

## Editorial

### Community College Librarianship and the "Field of Dreams"

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) was established in 1939, the same year B. Lamar Johnson published *Vitalizing a College Library*, which describes the prototype of the two-year-college learning resources center (LRC). As both chief academic officer and librarian at Stephens College, Missouri, he broadened the concept of library materials and made librarians central participants in the college's instructional and professional development programs. If Johnson and other early community college librarians were given the chance to return briefly and join us in shaping the nature of *current* learning resources services, what directions might they take? What dreams would they promote?

Immediately, they would be dismayed to discover that community college librarians are underrepresented in the published literature and in attendance at national and regional professional meetings. There are some obvious reasons for this. The majority are not required to publish or engage in activities of professional associations to acquire tenure. Moreover, close to half of the nation's two-year colleges are small, located in rural or remote areas, and have libraries with limited staffs and resources. Even in most larger institutions, restricted staffing requires professionals to be generalists and to cover a variety of services.

However, Johnson and his colleagues would not find a lack of research, problem solving, or innovative LRC programs, particularly in functions in which community colleges excel, such as teaching. One district in Arizona, for instance,

has designed a model automated library of the future that highlights collaborative planning, staffing, teaching, and learning. An entire college instructional program in Texas is both literally and figuratively designed around its LRC, which promotes active, experiential learning projects. And the community and junior college libraries section of ACRL recently honored two Florida librarians who have developed a model outreach program for training instructional faculty and other local librarians to help students access information in a high-tech library. Moreover, community colleges continue to lead the way in training paraprofessionals to assume significant roles in their rapidly changing LRCs.

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges recently published its vision for the new century which emphasizes another strength of community colleges: building communities, both within and outside the institution. Community colleges generally develop strong partnerships with agencies and business in their communities. And LRCs—particularly the new integrated technology centers in numerous states—have broadened these linkages by offering unique mixes of information, programming, and instruction over networks that connect their colleges to entire communities or regions. As a result, many LRCs are developing innovative ways to provide resources to students at off-campus (and frequently remote) sites.

Johnson and other dreamers would surely applaud the current efforts of the

C&RL editor and board to elicit articles from community college librarians on such programs and efforts at problem solving. In a recent editorial, Gloriana St. Clair outlined many of the benefits of research and publication, including improved teaching and services, intellectual cross-pollination, and professional revitalization.<sup>1</sup>

Those drawn to the "field of dreams" would doubtless discover particularly promising areas of research and practice for community college LRC professionals to tackle. For instance, because community colleges focus on teaching, it would be especially appropriate for community college professionals to develop techniques for establishing mutually productive partnerships with instructional faculty.

Moreover, the institutions are attracting mushrooming numbers of nontraditional students. Colette A. Wagner and Augusta S. Kappner have vividly described the challenges facing both instructors and librarians in motivating these students to acquire minimum skills at both developmental and advanced levels.<sup>2</sup> Many LRCs already incorporate learning or tutorial centers and are working closely with literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), and writing-speech-computer-across-the-curriculum programs. They are in a unique position to test and evaluate new

techniques for teaching information literacy. Most community colleges have had to incorporate a strong general education component into their occupational programs. Librarians should concentrate their efforts on having that component include information literacy.

In a growing number of states, community college LRCs are electronically networked, sharing automated library systems and databases of resources. The "virtual library" has become feasible for them.

Because they work in flexible, evolving institutions, LRC professionals also can more easily experiment with various kinds of administrative and organizational structures and systems approaches to service. And because their institutions are aging, librarians, instructors, and library paraprofessionals with long tenure need to develop new approaches to in-service training and continuing education.

Indeed, many of those who have been influential in fashioning the nature of current learning resources services through leadership in professional organizations, publishing, or mentoring are retiring or embarking on new careers, leaving the field of dreams open for strong new voices and visions.

MARGARET HOLLEMAN  
PIMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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#### REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Gloriana St. Clair, "Why Do Research?" *College & Research Libraries* 51:293-94 (July 1990).
2. Colette A. Wagner with Augusta S. Kappner, "The Academic Library and the Non-Traditional Student," in *Libraries and the Search for Academic Excellence*, eds. Patricia Senn Brelvik and Robert Wedgeworth (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1988), p.43-56.