Two-Year College Learning Resources Standards

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STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO two-year colleges are at the same time the oldest and the most recent of the current academic library standards. This seeming paradox is possible because the current standards were approved in 1972 (prior to either the present college or the university library standards), and because they were supplemented by quantitative standards in 1979 and underwent a review process for the basic document in 1981. The 1972 date is significant for two-year institutions, because the statement which was then adopted represented cooperation in development and endorsement by the three national associations most concerned.

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) started the process which resulted in the basic standards statement in 1967. Their representatives were joined several years later by members of a task force appointed by the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), who made significant contributions to the final document. Public hearings were conducted at the national meetings of all three associations before the final acceptance. It was not until 1972 that each association completed the approval process for the "Guidelines for Two-Year College Learning Resources Programs," as the statement was designated.[1] The name reflects the difference in philosophy and organizational structure between the two-year institution and other academic library standards.

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"Guidelines" consists entirely of qualitative criteria to be applied to the colleges. In contrast to both the college and the university standards, no quantitative criteria were included in the basic document, no assumption is made that each two-year institution will be more or less identical to every other, and no pattern is prescribed for the administrative structure within the institution. All provision for learning resources made on the campus of any two-year college—public or private, community college or junior college, technical institute or two-year branch of a senior institution—is included. The document is concerned not only with a library or a learning resources center, but also with provision for learning resources, including audiovisual production and services, throughout the campus. Because it is concerned with all aspects of learning resources, wherever they may be located and however they may be placed in the institutional administrative structure, the "Guidelines" document is not just a library set of standards. Besides differing from standards for senior colleges and universities, "Guidelines" was a departure from previous standards for junior and community colleges. The history of standards for two-year institutions, including the development of "Guidelines" has been published in an earlier article,[2] so this account will concentrate upon developments since 1972.

Given its radical departures from previous standards for junior colleges, one might assume that there would be strong opposition to "Guidelines." An earlier statement of standards had indeed aroused strenuous opposition from a number of junior college administrators. Part of their protest was against the presumptuousness, as they then saw it, of recommendations about junior colleges being made by librarians or any group other than the chief administrators. Additionally, there was considerable disagreement with the minimum collection size of 20,000, a number that was then (1960) exceeded by very few junior colleges.

However, there was surprising acceptance of the document, considering the major change in philosophy—the integration of library and audiovisual services, the inclusion of production of these services, and the involvement of learning resources actively in instruction. Proof of the success of the document, and of the extent that two-year institutions had matured, is indicated by the very few adverse reactions. Some few individuals expressed disappointment about the lack of quantitative requirements or suggested minor changes in wording of specific criteria, but the "Guidelines" received general acceptance in the two-year institutions. The extensive hearings and the long period of development during which many problems had been resolved probably contributed significantly, as did the absence of more controversial quantitative criteria, but the continued acceptance contrasts with the shorter life span of the other academic standards.

In the introduction to "Guidelines," expectation was voiced that "these guidelines may serve as the foundations for research and for experimentation in organization, structure, and services."[3] In general, this has occurred. The many varying titles of the chief administrator involved and the divergent components of the learning resources programs support the latter expectation. The statement has also been utilized for research and other purposes.

One of the first individuals not directly involved in its development to write about "Guidelines" was Fritz Veit.[4] He used the statement throughout his book as he examined library services and learning resources provided in two-year colleges. He also noted endorsement of and use of the statement by state groups, especially in Illinois and Washington.

Other studies were conducted by Nieball, Berning, Thomson, Webb, and the team of Clark and Hirschman. Nieball found that a majority of the Texas institutions had utilized the qualitative statements by 1974, and that there was a high degree of correlation between the criteria and the actual practices and procedures. The only criteria where small numbers of Texas institutions were involved were those relating to network participation and formal cooperative arrangements with other libraries.[5]

Berning's study of public two-year colleges in Colorado found somewhat less correlation.[6] Criteria least often met related to nonprint facilities and equipment, adequacy of budgets, lack of trained staff, and absence of faculty rank. Colorado has not been among the states usually identified as being in the forefront of developments among two-year colleges; Berning's study reveals the transition from traditional library services to learning resources programs. Since this transition has occurred in the maturing of most two-year institutions, Berning's study could be the foundation for a later study on the impact of "Guidelines" in that state.

Thomson used a grant from the Council on Library Resources to survey services and budgets in a selected group of community colleges. Her study was not a study of the "Guidelines," but her observations and conclusions attest to their use and applicability.[7] Her study also highlights the diversity which is both a characteristic and a strength of two-year institutions, but which makes standards difficult to develop.

Webb, in a more recent study, had a group of ninety persons—almost equally divided among presidents, deans and administrators of learning resources in Florida public colleges—rank the criteria in order of importance.[8] As could be anticipated, many of the individual criteria rated by respondents were ranked the full range, from important to insignificant. The differences in perception among the three groups was often revealing. Nearly two-thirds indicated the need for quantitative standards, but for quite different reasons. In general, "Guidelines" fared well, but it was interesting that presidents seemed to be more aware of the statement than deans.

Clark and Hirschman used "Guidelines" to study Ohio institutions.[9] They found that in one-third of the colleges, media and other learning resources were separated administratively, but that there was evidence of the leadership role of the statement on structure. They concluded that "Guidelines" was a useful tool, that it provided basic theory, and that it did furnish a set of objectives to be used as a basis for evaluation of performance by the colleges.

To a lesser degree, use of "Guidelines" has been made in other studies. Giles described the great significance of the statement in bridging the philosophical gap between the traditional print-related library services and services related to learning, instruction, and instructional systems. She found in the statement "enough flexibility to meet the special needs of individual institutions and to deal with whatever new media may emerge in the future."[10] Terwilliger found the statement to be in accord with the instructional role. The concepts contained provided the basis for "continuity to the entire educational program."[11] The impact of a strong learning resources program was illustrated with specific examples.

Three books also deserve mention. Allen and Allen completed their study[12] shortly after publication of "Guidelines." While their study was more comprehensive, dealing with management of many more specific items, their conclusions were harmonious with the criteria. Bender's more recent book[13] did study reaction to criteria statements, most of which were based on "Guidelines" directly, or were amplifications of it. He found widespread favorable reaction to the essential criteria. Over 81 percent of the institutions in his study had combined learning resources services, with only 7 percent retaining only print-related library services. Throughout his book there is evidence of the useful impact of "Guidelines" upon patterns of organization and services. That this influence reached beyond the two-year college can be found in a book by Burlingame, Fields and Schulzetenberg about learning resources centers in four-year institutions.[14] They make several references to the "Guidelines" and to the opinions and experiences of personnel in two-year institutions, and many inferences about it as they discuss the organization and functions of such centers in senior colleges.

The role of "Guidelines" in the accreditation process has been discussed in several conferences.[15] The document has been recognized as appropriate to the self-study process that culminates in the regional accreditation of the institution. (Indeed, it would be unlikely that the accrediting associations, in their thrust for quality higher education, would ignore a basic statement emanating from three such major associations.) It is not, however, an accreditation document in the sense that an institution failing to meet or ignoring one or more of the criteria would automatically endanger its accreditation. The learning resources program is but one, although important, aspect of the accreditation of an entire institution. It is unreasonable to expect any regional accrediting association to use "Guidelines" directly in their evaluation of an institution, but its use in the self-study process would be acceptable to the accrediting associations.

Use has been made of "Guidelines" for statewide planning for community colleges. A typical example of this process is the state of Illinois. There the statement was supported implicitly, but quantitative standards for identification and meeting of statewide needs were developed to support the statement.[16] These quantitative standards dealt with collection size, staff, adequacy of physical facilities, and requirements for budgetary support.

State needs, as in Illinois, along with the recurring criticism of the lack of quantitative standards in "Guidelines," were not ignored by the Standards Committee and the ACRL Board, but difficulties in developing acceptable standards were also recognized. Probably the strongest evidence of the impact of the absence of some authoritative professional measurements was reflected in the assessment of library needs made for the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS).[17] The consultants to NCLIS who were given the task of assessment, lacking any formulated standards, were forced to hypothesize numerical criteria for two-year colleges. A minimum collection, for example, was assumed to be 40,000 volumes, plus an additional number of print or audiovisual items for each full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty and student and for each field of study. With one-third of all two-year institutions having under 1000 FTE enrollments, and with such estimated measurements in collections and other areas, it is understandable that the study determined that there were significant deficiencies in almost every two-year institution. While deficiencies exist, to be sure, this was a case of measurement by the wrong scale. Although assessments such as this are probably harmless, the time spent would have been more useful and appropriate had acceptable quantitative standards been available.

In spring 1975, the ACRL appointed an ad hoc subcommittee to attempt to develop quantitative standards for two-year colleges. William J. Hoffman was the first chairman; after several years he resigned and was replaced by James O. Wallace. The remainder of the subcommittee, including two representatives of AECT, remained the same until the subcommittee completed its assignment.

Hoffman has written about the problems faced by the subcommittee.[18] The major problem was the lack of a clear identification of the components of the learning resources program which were common to all two-year institutions. While library services were to be found in all of the colleges, the varieties of other units showed an amazing mixture of responsibilities. The best available study (by Peterson) had shown that, although some common components could be found, there were many discrete services across the country.[19] Making standards which were conditional upon the presence of a specific service was no solution.

Another apparent problem was the difference between development of standards objectively, in terms of needs for services; and development of criteria based upon a methodology which identified similar communities and related existing resources to those communities, and use of these to develop acceptable levels of resources. The final document, as later developed, was based on the latter procedure, because for all its obvious flaws, agreement was attainable.

The third problem faced by the subcommittee was the absence of appropriate national statistics. Information on existent holdings by two-year colleges of all types of materials—print and audiovisual—was essential to test the validity of any quantitative figures developed. Lack of such statistics had been one of the major reasons "Guidelines" did not include an appendix with quantitative criteria in 1972. Such statistics finally became available in 1977 when the National Center for Education Statistics published the 1975 library statistics gathered as part of the annual Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS).[20] In their 1975 survey, for the first time, detailed holdings of specific forms of print and audiovisual media were requested and received from the institutions surveyed. With these statistics available, it was possible to relate quantitative values to institutional conditions as the standards were developed.

After agonizing for several years over possible ways to meet its assignment, general agreement was reached by members of the subcommittee that every element in a learning resources program could not be covered. Seven possible elements were finally identified; six are in the final document. Using the 1975 HEGIS figures, computer studies were made of the possible elements of staff and collection size by size of the student body based on FTE enrollments. One of the seven elements was resolved by citation to a comprehensive study of space needs[21] made in California; this was so well done that duplication was unnecessary. The subcommittee had only to prepare a table indicating correlation to FTE enrollment.

By 1978 the subcommittee had agreed on a preliminary draft, which was published in March 1979.[22] A few minor changes, including elimination of the attempt to develop user standards, were made before the final text was approved by the Committee on Standards and Accreditation and the ACRL Board on June 28, 1979.[23] The AECT Executive Board concurred at their fall meeting. The resultant document, *Statement on Quantitative Standards for Two-Year College Learning Resources Programs,* was published separately by ACRL in 1979.

The *Statement* introduced several new concepts. One of these was the creation of five levels through which an institution could evaluate itself. This was done in the document by including in the tables "minimal" and "good" levels, which made possible a level representing less than "minimal," a level between the two, and a level above "good," which would "usually be found to have the capability of providing outstanding services."[24] Even though this action could be, and has been, challenged as an apparent conflict with the statement in the introduction to "Guidelines" "not to establish minimal (or accreditation) standards,"[25] the subcommittee did not consider the use of minimal levels for self-evaluation as being in conflict with the standards used in accreditation by a regional association. A collection below minimum professional standards would be a concern by an accrediting team during their visit, but the collection size should have been a concern of the institution long before the accreditation visit.

Another new concept not found in other academic library standards was the expectation that all resources on the entire campus would be considered in determining the size of the collection and other quantitative elements. Provision for obtaining materials through renting or borrowing, as in the case of motion pictures, was equally supportive to institutional needs, as was the spending of the same amounts to acquire infrequently used items. The size of the collection is expressed in bibliographical unit equivalents (BUE), a new term used to represent the concept that volumes or items alone did not sufficiently differentiate the impact of all types of materials. Five films rented or borrowed, for example, were equated to one item owned. Some audiovisual items owned were also counted as a fraction of a unit: fifty individual slides (not in sets) were equated to one BUE, as were five microcards or five uncataloged microfiche.

An attempt was made by the subcommittee to devise a measurement for user services. The point made by Hoffman that standards should be based on services could not be followed, because there was no objective or quantitative method available for satisfactory measurement of all types of user services. In the published preliminary draft, a long and detailed list of possible user services statistics was included as an appendix. Ideally, the collection of such statistics nationally could make possible the development of quantitative standards developed from services provided. For the present this ideal was not possible; the list was deleted from the *Statement* as adopted.

The most comprehensive use of the *Statement* has been made by Carpenter.[26] Using the 1977 HEGIS data, he applied the quantitative standards in the draft document to the data available for two-year institutions. Not all the variables were adequately represented in the available statistics, particularly those on space and equipment. Some of the audiovisual media were grouped under "other recorded materials," and figures for motion pictures and videotapes were combined, but Carpenter was able to adjust most of the items to the available statistics. Carpenter's study included data from 1145 institutions. In size, 32 percent had fewer than 1000 FTE students; this finding included 82 percent of the private junior colleges, but only 19 percent of the publicly controlled institutions. Another one-third of the institutions had fewer than 3000 FTE students. At the other extreme, ten institutions had more than 9000 FTE students.

On reading the results of Carpenter's study for the first time, the number of institutions not meeting minimal levels seems excessive. Large numbers of institutions, particularly the smaller ones, were miserably below the minimum collection size. There was prevalent understaffing and inadequate financial support in many institutions. On the other hand, there are institutions which exceed the good level, institutions which would be recognized as excellent institutions on a majority, if not all, of the criteria.

The existence of either extreme among two-year colleges is no surprise. To have the quantitative standards met in advance by most institutions would raise even more questions about the validity of the measures suggested. The incentive value of quantitative standards must be recognized. In 1960, the first accepted quantitative standard for collection size (of 20,000 volumes) was formulated when an overwhelming two-thirds of the colleges did not reach that size. In Carpenter's study, 80 percent of the institutions had in excess of 20,000 volumes. It remains for future studies to assess the changes in another decade.

One unstated obstacle to full reliance on Carpenter's study, aside from the lack of comprehensiveness in the available data, is the strong probability that the HEGIS report, directed as it was to college and university libraries, did not include full institutional statistics for many elements in a learning resources program. It will never be known how many units were omitted, how many staff were not counted because of organizational structure that placed personnel in a different component from libraries, and how many resources were overlooked. But it is certain that for many two-year institutions, only the library holdings, staff and finances were included. These are only part of a learning resources program for which the *Statement* was intended to measure. Recognizing such limitations does not negate the value of Carpenter's study; conditions in many institutions, however, may be better than the study indicates.

Subsequent to the publication of the draft, the subcommittee received communications from librarians and higher education officials in Colorado, British Columbia, Massachusetts, Alaska, Tennessee, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and in several other states, about use of the *Statement* in planning. Although it is too early to monitor all the applications as they occur, it is certain that the *Statement* is being used for self-assessment by individual institutions, as well.

Simultaneously with the work of the ad hoc subcommittee (which was guided by ACRL), the AECT agreed to provide the guidance for a review of "Guidelines." A task force was appointed under the chairmanship of Richard C. Decker for this purpose. Several individuals, including Decker, served on both the subcommittee and the task force, so there was constant communication. ACRL representatives served on the task force, as well. While there was no official representative from the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC), staff of that association were kept informed of the work of both groups.

The task force reviewed "Guidelines" sentence by sentence. Changes to eliminate possible sexist language and to amplify certain criteria were suggested. The core of the document was found still to be germane. With some rearrangements and a few deletions, the task force recommended the changes to the three associations. A new definition of a two-year institution suggested by AACJC was incorporated to clarify that the document was designed for all types of two-year institutions.

The proposed revisions were considered by the ACRL Committee on Standards and Accreditation at the 1981 ALA conference in San Francisco, and were then accepted by the ACRL Board.[27] They had been previously approved by AECT. The revised "Guidelines," along with the *Statement*, have recently been published.[28] With the revisions made in 1981, the standards for two-year colleges become the most recent, as well as the oldest, of the academic library standards.

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