A look at community college learning resources programs

By Wanda K. Johnston

A learner-centered support system

The community college mission differs from other academic institutions. All community colleges are higher education institutions which emphasize teaching rather than research. All provide open access to education resulting in diverse student populations and learning styles. All offer comprehensive instructional programs, including liberal arts, technical, developmental, and community interest courses. All mirror the characteristics and needs of their local communities. Consequently, no two community colleges are identical.

Similarly, community college learning resources programs share a common mission. All provide the resources and services necessary to serve the informational, learning, and developmental needs of their students, faculty, administrators, and broader college community. All promote learning through the college's academic program by providing access to information in a variety of formats and by delivering that information either to the individual user or to campus classrooms. All are responsive to the unique characteristics of their parent colleges. Thus, no two learning resources programs are identical.

The process of researching and writing my recently published book, *Administering the Community College Learning Resources Program* (G.K. Hall Reference, 1994), clarified my understanding of the community college and the role of its learning resources program. By summarizing the evolution of the learning resources program, I share my definition of the community college learning resources program.

Evolution of the program

Since the first public junior colleges were created as extensions of high schools in the early 1900s, community college learning resources programs began as high school libraries. Assigned textbook study, reserve readings, and lectures were the primary instructional methods. The high school librarian was usually the sole staff member serving both high school and college students.

When state and local support for separate junior colleges was legislated, separate campuses were established. Library services expanded to meet the changes in instruction, with attention given to vocational programs, classroom instructional resources, and the quality of holdings. By 1930 the Junior College Libraries Section of ACRL approved the first set of standards to encourage library service. These standards recommended a book collection of 10,000 volumes for the first 500 students, an annual expenditure of $5 per student for materials, and a staff of at least two professional librarians.[1]

Following World War II, junior college enrollments swelled with returning veterans. Increased emphasis was placed on vocational/technical and general education. Librarians began serving on curriculum committees to be seen as educators rather than caretakers of books. Libraries increased their nonbook holdings and began to utilize microfilm. Audiovisual departments began producing software.

Major changes in the '60s and '70s

The 1960s brought rapid growth in community colleges. Individualized instruction led to audio labs, programmed instruction centers, etc. What once had been 16mm film and slide projector distribution services grew into language laboratories, instant-response classrooms, sound

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systems for field houses, and audiovisual classrooms. Traditional print-oriented library services transformed into learning resources programs.

By 1972 the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC), the Association of Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), and ACRL formalized the change in philosophy for community college library programs through the "Guidelines for Two-Year College Learning Resources Programs." This document outlined provisions for the integration of library and audiovisual services within the learning resources program. Program components included acquisition of materials and related access services; instructional development; production of both print and nonprint materials; user services including reference, circulation, and faculty assistance; plus auxiliary services. The technological developments of the 1980s, improving information access and retrieval and extending the delivery of instruction, expanded the learning resources program to serve as an information network as well as an instructional support system. Computerized systems provided acquisition, cataloging, circulation, inventory, film rental, and other essential services.

Standardization of databases and their access expanded information availability, networking, and resource-sharing opportunities both internally through campuswide networks and beyond through external partnerships. Video access expanded to include videocassettes, campus cable systems, educational television stations, interactive video, and distance learning.

The new standards of the '90s
Responding to this expansion of the learning resources program, a joint committee of ACRL and AECT cooperatively adopted the 1990 "Standards for Community, Junior, and Technical College Learning Resources Program." These standards reemphasized the importance of the learning resources concept and added focus on microcomputer and telecommunications technology. These standards also encouraged learning resources programs to support the AACJC emphasis on the building of partnerships within and beyond the campus, as described in *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century* (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1988).

The community college learning resources program evolved from its initial creation as an extension of a high school library to its current integration of library, media, computers, and telecommunications. However, the scope and organization of each learning resources program reflects the parent college's unique educational goals, curricula, student population, organizational structure, and the diversity of resources needed to accommodate diverse learning styles.

The learning resources program
As the community college evolved, print and nonprint collections and services were integrated into one unit named "Learning Resources Center," "Educational Resources Center," "Instructional Materials Center," or other variation. These names reflected efforts to redefine the function and image of the community college library. Both the 1972 "Guidelines" and the 1990 "Standards" emphasized learning resources terminology to encourage standardization of the name. Specifically, the 1990 "Standards" defined the term "learning resources" as "an organizational configuration which provides library and media materials and services. In addition, learning resources programs can provide various specialized services and perform other instructional responsibilities."[2]

Continuing this evolution, I define the learning resources program as a learner-centered support system which provides materials, equipment, and services necessary to implement the community college's mission. The program provides an organizational umbrella including, in various configurations, library services, media services, academic computing, learning assistance center, etc. This organizational umbrella encourages cooperation and balance among its various learning resources components, regardless of physical location within the college. It flexibly supports the informational, learning, and developmental needs of its clientele and serves the college mission. The learning resources program is an integral part of the community college.

Notes
1. J. O. Wallace, "Newcomer to the Academic Scene: The Two-Year College Library/Learning Center," *College & Research Libraries* 37 (November 1976): 503–13.

2. "Standards for Community, Junior, and Technical College Learning Resources Programs," *College & Research Libraries News* 51 (September 1990): 757–67. ■