Individual aid by the library staff is the most used and most expensive type of library orientation. Many librarians have told me that they are burned-out from desk duty during which they explain the use of the *Readers' Guide* over and over. Slide-tape presentations, videotapes, and other visual means are used to reach large groups, but these must be kept up-to-date.

Library instruction is often differentiated from orientation and is defined as a specific scheduled course for credit. These courses can range from one to three credits. I have found many course titles in various college catalogs: Library Skills, Use of Books and Libraries, Finding Information, Introduction to Research, Access to Information, Effective Use of Learning Resources, Enjoying American Magazines, and Audiovisual Materials and Equipment. Many libraries offer self-instruction courses and respond to students' questions via feedback bulletin boards. Librarians offer term-paper clinics when needed. Courses for faculty are fewer. One library maintains faculty pro-

files on three-by-five cards that include individual faculty pictures. Computer database management systems lend themselves to this type of analysis and could provide current information about new books and services to faculty.

In planning a library instruction program in a community college, several questions must be answered: will the course be required or an elective, who will teach it and who will be taught, what will be taught, when will it be taught, where will it be taught, and how will it be taught? One successful library instruction course has evolved over several years at Earlham College. There are three basic principles in this program: integration, demonstration, and gradation.

1. The instruction is *integrated*, whenever possible, into the course work in those courses requiring intensive use of the library.

2. A class period (or more) is set aside for one of the library staff to *demonstrate* the search for and use of library materials. Each student receives an annotated bibliography which locates and describes the most important reference tools for that course and watches the librarian demonstrate the use of these sources by working through a library search similar to what the student himself is facing.

3. The instruction is *graded*—it builds on previous instruction.<sup>10</sup>

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James Kennedy concludes "the greatest benefit of an effective program of library instruction is that it can bring the library into its rightful position as an essential element in a college education."<sup>11</sup> Although designed for a four-year liberal arts college, this program has implications for community colleges, especially for their liberal arts courses.

Before undertaking an elaborate library instruction program, a needs analysis sur-

vey of both the students and the faculty should be done. A questionnaire designed to measure student opinion of library orientation and instruction can be distributed. One such study by Elizabeth Badger revealed that 85% of the students planned to transfer to four-year colleges and 80% felt adequately prepared to use the community college library.<sup>12</sup>

To be the heart of the college—a goal universally desired—has not been universally reached. One seminal study completed in 1966 by Richard Hostrop deserves more attention than it has received.<sup>13</sup> Hostrop researched library usage at the College of the Desert in California, studying the relationship of academic success and selected other factors to actual student use of library materials.

A January 1966 inventory showed total holdings at 14,370. The library has a fully automated circulation control system. The study used the following data: (1) interviews with all department chairs, (2) interviews with students and faculty, (3) six different questionnaires, (4) three kinds of circulation records, and (5) student data.

The study was limited to the circulation of printed library materials to students attending the college in the fall 1965 semester. In a thirteen-week period, 413 full-time students (about one-third of the total full-time student body) made 3,385 withdrawals. Of these, 3,010 (88.92%) were course withdrawals and 375 (11.08%) were noncourse withdrawals. Of the course withdrawals, 400 (13.28%) were from the reserve collection and 2,610 (86.71%) were from the general collection. Of the 14,370 holdings, 2,995 individual pieces were loaned 4,352 times. Therefore, 20.8% of the collection circulated once or more, and 79.2% of the collection never left the library. (With the advent of sophisticated circulation systems, these would be the books appearing on your "dusty-book" reports, those considered for withdrawal from the collection.) Full-time students made much greater use of the library than part-time students. An analysis of student characteristics suggested that (1) students who were older than the average age of the student popu-

lation were likely to be nonlibrary users; (2) females borrowed more library materials per capita than did males; (3) students who achieved greater scholastic success in college were more likely to be library users; and (4) students who carried heavier semester unit loads were more likely to be library users. The student library user also lived at home, had a greater number of books in his home, and had a father with a higher socioeconomic status than the non-library user.

About 18% of the students accounted for about half of the circulation. About half of the students accounted for almost 90% of the course withdrawals. Out of 161 courses investigated, 5 accounted for more than half (53.07%) of the course withdrawals and 40 courses accounted for 95.49% of the course withdrawals. The author reported on interviews with the 9 instructors whose courses generated high library use, representing 23.68% of the 38 full-time instructors who taught graded classes during the period of the study. Hostrup interviewed 23 students who were heavy library borrowers, 14 students who were nonlibrary users but who still got A or B grades, and 5 full-time students whose fall semester grade point average was 4.00 (A).

On the basis of these interviews and other data, the typical library user at the College of the Desert was likely to be female, to withdraw books from the general collection, to spend much time in the library, to have a native curiosity that prompted reading, to come from a higher socioeconomic stratum, and to live in a family home that contained many books, including paperbacks that the student had bought.

In response to a four-question course survey form (with 100% return from the 38 full-time and 20 part-time instructors and an 83.8% return from the 419 full-time students), 121 graded courses were shown to be library independent—that is, both instructors and students agreed that use of library materials was not notably or extremely important in determining final course grades. These 121 graded classes represented 75.15% of all graded courses offered in the fall semester of 1965–66. An

additional 28 classes or 17.39% were judged by a majority of the students but not the instructors to be library independent (for a total of 90.30%).

In a student survey of library-instructional relationships, 2 factors out of 20 interfered with library use: (1) instructors were not library oriented, and (2) there was too much noise in the library. In 12 of the 161 graded courses (7.45%) there was agreement by both instructors and students that the use of library materials was extremely important in determining final grades. Although the use of library materials was not very important for success in examinations, 10 (83.33%) of the 12 classes reported that use of library materials was very important in order to get a good grade on a term paper. The 12 library-dependent classes were taught by only 5 instructors. The students implied that motivation to use the library came from two sources: the instructors and the library staff.

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Both hypotheses tested in this study were accepted by the researcher: (1) there are few student characteristics associated with the use of library materials, and (2) most courses stimulated little or no student use of library materials. This study points to the need for more precise and accurate circulation statistics from community college libraries. Hostrup recommends that (1) the library staff provide library-use instruction; (2) community college libraries establish library committees; (3) library staff conduct in-service workshops for new instructors, and (4) library-instructional objectives be established and implemented.

A study of satellite learning centers of U.S. community colleges demonstrates how difficult it is to provide service to students at these centers. Of those colleges responding to the survey, 82% operated satellite learning centers, but 73% received no library support.<sup>14</sup>

Various use studies have demonstrated that miles of books in many libraries are hardly ever used.<sup>15</sup> Although many studies used circulation records, Robert Broadus states that "use of materials in the building seems to be parallel and proportional to circulation."<sup>16</sup> Recent materials are used most frequently, and most Americans do not use materials in languages other than English.

Some specific recommendations gleaned from field trips and research studies include the following:

1. Examine your college catalog. What are the objectives of the college? Do they include one relating to the mastery of library skills to promote lifelong learning? Are the objectives of the library clearly stated?

2. Do a needs assessment, a user study, a study of circulation records, and a study of the use of materials in the library. Before beginning any studies, read the document prepared by the Subcommittee on Use and User Studies, Collection Management and Development Committee of RTSD. This document provides a summary of the methods available to determine the extent to which books, journals, and other library materials are used.<sup>17</sup>

3. Develop a three-credit library instruction course, in-service workshops, term-paper clinics, and informal networks with faculty. *Teaching Librarians to Teach*, by Alice S. Clark and Kay F. Jones may be helpful.<sup>18</sup>

4. Develop a good public relations program, good signs, a newsletter, and articles in the school paper. You do not have a captive audience, as is often assumed in academic settings. You must win over both the students and the faculty. Get out from behind the desk, quit checking out books yourself, don't shelve books, and get involved in curriculum planning, instructional design, faculty meetings, and informal networks.

5. Weed the dusty books, the books not

used, and quit trying to preserve the world's knowledge—it's impossible anyway; even the Library of Congress no longer tries to do it. Now that the computer can issue a "dusty book report" weeding is easier.

6. Investigate using technology to create connections between radio, television, video, and computers and library materials.

"Why Is This Library?" a guest editorial in the fall 1985 issue of *Community & Junior College Libraries*, prompted this article.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the library is because of tradition, apathy, prestige. How can one be against apple pie, the American flag, and libraries? But it is interesting that in a recent book on excellence in the community college, not a single chapter is devoted to the library or the learning resource center.<sup>20</sup> Two paragraphs on communications mention the flow of information between both individuals and groups, but the library is not included.<sup>21</sup> Nor is the library included in the Roueche-Baker Community College Excellence Model.<sup>22</sup> If excellence can be achieved without libraries, indeed, why is there a library? Libraries must be accountable and must stand up and be counted. Public, school, and academic libraries all compete for the same tax dollar. There is considerable duplication, waste, and many dusty books. In his guest editorial, Harold Ettelt concludes:

This library is because we recognize that no introduction to a field of knowledge is complete without instruction in how to proceed beyond that introduction on one's own. What the students learn today can never be all they will ever need to know. For most of their lives there will be no teacher present to fill those needs. The world is evolving, knowledge is expanding, and the best education we can provide students is the ability to cope with rapid change. It is the most important thing they can learn in the college, and only the library can provide it.<sup>23</sup>

Is your library providing it?

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