

## **Toward Collaboration**

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The library at Westmont College has evolved as most academic libraries do. The requirements of curriculum, the ups and downs of the nation's economy, and the growth of the college in numbers all contribute to that evolution. I should also mention the growth of the observer contributes to new understandings of what is happening.

I began a new job as director of the library in 1975 at Westmont College. I have been at Westmont since that time.

**Staffing.** The increase of the student body by about 50 percent from 840 to 1,200 necessitated an increase in the number of librarians. This led to questions about their place on the faculty. Currently, only the director and associate director vote at faculty meetings and serve on committees. This has caused a certain amount of frustration on the part of these professionals.

**Programming.** The library has demonstrated a commitment to bibliographic instruction (BI) and to electronic resources. We have been doing BI since the early 1980s, and we've been acquiring electronic resources since the early to mid-1990s. Our networking with SCEL (Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium) has been critical to that activity. BI has been significantly enhanced and changed character by the availability of electronic resources.

**Space Issues.** We have acquired several academic or student life neighbors in our building as a result of increased enrollment and addition by the college of programs to serve them. The moral to this story is to be prepared to occupy any space that becomes available. If you don't, a dean will. One of our neighbors is Information Technology. It has proved advantageous to work with them as we manage our online catalog, subscription databases, and Web presence.

What do I observe as I see the library today? Coffee cups. Laptops wirelessly connected to the Internet, with attendant power cords snaking from them. Students are gathered around tables quietly discussing a project. Some students are sleeping. During times of greatest pressure, such as finals, bouncy balls make their appearance. Some students are studying and using books!

Given this reality, what do I look for in the future, not just at Westmont, but in the larger library world? What do I observe today? Coffee cups. Laptops wirelessly connected to the Internet, with attendant power cords snaking from them. Students are gathered around tables quietly discussing a project. Some students are sleeping. During times of greatest pressure, such as finals, bouncy balls make their appearance. Some students are studying and using books!

## The “Collaboratorium,” or How We Do the Future

The academic library of the future will be a highly collaborative creature. Collaboration will include libraries from other institutions and the faculty and students of its own institution. The purpose of collaboration is to get more results from the funds available and from the ideas and hours available. Collaboration will increase the strength of the library community. It takes the community beyond cooperation to a point where purposes and processes are shared.

I don't know if the word *collaboratorium* has been coined already, but if not, then now it has. It is a place or situation that encourages community and cooperation, shared purposes and shared processes. It does not have to be a library (or libraries), but a library is a natural place for such activity. A collaboratorium encourages a high degree of respectful involvement of the principals of any inquiry. It involves as much listening as speaking. It involves the encouragement of all participants in the projects' ends.

A collaboratorium is an ideal concept for people in academic settings. To develop the collaboration envisioned by this idea, staffing will be the first consideration. The sort of staffing required in this environment is heavily oriented toward serving student and faculty requirements. The ideal staffing situation would involve all library faculty, whatever their assignment, in assisting students and faculty in achieving their goals.

Staffing will be distinctly generalist in nature, or at least changed, as we look out into the future. A larger percentage of the technical side of librarianship will be available through technology. This will permit libraries to put greater emphasis on research help and instruction. Most acquisitions and cataloging work in smaller libraries will be done by library technicians. Smaller libraries will develop cooperative relationships with other libraries to minimize costs in order to take advantage of economies of scale.

Libraries will take increasing advantage of self-checking software and hardware, and of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tags to manage circulating materials. This will mean fewer staff doing work that formerly was considered central to library service. In smaller libraries, this will mean fewer student staff positions available in these roles.

Cataloging software will permit libraries to catalog with whatever depth they choose. Academic libraries are cognizant of the need for good cataloging practices, so there is some hope that high standards will prevail. However, libraries will be “under the gun” financially to do more with less. There will be considerable pressure in libraries to maintain the highest standards for records in the catalog, and for the expediency of quickly entering records just to have something there.

The acquisition of materials for the library will remain a constant pressure point as well. The cost of materials, and the increasing variety of online products along with the uncertainty of how a particular format will be viewed by faculty or students, will create an environment in which the acquisitions staff will be constantly under pressure.

Citation and full-text databases have moved from simply re-creating what was formerly a paper product to slicing up the subjects into increasingly narrower subject areas.

Encyclopedias or e-reference tools raise the question of whether to subscribe to the work and pay yearly or purchase the work outright, paying a high “access fee,” and then have to purchase it again when it is updated. Then there are products that provide data along with built-in software to manipulate them, making them dynamic. And there are products that merely assist in searching or managing the databases you have, such as federated search products, link resolvers, and electronic resource management tools. A further question about online products relates to products that either overlap or cover only very narrow aspects of a subject. Finally, should a small to medium-sized library try to have it all? This represents the same old question, though with new parameters, and with not insignificant financial impacts. Making these decisions will require engagement and input from faculty.

One desirable outcome of this collaboration, in public service roles, is that public service librarians will participate in technical service roles—actively cataloging and actively participating in materials selection.

The kinds of changes I have noted give library staff the opportunity to make more and intentional contact with library users. Student workers can be prepared to function at a higher level than we’ve required before. This might require summer programs or a concurrent class to train them.

Space is always at a premium. The library will need to think very carefully about what it wishes to retain. A judicious use of compact shelving, an appropriate use of e-books along with a determination to use “e” only (with no duplication of print holdings), a collaborative connection with information technology, and a careful survey of space required for the student body are necessary.

What space is required for student and faculty users of the library? This partly depends on what other meeting places exist on campus. We are all aware of the social nature of campus life and the increased use of group projects as a teaching tool. At one point in the existence of our library, it was the social hub of the campus. The voices that said a library should be a quiet place won the battle of noise, and over time the students went away. In the future we must readjust our vision about noise and activity. The library is already a foreboding place to students newly arrived from high schools where libraries have no teaching role, where they are at best study halls, and where they must *be quiet!* The idea of having a coffee shop in the library will remove some of the barriers. This is being done commonly now. I don’t see it diminishing in the future. The genie of the library as a social space is out of the bottle. It will not go back in. Libraries will have to accommodate it, and the spots it leaves on the rugs, and the trail of critters it attracts.

An idea that takes little space, but provides opportunities for the library to provide service to the entire campus and get students and faculty and staff at all levels communicating with one another, is the digital commons. The digital commons attracts no critters and causes no spills but requires that most precious of all commodities: campus-wide cooperation. It can accommodate

finished publications or science experiments that are in development. It can accommodate student and faculty effort. Since its outputs and outcomes are primarily digital, it provides opportunities that cost relatively little to the institution. In short, the digital commons idea welcomes scholarship and learning at all levels. It becomes a medium for collaboration among students and between students and faculty.