
Promoting Services in North Carolina Community College LRCs

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The fifty-eight community colleges in North Carolina differ in many respects. The regions in which they are to be found vary from the mountains to the coast and their settings include urban, suburban, and rural. Student body size ranges from a little over 100 to over 15,000.¹

Each of these community colleges houses a library, sometimes known in North Carolina as a Learning Resources Center or LRC. These LRCs have much to offer their users. Books, periodicals, microforms and audiovisual materials are available for research and leisure activities. The availability of computers is increasing for personal use and for online searching, as well as for reference sources on CD-ROM or laser disc. Interlibrary services and networking provide additional information beyond that available in one particular library.

The community college LRC serves a non-resident student population involved in programs that vary from auto mechanics to college preparatory. There are also a number of continuing education courses offered, such as sewing, notary public, and aerobics. Many of these are taught on off-campus locations. Students attending these classes may never come to campus. Moreover, unless an assignment is made which involves the use of library materials or facilities, it is possible that some students might complete programs without ever having entered the LRC.

But how does the *user* of the LRC learn of the services offered? Can the *non-user* or those with little previous experience be reached? In consulting the library literature for information on marketing the services of community college LRCs, there was very little to be found. It was possible that the answers to these questions could be discovered by querying the LRCs themselves; therefore, a survey was conducted to determine what marketing activities were occurring in the LRCs in North Carolina. The survey was funded by the Department of Library and Information Science at East Carolina University.

Methodology

In October, 1986, a questionnaire was used to gather information on how the community colleges in North Carolina made both users and non-users aware of their services. Accompanied by a cover letter to explain the purpose of the survey, a questionnaire was mailed to the head of each of the LRCs. For purposes of this survey, marketing was defined as any effort to reach out to library staff, faculty, administration, students, and members of the community. The questionnaire was short, consisting of the front and back of one sheet. The questions were simple with a variety of possible answers to be checked. Some left space for brief explanations. A comprehensive question was included, containing a list of ways in which services might be advertised, and participants were asked to check as many as applied. At the end of the questionnaire, space was provided for comments.

Results

The rate of return for the questionnaire was excellent. Of the fifty-eight questionnaires, fifty-two (89 percent) were returned. In answer to the comprehensive question listing ways to advertise services, fourteen of the eighteen items were checked over 50 percent of the time. Items which were the two most frequently checked were orientation sessions (94 percent) and distribution of a "new materials" list (90 percent). The latter, however, was distributed mostly to faculty and administration, although some LRCs post copies for students' perusal. Another popular activity was library tours, which were given by 88 percent of the LRCs. In addition, eighty-two percent of the respondents have a new materials shelf or cart, seventy-six percent provide a handbook of services, and seventy-three percent make subject bibliographies available. Suggestion boxes (36 percent) and regular columns in the campus newspaper/newsletter (19 percent) were the least frequently checked items.

The results were broken down by area to see if LRCs in urban areas with larger student bodies

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and closer proximity to other libraries have different marketing strategies than LRCs in rural areas or small towns (Table I). An area was defined as rural if the population was under 2,000, small town if the population fell between 2,000 and 10,000, and urban if the population was over 10,000. Orientation sessions were used by 100 percent of the LRCs in rural areas and small towns, but only by 87 percent of the LRCs in urban areas. Urban area LRCs indicate that new material lists were the most popular means of advertising holdings (91 percent). The most noticeable differences were in the handbook of services which had a response rate of 84 percent for rural areas and 86 percent for small towns, while urban areas showed a response rate of only 66 percent. With subject bibliographies, small towns and urban areas rated this 86 percent and 75 percent, respectively, while rural areas had a response rate of only 53 percent. Proximity to other libraries proved to have no bearing on the results.

TABLE I.
Breakdown by Area

	rural area	small town	urban area
orientation sessions	100%	100%	87%
new materials list	84%	93%	91%
library tours	92%	86%	87%
new material shelf/cart	92%	84%	83%
handbook of services	84%	86%	66%
subject bibliographies	53%	86%	75%

A breakdown by student body size (Table II) showed that in LRCs serving student bodies of 2,000-2,999, new material lists were checked most often (100 percent). Orientation sessions, library tours, new material lists, and displays all shared top-ranking (100 percent each) in LRCs serving student populations of 3,000 or more. Orientation sessions were checked more often in LRCs serving student bodies of less than 2,000 (93 percent).

TABLE II.
Breakdown by Student Body Size

	1-999	1,000- 1,999	2,000- 2,999	3,000+
orientation sessions	93%	93%	92%	100%
new materials list	80%	87%	100%	100%
library tours	80%	87%	84%	100%
new material shelf/cart	80%	75%	92%	87%
handbook of services	73%	81%	84%	62%
subject bibliographies	73%	62%	69%	87%

Another aspect of the survey dealt with mar-

keting to the community. Providing services to community members could help in recruiting new students and could gain benefactors for the LRC as well as for the school. On the other hand, it may be felt that community college LRCs are primarily for the students and faculty, and community service should not interfere with this purpose and should not be actively pursued. When asked, "Do you actively market your library's services to members of the community?", 62 percent checked yes. Even though all of these LRCs are within ten miles of a public library, it was indicated that as members of the community, offering services to community members, whether full or limited, was a part of their duties.

The extent of community services varies from LRC to LRC. One school promoted the availability of audiovisual hardware and software to local business and civic groups at their regular meetings and also hosted various groups in the LRC. This LRC had also provided extended research for several motion pictures that were filmed in the state and had a museum provided by community patrons. Others provided orientation sessions for community groups. Radio, TV and/or local newspapers had a response rate of 53 percent in this category and were used to promote special services that were offered and also to announce hours of operation. One LRC used this medium to advertise its DIALOG service.

Respondents were asked to provide information on other things they were doing that did not appear on the questionnaire. One LRC sent memorandums to faculty about new services, used bookmarks that were placed at the circulation desk and were also placed in books as they were checked out to promote library hours and Polaroid camera availability. They had an art display by a North Carolina artist from the area which attracted people to the LRC. Another conducted information sessions for any teacher who requested them. These sessions focused on the specific subject area of interest to the faculty member. Exhibits at shopping malls were also mentioned.

Respondents were also asked to utilize the comment section of the questionnaire to discuss any aspect of marketing the LRC they wished. Comments received included: "Staff members are trained to offer service, service . . ."; "Word of mouth is important. Talking to patrons on campus."; "A friendly smile and a hello to students and faculty as they come through the library en route from one building to another is probably the most effective. All staff and work-study students are permanently pleasant."

Conclusion

Data indicates that LRCs were indeed utilizing various methods to market their services. While some of these methods, such as orientation sessions, were aimed directly at the student user; others, such as the handbook of services, educated not only the student, but the faculty member as well. Still other methods indirectly reached the student through faculty members. For example, once faculty members have become aware of new acquisitions through the "new materials" list, they may suggest supplementary readings or sources for reports, term papers, or speeches to their students.

It was not surprising to find that orientation sessions were used 94 percent of the time. This is a reliable method used by librarians from elementary school through college level. An occasional column by librarians in the campus newspaper/newsletter is a good way to reach out to students who are in programs that do not use the LRC, even though resources for these students exist. This method rated only 61 percent and might be something that more LRCs should consider doing.

It was surprising to see that urban areas and schools with student bodies of 3,000+ were not utilizing a handbook of services. Tables I and II show only 66 percent and 62 percent, respectively, in this category. Since these are used frequently in college and university libraries, the researcher expected the usage to be greater in the larger community colleges as compared with smaller ones; however, this was not the case.

Some good ideas surfaced when participants were asked to name things they were doing that were not mentioned in the questionnaire. The researcher particularly liked the idea of sending memorandums to faculty announcing new services—when the support of our faculty members is gained, it becomes easier to reach students. The fact that there were not many suggestions given was disappointing. The researcher hopes that this suggested a lack of time for elaboration on the respondents' part rather than the lack of unique ideas.

Additional comments centered around the basic foundation of public relations in the LRC—that of making people feel welcome. We can have the latest in technology and a wealth of knowledge at our fingertips, but it is basically useless if people do not feel free to walk through the door to use it.

Marketing is only a small part of the activity of the LRCs of the community colleges in North Carolina, but it is an important part. With the

increase in services offered, we should look for the best ways of promoting these services. Time spent on marketing is not wasted if it gains an additional user.

Reference

1. *Peterson's Annual Guide to Undergraduate Study: Two Year Colleges 1986*, Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides, 1985.

Survey

1. This community college is located in a:
___ rural area (under 2,000) ___ urban area (over 10,000)
___ small town (2,000-10,000)
2. Approximate size of the student body:
___ to 999 ___ 2,000-2,999
___ 1,000-1,999 ___ 3000+
3. Approximate number of miles from community college to:
 - a. Public library
___ within ten
___ 10-20
___ more than 20
 - b. College or university library
___ within ten
___ 10-20
___ more than 20
 - c. Other library (please specify) _____
___ within ten
___ 10-20
___ more than 20

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you
keep
her
from
flying
on
Halloween?



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4. Do you actively market your library's services to members of the community?

- ☐ yes
☐ no

5. In what ways do you achieve public relations? (please check as many as apply)

- ☐ suggestion box
☐ newsletters

a. made available to:

- ☐ faculty
☐ students
☐ staff
☐ administration
☐ other (please specify) _____

b. is distribution through:

- ☐ pick up by interested party
☐ distributed to persons on a list
☐ mail
☐ other (please specify) _____

- ☐ regular column in campus newspaper/newsletter
☐ occasional column in campus newspaper/newsletter
☐ new material shelf or cart
☐ new material list

a. distributed to:

- ☐ faculty
☐ students
☐ administration
☐ other (please specify) _____

☐ orientation sessions

a. for:

- ☐ faculty
☐ students
☐ other (please specify) _____

☐ library tours

☐ slide/tape orientations

☐ individual

☐ group

☐ bulletin boards

☐ displays

☐ handbook of services

☐ for faculty

☐ for students

☐ handbook of usage

☐ for faculty

☐ for students

☐ subject bibliographies

☐ other in-house publications (brochures, pamphlets, etc.)

☐ literature searches

☐ staff meetings

☐ radio, TV, and/or local newspaper (please specify how used)

☐ other (please specify)

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