Baton Rouge Community College
Library/Learning Center:
Observations and Recommendations

Bertram C. Bruce
Leigh Estabrook
August, 2002

This report summarizes the results of our study of the plans to create a Library/Learning Center (L/LC) at Baton Rouge Community College. It is based on the following:

- face-to-face, telephone, and online discussions with BRCC faculty and staff;
- review of documents such as *The Baton Rouge Community College Millennium Plan,* the BRCC web site, the Course Catalog, the Criteria for Accreditation of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, various American Library Association documents;
- a site visit on July 10-12
- comparisons to other *new library* initiatives, especially in community colleges

Staffing was assumed to be a fixed point in this project; the goal was to make recommendations regarding a building and the resources within it. Nevertheless, the more we considered what needed to be accomplished, the more it became clear that attention to staffing was crucial to the success of the enterprise. The issue is not that new staff may be required, but rather that, if the L/LC achieves even a small part of the vision, then everyone involved—staff, faculty, administration, students, community members—will find that their roles are changing.

Following a brief background.statement, we organize our specific observations and recommendations into four sections: Staffing, Layout, Collections, and Technology.

Background

It may help to think of a framework often used to analyze technological change within organizations (Contractor, 1999). Here, *technology* is interpreted broadly, to mean a set of tools, processes, or structures. This framework sees the adoption of a new technology as occurring in three stages: *substitution, enlargement,* and *reconfiguration*. In the *substitution* stage, new tools are adopted in order to do old things in a new, more efficient way, e.g., sending email instead of a typed memo. This stage requires few resources, little new knowledge or skills, little resources, and few changes in organizational structures or processes. The use of the new technology simply leads the organization to accomplish more business of the same kind. But over time, this quantitative change leads to the *enlargement* phase, in which the organization grows more accustomed to the new way of doing things and begins to use the new tools in a more sophisticated way, e.g., sending email outside the organization or across normal organizational boundaries. As these new uses appear, the organization enters the third stage, in which new things are done in new ways. Organizations in the *reconfiguration* stage use technology extensively and innovatively. In the case of email, the new communication patterns engendered begin to restructure the hierarchy of the organization and call for a redefinition of its mission.

Reaching this stage requires a substantial amount of knowledge, continual learning, and substantial changes in organizational structures and processes.

We see the potential for a *substitution / enlargement / reconfiguration* process operating with the Baton Rouge Community College L/LC. On opening day, most people will likely be coping with the move, finding their new working space, and re-discovering how to accomplish old tasks. They will use the new space and learning materials as a *substitute* for the old space and learning materials, doing a better work and more efficient work, but without a substantial change in goals or in their own roles. But as they become more adept at using the L/LC they may discover that new opportunities arise. In fact, as the discussion below suggests, the emergence of new opportunities is a test for the success of the Center. As a result, staff, faculty, students, and others will undoubtedly find that they *enlarge* their view of what can be, and should be, done within a L/LC. As they enlarge their range of activities, they will inevitably find the need to *reconfigure* their roles and relationships.

For example, the presence of learning pods or other collaborative spaces may initially be not much more than additional study space for students, a worthwhile, but hardly revolutionary feature. But if faculty are given the opportunity to see those spaces as a new kind of learning, they may find themselves changing the nature of class assignments or working in the L/LC with students on projects. Soon, their role as classroom lecturer may begin to appear more akin to that of the reference librarian, or of staff in the academic center. Or, they may need to become more like information technology specialists. These transformations have been seen in many other academic organizations that have adopted comparable new learning spaces and materials (King, 2000; Leighton & Weber, 1999).

Staffing

Staffing of the BRCC L/LC is being affected by three concurrent changes: media convergence, new information technologies, and the evolution of community colleges. Much has been made of the *convergence of media* over the last decade. For example, using a standard computer, web browser and Internet connection, one can now send both email and faxes, listen to radio stations throughout the world, watch movies, view collections of art, have a telephone conversation, work with a tutorial program, and more. This convergence of media is leading to a convergence of roles. The AV specialist begins to do what the computer lab manager does; the classroom instructor does graphic design while designing a syllabus; the developmental learning tutor advises students much as the reference librarian does.

As technology has become incorporated into library operations roles of librarians have evolved. And as users become adept at using the Internet to acquire information, their expectations of libraries are altered. Librarians are much more likely now to act as teachers and guides to students and faculty using new information tools (see, for example, Library Science 101). In the process librarians' relationships to academic tutors, to faculty and to the students themselves need to be renegotiated and redefined. For the BRCC community this means helping staff understand the possibilities of their new roles and finding ways to renegotiate the relationships between and among different staff. Most immediately it will require clarifying the ways in which staff of the library and of the academic learning center articulate their work.

BRCC also must respond to the continuing transformation of junior colleges into community colleges, with all that is entailed in terms of community engagement, lifelong learning, and multiple purposes for academic activities. Libraries as facilities have become increasingly important to support these activities that often entail depending on the library as a public space

for community and college members.

These three areas of change—in media, roles of libraries and roles of community colleges—must shape and inform the design of the library. The design process can be used as an opportunity to examine the changes, to challenge previous ways of organizing work and to consider how a new L/LC building can be used to support and define new ways of working.

Layout

When asked to visualize what the new L/LC can be, participants saw it variously as both grand and homey. Some imagine large open spaces that inspire, where others saw stuffed chairs in cozy corners. Multiple visions often reside in the same individual and are all be appropriate to consider, but they highlight the need to maintain a vision of the functions the Center is intended to serve.

Make space inviting for non-traditional students. A theme in all these visions is to make the space inviting, especially for the diverse population of community college students. This suggests several design criteria:

- As much as possible, the L/LC should facilitate off-hours access, if only to some of its facilities.
- Making spaces and facilities tell a story, or be *transparent* (a concept from usability research) can foster learning as well as make resources more accessible. Students should be able to *see* what resources are available, in terms of signage, informative design, and visual sight lines to books and other resources. The last has the incidental benefit of enabling a small staff to manage a large a diverse space.
- There are clear advantages to mixing book, computer, and collaborative spaces in terms of enabling coordinated learning. However, this needs to be balanced with practical management needs and with the need to have both quiet and active collaboration spaces.

Media convergence leading to redesign of spaces. As it becomes possible to do more with general purpose devices, such as a computer with Internet connection, space needs to be redesigned. For example, the function of video playback no longer requires a dedicated video player or projection equipment, but may be accomplished with a standard computer and DVD. But that computer may also serve as a reference desk or a project center. This multipurposing has obvious advantages, but also creates problems, as when the video playback occurs in what was supposed to be a quiet study area. There should be a lower growth factor for books per se and a higher one for collaborative spaces.

New learning spaces. One potential of the L/LC is create new types of spaces for learning, not simply more spaces. To some extent the nature of these spaces will emerge through use. But some of the spaces should be designed intentionally. For example, the information Commons facility http://www.usc.edu/isd/locations/undergrad/leavey/IC.html in the Leavey Library at the University of Southern California was one of the first attempts to establish a new kind of learning space that integrates digital resources. There are Collaborative Workrooms of various sizes available for group study. Each provides white boards and markers, network connections for laptops, and easy access to reference librarian services. Four years after it began, the Commons was doubled in size because of the enthusiastic reception by students and faculty. Another example is the Math Emporium http://www.math.vt.edu/resources/ at Virginia Tech. This arranges hundreds of computers in pods seating eight. Students help each other, but may also place a bright red cup on the top of their computer to signal the need for assistance from a

graduate assistant. Ad hoc lectures are held in mini-classrooms nearby and faculty are available for drop-in conversations.

A special type of learning space is the *professional writing laboratory* (Bruce, Peyton, & Batson, 1993). This consists of a number of computers connected in a local area network. Students carry on real-time written discussion as a means to learn specific content as well as to improve their writing skills. Such labs are not currently in use at BRCC, but they represent one example of the kind of space need, which could emerge once faculty see the potential of the new facility.

Collections

Despite recent calls for all-electronic libraries, books, journals, maps, and other print resources will continue to be important to BRCC faculty and students. As a technology, books still offer significant advantages—from pleasure reading to use in the laboratory. At this time electronic resources still are limited. Science and business materials are more widely available in electronic form than are materials in the social science and humanities. Because an electronic journal is licensed, not owned by the library, an electronic journal publisher ceases to provide access to any copies of a journal if a subscription is cancelled. The [National Science Digital Library,](#) designed for K-12 and undergraduate education, is not necessarily appropriate for community college courses, although this undoubtedly will change with time. Accrediting agencies, such as SACS, are only beginning to look more broadly at a library's *access* to materials, rather than its *holdings*

We expect, nevertheless, that electronic resources will be used increasingly at BRCC. Through its subscriptions to the [Louisiana Library Network](#) and [NetLibrary](#), the library offers extensive access to full text articles and books, including [LexisNexis Academic Universe](#) and [InfoTrac](#). But electronic resources require more space than do books because it is necessary to provide access as well as content. The new space will need computers and also connections for users' computers. It will need to be flexible so that cables and connections may be moved as the shape of the collection shifts. Since the library is the primary laboratory for humanists, it will need to be designed with concern for the ways in which students and faculty who work in the humanities might exploit L/LC resources.

We were asked to consider issues of collection development for the BRCC Library. After meeting with library staff and reviewing library collections, we believe that they—in consultation with BRCC faculty—are in the best position to determine how the special collections allocation should be spent, including what proportion should be allocated to each disciplinary category. The librarians do face some critical challenges, however, since much of the money is one-time only, non-recurring. We suggest that a significant investment be made in assuring that the library has a strong "core" collection of frequently used and "canonical' and classic books. This will provide a base to satisfy SACS and that will enhance the library over the long term.

Technology

The L/LC will require recurring support for equipment and staff to respond to changes in technologies themselves and changes in IT needs as the L/LC evolves. It is not possible to design today a fixed array of technologies that will be adequate even a few years out. The L/LC requires basic computer support for students and staff to use the library system and gain access to electronic resources. Beyond that, the new L/LC is likely to be like most academic libraries

that have become centers for computer use for composing papers, doing email and other ancillary work. [This is but one of the reasons that a number of academic institutions have tightly linked the role of chief information officer with that of the librarian.]

Technology in the L/LC will be both a problem solver and a problem generator: The changes in technology will lead to changes in needs, both because each technology brings with it unintended and sometime undesirable consequences, but also because new technologies make new things possible. For example, BRCC might want to explore extending its community college role by becoming a community technology center that can provide access to Baton Rouge residents and a learning opportunity for students.

Given the funding uncertainties to support future growth and changing technology needs after the new L/LC is opened, the College should adopt design strategies to optimize its current investment. First, the new building must include ample conduits and outlets such that layout can easily be reconfigured as needs change. Second, the College should explore using "open source" software. Many academic institutions are considering open source software as a means to lessen costs and to have more control over the applications they need to support them. It is worth considering tools such as the Linux operating system and OpenOffice. Third, if security issues can be addressed, wireless technologies can extend the use of L/LC space. (For example, the same room might be used as a study area or as computer classroom. Wireless can connect L/LC to other parts of campus.)

We were impressed with BRCC IT staffing as we were with the Library staff and believe that these issues are well understood already.

References

Bruce, B. C., Peyton, J. K., & Batson, T. W. (Eds.). (1993). *Network-based classrooms: Promises and realities*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Contractor, N. S. (1999). Self-organizing systems research in the social sciences: Reconciling the metaphors and the models. *Management Communication Quarterly, 13*, 154-166.

King, H. (2000, July). The academic library in the 21st century - what need for physical space?. In *Virtual libraries: Virtual communities*. Oxford: the International Association of Technological University Libraries.

Leighton, P. D., & Weber, D. C. (1999). *Planning academic and research library buildings*. 3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association.