

Community Colleges and Networking in New Jersey

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As a general rule, one must be cautious about heralding the advent of change. In New Jersey, however, there are signs that the foundations of a new environment for library network development are being established. As this new environment takes shape, there seems little doubt that it will have important implications for the state's community college libraries.

In New Jersey community colleges fall under the general jurisdiction of the State Board of Higher Education but remain relatively autonomous institutions established and primarily financed through county governments. The County College Act of 1962 authorized one or more contiguous counties to establish a county college; to date, fifteen counties have established colleges under this legislation. In all, 18 institutions in the state offer an AA or AS degree, with one Community College Commission contracting the services of other postsecondary institutions to offer programs of instruction similar to those offered at a county college.

At present, the major instrument for cooperation among New Jersey's libraries on a statewide basis is the New Jersey Library Network, which is designed to facilitate interlibrary loan and is meant to include all of the state's libraries. But the structure of this network does not effectively address the needs of academic libraries nor does it attempt to utilize their potential. Encouraging a pattern of vertical interaction, the network centers on the designation of certain larger public libraries as area libraries which perform a variety of services for local public libraries. The latter constitute the first level of service in the state, while the area libraries are the second level, and the New Jersey State Library, Princeton University, Rutgers University, and the Newark Public Library are a third level of regional research library services.

In effect, this arrangement does not promote broad participation among different types of libraries in a networking process—something acknowledged by the State Library itself as well as in a report issued recently by a County and Municipal Government Study Commission. However, it now seems likely that a new multi-type networking environment is emerging in the state. Sparked by new leadership at the State Library and perhaps to be fueled by additional enabling legislation as well as by new funding

patterns (though not necessarily more money), an alternative structure will attempt to provide support for regional library cooperatives which would include all types of libraries in horizontal relationships designed to encourage resource sharing, cooperative acquisitions, regional reference and referral services, the shared use of new technology, and so forth.

For community college libraries, this new environment will be considerable significance although to some extent it will reflect patterns already in existence in the state. Many community college libraries have already forged ties with area and other non-academic libraries, and reciprocal borrowing, joint service, and other such agreements among contiguous libraries are fairly widespread. At least one county has preliminary plans for an Information Resource Consortium to embrace the county college, the county library, and a vocational-technical school. In Morris County an online circulation system will link the county college, the county library and, in time, smaller public libraries.

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It is becoming apparent that an important factor in many of the new networking plans will be computerization, particularly the installation and sharing of online systems. Of interest to community college libraries here has been the formulation and (to date) partial implementation of a three-phased state-funded program involving New Jersey's eight state colleges and two other publicly supported academic institutions. Under this program each of the ten libraries has joined the OCLC network and will soon participate in a cooperative, vendor-supplied online circulation control system. There are also plans to explore the feasibility of a joint dead storage facility.

Given the autonomy of the community colleges and the absence of a central funding base, a similar package will be more difficult to put together for them. However, with strong indications of impending (and actual) state and county budget-cutting, community college libraries in New Jersey must be both energetic and imaginative in their search for alternative funding patterns to make possible the expansion of innovative service and the establishing of new, cooperative organizational arrangements. ■■

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Erratum—The gift of rare French literature to the University of Missouri at Kansas City was donated by Professor William L. Crain, not Crarin as reported in the September issue.

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