

# Today's Learning Resource Center: Theory or Practice?

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The Learning Resource Center is a multimedia center for learning resources and services designed to support and implement the total educational program. The LRC is a vital instrument of instruction and is administered as part of the academic program. In providing a "learning environment," its chief aim is to contribute to the realization of the institution's educational objectives by acquiring, organizing and circulating the books, periodicals, audiovisual and other types of materials needed to support the instructional program; to assist in the development and production of instructional materials; to provide a variety of learning and study options; and to promote the cultural development of its users.

*Faculty Guide to the Learning  
Resource Center*  
Guilford Technical Institute, 1975-76

It was during the late 1960's that librarians across the nation from the elementary through post-secondary levels began to come to grips with a revolutionary dilemma. Traditional library services simply weren't keeping pace with major revisions to instructional programs spear-

headed by the renewed and expanded emphasis on individualized instruction.

No longer was it sufficient for a library to deal primarily with the acquisition, cataloging, and circulation of printed matter. The new instructional approach required the use of non-printed materials as well, and some of the required materials were not readily available commercially. Librarians found that instructors as well as students needed assistance in these specialized areas, and the spotlight was focused on the library to respond to everyone's needs.

The North Carolina Department of Community Colleges and Technical Institutes was at the forefront of this national effort to meet expanding needs of library users through non-traditional library components, and it was natural that the system assume this position. Because the system's 57 member-institutions operate on

an "Open Door" admissions policy, the individual student bodies represent a variety of educational levels, abilities, aptitudes, and learning styles. At any given institution, there was a need to serve some students whose learning styles were not suited to lecture or reading methods exclusively. Other students required extra courses and/or remedial work before they could qualify for enrollment into a specific curriculum, while still others required the challenge of learning options above and beyond the normal curriculum requirements.

It became evident that the answer to meeting these varied needs was not in doing away with the traditional library, but through expanding its services and capabilities through direct and total involvement in the instructional program at each institution. Hence, the "library" became merely one component of a larger operation that could respond to non-traditional needs of both students and instructors. Terms such as "media center" and "learning resource center" came into use in an attempt to convey this expansion of service, with the latter term perhaps best describing the purposes and objectives of the new endeavor.

Guilford Technical Institute located at Jamestown, North Carolina was one of the pioneers in the North Carolina movement which would transform the learning resource center theory into practice. Following extensive planning and study, it was determined that expanded instructional needs would be met through a systems approach involving the application of components, with the traditional library services comprising one of the components. A second component, that of Audiovisual Services, was initiated in 1970 through the employment of a full-time Audiovisual Technician responsible for media production and centralization of the Institute's audiovisual equipment inventory. During the Fall of 1972, the GTI Library became

known as the Learning Resource Center, and Librarian Mertys W. Bell became known as the Director of Learning Resources.

Another major step toward the realization of the learning resource center concept was taken in 1973 with the addition of the Instructional Component. It was at this time that the institute's learning option program called Learning Laboratory was incorporated into the Learning Resource Center. A full-time coordinator was placed in charge of this program, which offers self-enrichment instruction on a non-credit, individualized basis to students. To further reflect the Institute's total support for LRC involvement in the instructional program, Mrs. Bell was renamed Dean of Learning Resources. Other LRC services through the Instructional Component include the organization of a Peer Tutorial Program in January of 1974, and an organized program

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of credit-carrying, self-instructional, independent study courses in May of that year.

Guilford Technical Institute's master plan for putting the LRC theory into practice was reinforced by the knowledge that a new LRC facility was scheduled for construction during the middle of the decade. That facility was planned to handle present and future LRC needs with respect to its expanded role on the GTI campus. The three-story structure, containing 44,000 square feet of usable space and constructed at a cost of \$1,119,827 or \$26.14 per square foot total, was occupied on February 25, 1975. The facility presently houses such services as: Library; Audiovisual Services; Learning Laboratories; Peer Tutorial Program; Independent Study; GED Testing; Closed-Circuit Television Studio and Control Room; and all traditional services associated with the Library Component. Additionally, "satellite" learning resource centers have been established at Guilford Technical Institute teaching centers in Greensboro and High Point, and each of these is administered in coordination with the overall program of learning resources. Guilford Tech's LRC organization features "differentiated staffing" involving 18 full-time and five part-time staff members, including four professional librarians, a media specialist, three Learning Lab specialists with backgrounds in counseling and psychology, and seven technicians.

Because GTI wasted little time in putting the learning resource center theory into practice, the LRC's involvement in both social and academic programs has taken on new dimensions. Socially, the LRC functions as the hub of Guilford Tech's Bicentennial observation efforts. Mrs. Mertys Bell, Dean of Learning Resources, is chairman of the Institute's Bicentennial Committee and was instrumental in achieving the designation of Guilford Technical Institute as a National Bicentennial Campus. The LRC archives also

contain the complete tape collection of "Voices of Guilford" for the county. The collection features historic information about Guilford County presented through the recollections of prominent county residents. The Learning Resource Center also hosts periodic art exhibits and collections that are open for viewing by the public.

A major step toward improving GTI's academic program was made when the LRC's Audiovisual Services Department undertook establishment of a comprehensive closed circuit television system on the Jamestown campus. Largely through funding under a federal grant, Audiovisual Coordinator David Walters completed groundwork for the system, and is presently involved with its continued expansion. Through this new LRC service, various lectures and campus events can be videotaped for play-back through the closed circuit TV system whenever and wherever desired. Special teaching aids can also be taped to reduce the need for instructors to repeat certain lectures or demonstrations. For example, Walters has worked with Dental Hygiene students and instructors in the production and taping of special seminar lessons for both present and future use. The recognition ceremony for GTI's designation as a National Bicentennial Campus was also videotaped for keeping in the Institute's archives.

Adoption of a learning resources program involves more than a merger of the traditional library and audiovisual functions. The LRC must also be responsive to instructional needs of both students and faculty. A successful program requires a highly organized effort featuring a complex mixture of materials, people, equipment and facilities. It represents a challenging endeavor to schools across the country. Those institutions which have taken giant strides in this field, however, have realized rewards and satisfaction in many ways beyond the expansion of service to students.