

NCLR Newsletter for Presidents

For the executive administrators of community colleges...

From the National Council for Learning Resources
an affiliate council of the American Association of Community Colleges

Vol. 6, No. 3
Winter 2000

The Case for Library Instruction Rooms

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I was honored recently to receive the NCLR Administrative Leadership Award. The nomination letter called attention to my interest in a learning resources center remodeling project we had just completed at our college and I take this occasion to write about the importance of one specific phase of this project, the library instruction room. In this article, I will make specific reference to our own instruction room but invite you to be creative in thinking about such a space in your own LRC which might perform a similar function. I will share some of our own successes from the past year and pass along some of the facility design tips our librarians have found to be important.

For purpose of clarity, let me define "instruction room" as a separate area in the library in which librarians can instruct students and faculty in the use of library resources (including electronic data bases) with up-to-date computers, computer projection equipment, and comfortable attractive furniture. This space should be able to accommodate a full class for library instruction (up to 30 students) and, although it should be designed for flexible use, it should not be regularly scheduled for other college classes.

Until our library remodeling project, I had not given the concept of a library instruction room much thought. Like most other chief academic officers, I

was focused on the big picture of leadership for a community college. But several things have given me pause to think more seriously about this type of instructional space in a community college. Probably most important, I am influenced by how I have seen our library staff use our facility during the past year and the dividends it has paid to our instructional program. I should also note that my 25 years of experience in student services also influences my thinking about the importance of the library instruction room. Finally, as a former English instructor, I can see very direct benefits to both faculty and students who have access to this type of support.

During the past year, our librarians have conducted over 250 library orientations and instruction sessions in a wide variety of subject areas including occupational programs as well as transfer programs. With additional incentive coming through a small "mini grant" from our Education to Careers program, librarians developed PowerPoint presentations which targeted specific instructional areas and which also linked to outside resources in addition to our own subscription data bases. Since the librarians always interview faculty prior to conducting the classes, they were able to fine tune the programs to assure relevance and maintain student interest.

Our college is always looking for ways to improve the relationship with the public schools and the instruction room provided the perfect social setting and lab environment this spring as our staff hosted over 25 librarians from the public schools who had asked for a cataloging workshop on their professional development day. Refreshments were served in an adjacent room as the school librarians arrived in the morning and our technical services staff then conducted a well planned workshop which was tailored to the specific needs of the school librarians. It was a class act by

our librarians and this specific event went a long way towards helping improve communication between our largest public school district and the college.

The instruction room has been used as a lab for our own faculty development efforts with several Web page design classes having been offered by the LRC staff. Since the LRC is open seven days per week during the fall and spring semester, the instruction room also becomes the only accessible college computer lab on Sundays, staffed by trained computer lab assistants just like other open labs during the rest of the week.

As the chief academic officer in a community college, I know how scarce classroom space is at most colleges and how significant an issue it may be to dedicate such space exclusively to the library for this type of instructional activity. Why would I encourage senior administrators at other colleges to consider this model (if they have not already done so)? For us, the decision was made somewhat easier in that the space was already inside the footprint of the library and did not require any reallocation of space from another area. So we avoided the political problems that others might have if adjacent space were to be reassigned for his purpose. But even if we had been forced to reassign adjacent space, I would have supported this model to the planning committee.

If we were to think of it from a simple business perspective, we might consider the library as a multi-million dollar investment in the instructional program that needs to be fully used in order to gain a return on the investment. As a faculty member on the receiving end of a library instruction session, I know that the tools and techniques of library science are changing so rapidly that I could never hope to remain as current as the librarians who use them

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From the Chair

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Published by the
National Council for Learning Resources,
an affiliate council of the
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(AACC).

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This issue of *NCLR Newsletter for Presidents* was made possible with support from **Bell+Howell Information and Learning**. We thank them for their support of community colleges and learning resources programs. Visit their website at:

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daily and who can instruct my students in their use.

Let me share some of the specifics about our facility and discuss some design points our library staff have found to be important. The layout of the room was determined after extensive discussions among our staff and recommendations from a consultant. Our staff decided on a more flexible arrangement for the room than the consultant originally designed. Our librarians also wisely chose to arrange the furniture temporarily for a semester until they were sure about the layout they preferred. Only when they were comfortable with the room arrangement did they give the word to proceed with drilling holes through the cement floor to run conduit for power and data lines.


The room is approximately 22 ft. by 35 ft in size. The layout includes 18 computers situated around the perimeter of the room rather than the more formal arrangement of all machines facing the front of the room. The room size also allowed for two large conference tables to be placed in the middle of the room to accommodate activities which don't involve using the computers. The teacher's work station includes its own computer and computer projection equipment. High corner placement of the screen assures optimum sight lines. The 36" deep computer tables allow keyboards to be located in front of each monitor and two work stations per table. Perhaps the most frequent student comment about the room is, "I really like these cool chairs!" an obvious reference to some especially well designed conference seating used in the room.

Based on my own observations over the past year and recommendations from our librarians, I am very positive about the benefits a college might receive from this type of instructional environment in the library. My specific recommendations are:

- ◆ Reinforce the role of the librarian as a teacher and encourage their collaboration with other faculty on library instruction activities
- ◆ Keep the design flexible - to accommodate different learning styles

of the students as well as different teaching styles of the librarians

- ◆ Pay attention to aesthetics - make it feel and look as nice as any other lab on campus
- ◆ Make sure that the network configuration mirrors that of other classrooms and labs in addition to accommodating all of the library data base products
- ◆ Leave the scheduling of this space to the librarians and do not try to use it for regularly scheduled classes

One last thought. I often accompany our new faculty on tours of the campus at the start of each new semester. I make a special point of having the tour visit our library instruction room so that all of our new faculty can see the facility and meet our librarians. I want to reinforce the notion that this is a place that can touch a wide range of students at different times and at different levels. As a chief academic officer who came through the ranks of student services into my current job, I believe there is a strong link between student success and this type of service in the library. 

About the author. Ms. Judy Jobe is Vice President of Instruction and Educational Services at Elgin Community College in Elgin, IL. Her active support for libraries and learning resources programs focuses on their role as an integral part of the instructional program.

Meetings & Events

ALA Midwinter Meeting
January 12 - 17, 2001
Washington, D.C.

Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
March 15 - 18, 2001
Denver, CO

AACC
April 4 - 8, 2001
Chicago, IL



Do We Need Academic Libraries?

by Larry Hardesty

A Position Paper of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), reprinted with permission. Also available at: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/academiclib.html>

No one will dispute that technology has had a tremendous impact on academic libraries over the past generation and few will disagree that this impact has been positive. Because of technology, academic libraries have evolved from card-based catalogs and print-based periodical indexes to online public access catalogs (OPACs) and online periodical indexes. Increasingly, digital journals and books have supplemented the traditional print sources housed in physical library buildings. Often members of the academic community can access these digital publications without regard to proximity to the physical library building or its hours of operation. The availability of digital information made available by libraries through paid subscriptions combined with the growing amount of digital information available free via the Internet has created, for some, the mistaken impression "all information is available electronically."¹

Perhaps it, therefore, was inevitable that someone would ask, "Does a degree-granting institution of higher education need a physical library (and librarians) for accreditation?" In August 1999, Oswald M. T. Ratteray, Assistant Director for Constituent Services and Special Programs, posed such a question to library directors at member institutions of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. He asked because the Middle States Commission is facing the highly controversial issue of the accreditation of transregional and virtual institutions,² as are other regional accreditation agencies.³

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the largest professional association representing academic librarians, is, of course, vitally interested in this issue. The issue, however, is not only of significance to academic librarians but has consequences for the entire academic community and for society in general. It calls into question the very meaning of a college degree from an institution accredited by a regional accrediting association.

Just what does a college degree signify? What does a student really need to obtain a college education? To obtain a college education, does a student need face-to-face contact with classroom faculty, fellow students, and librarians? To obtain a college education, does a student need to experience the benefits offered by classrooms, laboratories, theatres, galleries, and libraries?

Should, for example, a college degree signify that a student has been prepared to locate, evaluate, and use information in order to become an independent and continual learner? If the answer is yes, can one become a lifelong learner without access to a physical library and the services of librarians?

The answer is not obvious because too often the wrong question is being asked. The 19th century ideal of the Mark Hopkins at one end of the log and a student at the other end of the log has long given way, at most institutions of higher education, to a post-World War II reality. The teacher is too often an ill-prepared, over-worked, underpaid teaching assistant at one end of the lecture hall and the student is often one of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of others sitting at the other end of the lecture hall. Any assignments may be designed to keep the student (and his/her numerous fellow students) out of the library. So, is there a difference between the library needs and educational outcomes of this student and the faceless student 500 miles away receiving the same lecture via videotape or Internet? Probably not, but this is the wrong question! If neither the on-campus nor the distance education student goes beyond the textbook and any other prepackaged materials, both are being cheated out of the opportunities to receive a college education.

In addition, accreditation agencies should be particularly cautious about accepting findings that there are no measurable differences between on-campus and distance education experiences. Methodologies examining the differences have been recently called into question.⁴ Not only is the wrong question being asked, it is being asked in the wrong way.

We recognize that some courses and even some major fields of study are legitimately not dependent upon the library. A first-year course that might heavily depend upon the textbook or reserve readings in the library may be little different from pre-packaged curriculum materials made

available to a distance education student. An undergraduate mathematics major, for example, may make little use of the academic library in his or her field. However, regional accreditation agencies are being asked to accredit not individual courses or the courses for a singular field of study. They are being asked to accredit an entire curriculum of study.

A curriculum that consists largely of pre-packaged materials devoid of opportunities and requirements for independent study and interactive research possibility may be little more than a series of first-year, entry-level courses. While accumulating credit hours, students moving through the courses do not develop an increasing sophistication in the skills and abilities needed to be a lifelong learner.

Can an electronic access to information resources be provided that is equivalent to traditional campus-based print materials? For some courses, the answer may be yes, just as for some courses traditional print materials are not needed. However, for most major fields of study at even the undergraduate level the answer is still no. Academic librarians recognize that currently available digital resources have serious limitations in supporting an entire curriculum. Relatively few of the millions of journals and books that fill our academic libraries have been retrospectively converted into digital formats and there is no evidence that a significant percentage will be in the foreseeable future. In addition, there has been little evidence of any abatement in the current publication rate of print materials, and most remain unavailable digitally.

Therefore, the student who has access to only digital information has access to only a very fragmented and incomplete portion of recorded human knowledge. It is fragmented because the creation of digital collections is not based on the interests and needs of the classroom faculty and the bibliographic development skills of librarians. Digital collections most often are based on the willingness of publishers to make their product available in that format. Two situations can result. An institution may offer only those courses that available databases support. Or, an institution may offer courses not adequately supported by information resources. Neither should be acceptable for an accredited institution.

Continued on next page...

In addition, the contents of many electronic databases remain unstable. Contracts between vendors and producers are often short-term. Electronic journals available one year may not be available next. Academic librarians can readily testify to major resources being available one day through a vendor and not the next—with no advance notice.

In contrast, the traditional print collections of the academic library are highly shaped by the interest and needs of the classroom faculty. Faculty members have the opportunity to recommend for purchase materials to allow their students to explore the topics of their particular classes in more depth. Through the collaboration of classroom faculty and academic librarians access to resources can be provided that can lead the student beyond the classroom. And considerable effort is made to preserve and make accessible these collections. An entire range of journals will not disappear with the flip of a switch. At this point, access only to digital databases is hardly equivalent to access to an adequately supported academic library.

Can then a transregional or virtual institution provide equivalent access to traditional library resources through formal agreements with traditional institutions for access to their traditional libraries? There is a long history of cooperation and collaboration among academic libraries, and technology has further enhanced this collaboration since most academic libraries now make the electronic record of their holdings available online. However, some institutions have come to rely all too heavily on the largesse of institutions that have expended considerable resources to support the library needs of their own students. Accrediting agencies should look carefully for evidence of abuses. Some institutions directly or indirectly encourage their students to rely on inappropriate libraries, such as the local branch of the public library, a community college library that does not support upper-level courses, or the library of a four-year institution that does not support a particular program. Even institutions with appropriate collections may drop programs and reduce acquisitions below an appropriate level. Finally, through the lack of guidance and the provision of adequate libraries, distance education students often find their ways to libraries for which there are no formal arrangements. Libraries once open to

the public are closing their doors to all but their currently enrolled students because they cannot afford to support institutions that are not providing their students with adequate library resources.

Development of the independent learning also does not end simply with providing access to information resources. A librarian, knowledgeable in the identification, location, and evaluation of information resources, must be available to guide students in the use of the library, whether it is in print or in digital formats. The vast increase of information in many ways has created a need for more—not less—guidance in the use and evaluation of information. Students uninitiated in the complexities of information retrieval and evaluation are often confronted by an overwhelming amount of useless or inferior information from the Internet. They often make little distinction between information from those refereed scholarly journals available digitally and the digital equivalent of vanity press publications. To the chagrin of their teachers, many uninformed students accept convenient information, whether appropriate or not, at the expense of appropriate but less convenient information. Left alone, students may perfect inappropriate information retrieval and evaluation techniques under the misconception that they are obtaining the benefits of a college education.

The traditional academic institutions of the United States have expended considerable resources to develop academic libraries that are the envy of the rest of the world. Individuals from all over the world seek to come to the United States to study because of the quality of our academic programs—supported by our academic libraries. The Association of College and Research Libraries recognizes the importance of innovation and the opportunities offered by technology. However, the Association of College and Research Libraries is also aware of current and past abuses of nontraditional programs.⁵ Therefore, the membership of ACRL strongly urges the regional accreditation agencies to exercise carefully their responsibilities and to proceed most cautiously in the accreditation of transregional and virtual institutions. We believe that the collections of traditional academic libraries and the services of librarians are vital for students in obtaining


the benefits of a college education. Therefore, the offerings of these institutions and the distance education offerings of traditional institutions both should be evaluated by the same rigorous criteria applied to traditional educational programs. To do less not only puts academic libraries at risk but also misleads the American public as to the true meaning of a college degree.

Notes

1. William Miller, "Troubling myths about on-line information," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 63 (August 1, 1997): A44.
2. As defined by Mr. Ratteray, "A transregional institution is one that is chartered and has its principle operation in one of the six accrediting regions in the United States and has a branch or other instructional location in the other regions. A virtual institution maintains a limited physical plant at its headquarters and transmits its courses and provides learning resources to students at a distance, usually electronically via the Internet, by mail, or some combination of electronic and print media."
3. Florence Olson, "'Virtual' Institutions Challenge Accreditors to Devise New Ways of Measuring Quality," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 66 (August 6, 1999): A29.
4. James P. Merisotis and Ronald A. Phipp, "What's the Difference?" *Outcomes of Distance vs. Traditional Classroom-Based Learning*. *Change* 85 (May/June 1999): 12-17.
5. David F. Noble has provided a very cogent essay on the abuses of correspondence instruction in the early part of this century, often by some very respectable institutions of higher education. See David F. Noble, "Digital Diploma Mills, Part IV, Rehearsal for the Revolution," November 1999, Accessed December 10, 1999 <http://communication.ucsd.edu/dl/ddm4.html>

FROM THE CHAIR...

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce our incoming chair for 2001, Ms. Mary Carr. She is the Dean of Instructional Services and Telecommunications at Spokane Community College.

I have valued this opportunity to promote the importance of learning resources and services to you, our college administrators. As an organization we strive to keep libraries and learning resources improving and changing to meet the needs of our users. 

RICHARD SHAW

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