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Susan E. Thomas

*LIU Brooklyn*, [susan.thomas@liu.edu](mailto:susan.thomas@liu.edu)

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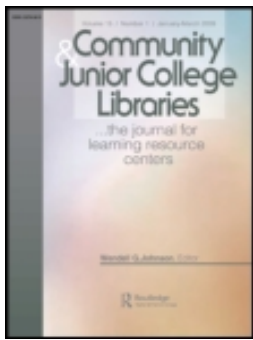
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# The Necessary Library Revolution in Community College Developmental and Remedial Programs

Susan E. Thomas

**ABSTRACT.** Community college libraries need to address the problems of disenfranchised, impoverished, and disadvantaged Americans. Community college students, who tend to be older, poorer, and have greater responsibilities than traditional college students, tend also to have a greater need for developmental and remedial programming. Both community colleges and libraries are known for their commitment to serving students and patrons, so it is logical that community college students' special needs should be emphasized in community college libraries. This paper explores different techniques that can and have been utilized for this purpose along with the political and motivational obstacles to implementing them. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: [getinfo@haworthpressinc.com](mailto:getinfo@haworthpressinc.com) <Website: <http://www.haworthpressinc.com>>]*

**KEYWORDS.** Community colleges, remedial programs, developmental programs, literacy programs, learning resource programs, learning resource centers, ethnic minority students, Hispanic Americans-Education, Afro-Americans-Education, non-traditional students, City University of New York (CUNY), Miami-Dade Community College, Austin Community College

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Susan E. Thomas is a graduate student at the School of Library and Information Science, University of South Florida, expected graduation, May 2000.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gil Scott-Heron wrote the furious, critical poem "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"<sup>1</sup> in the 1970's in response, perhaps, to urban despair and societal indifference. The title and song reflect real belief in the invisibility of a certain segment of American society: the disenfranchised, particularly the urban disenfranchised. Who cares what happens to the impoverished and disadvantaged American citizens and others living in the United States? In the professional world, politicians and educators sometimes care; and the community, junior, and technical-college administrators, staff, and instructors are known to care very much. After all, the mission statements of most articulate a serious, even solemn, commitment to reaching out to all people interested in furthering their education. The fact is that increasing numbers of non-traditional students are enrolling in the nation's community colleges. Many are older than twenty-five and disadvantaged economically, and many are full-time workers and family providers. For different reasons, many are placed in developmental and remedial programs. Stevens and Piland noted that there is a disproportionate number of functionally illiterate minority members (who may enroll in community colleges): according to the United States Census Bureau, 16% of whites over eighteen are illiterate, compared with 44% of blacks and 56% of Hispanics.<sup>2</sup> There is no reason to believe that these figures have changed dramatically; schools have not radically improved; nor have most new immigrants arrived speaking and writing standard American English.

Compound these statistics with the fact that minority populations and economically-disadvantaged groups make up the fastest-growing segment of the school-aged population,<sup>3</sup> and one can see how important developmental and remedial programs will continue to be in the future. Literacy is defined by the National Literacy Act of 1991 as "An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential."<sup>4</sup> Not all-nontraditional students are functionally illiterate. To be sure, some are not deficient at all; others are somewhat deficient; but others are very deficient.

Community college administrators must be prepared to defend the community college mission of providing affordable education to all,

for state legislatures and city officials increasingly wonder why they should pay for developmental programs for more and more ill-prepared students. In 1996, the United States Department of Education stated that 40% of first-time, community college freshman were underprepared in at least one of the basic skills areas. Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in 1996 that 55% of two-year colleges reported an increase in remedial and developmental education activity over the past five years.<sup>5</sup>

Not all community leaders and employers support the community college open-door admissions policy, which was introduced in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Most educators and other concerned community members agree that a community college is the natural "locus" for literacy programs and developmental education, but many individuals and organizations that actually fund the colleges do not want to pay for such programs if they do not seem to work. New York City's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, for example, has continued to attack the City University of New York's (CUNY) open admissions policy. Under pressure by Giuliani and others, CUNY trustees recently voted to drastically reform remedial education at its four-year colleges: a student who fails one or more of the placement exams will be denied admission. Anthony Coles, a Giuliani adviser, explained that such a student may receive remedial instruction " . . . either during intersession or summer session at a four-year school or *at a community college*" (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup> Dr. Raymond A. Bowen, president of La Guardia Community College, responding to an earlier, similar proposal, worried that the community colleges " . . . might be thought of as 'remedial mills.'"<sup>8</sup>

Giuliani once issued the injunction that all schools in the CUNY system end remediation, including the community colleges. New York City does fund 20-30% of the budget of the six community colleges, which serve 37% of the students in the CUNY system. Giuliani threatened to cut off this money.<sup>9</sup> The mayor seemed to be responding, perhaps not very thoughtfully, to this statistic: 87% of new community college students failed one or more of CUNY's three college-placement tests.<sup>10</sup>

Is Giuliani's apparent success CUNY's debacle? Now it appears that the six community colleges will have to offer more remedial classes than ever before. At least it is clear that the community college educators need not fear the dismantling of their remedial programs any time soon.

Developmental and remedial community college programs, while

essential and ubiquitous, are under scrutiny if not attack while the number of students enrolled in them explodes. Fortunately, community colleges are known for responsiveness and willingness to be different than four-year universities and colleges.<sup>11</sup> Most people regard two-year schools as committed to serving the students. Similarly, most people regard libraries as committed to serving the patron. Community colleges and libraries are not private, competitive institutions, and this fact should be emphasized.

Thus, it seems perfectly reasonable to assert that libraries at community colleges should have much to offer the remedial student and instructor. In fact, community college librarians should be doubly committed to helping the disadvantaged since they are bound to both the library profession and the community college profession, both of which emphasize commitment to all. Public libraries, in fact, initiated an open-door policy long before two-year colleges did! If one entertains this thought while understanding that the future of higher learning is a future of competition—for students and money—one sees that a true service mentality is necessary realistically as well as morally. The Committee on Services to the Disadvantaged of the Community and Junior College Libraries Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries asserted in 1987 that “basic-skills students,” ever increasing in numbers, need more innovative teaching styles and individualized instruction than they get. Ten years later, in 1997, McMillan et al. cautioned that if the community colleges do not provide such teaching styles and instruction, then something else, like a for-profit company or school, will.<sup>12</sup>

The role of the community college Learning Resource Programs (LRP) in developmental and remedial education has been defined and considered, at least by some librarians and administrators. Some of the reports are disheartening. For example, Rippey and Truett reported in 1983-84 that libraries in Texas community colleges were not much involved in the support of developmental courses. Only 18% offered special support to developmental/remedial students, and only 14% of the libraries spent more than 3% of the library budget on developmental services and materials.<sup>13</sup> Holleman, Todaro-Cagle, and Murray noted in 1990 that a California survey found that only 1% of community college library instruction was aimed at developmental students.<sup>xiv</sup> Person and Phifer found that among twenty East-Coast community college libraries polled, most did support developmental

programs; nevertheless, the authors concluded that the levels of support varied and were generally inadequate.<sup>15</sup> Two-thirds of community college librarians in Texas felt that the services and support they provided were adequate, yet many opined that the *college* should offer more services to disadvantaged students.<sup>16</sup>

Bibliographic Instruction (BI) is one of the most important services any community college LRP provides. And while discipline faculty and administrators understand the importance of specially instructing remedial students by offering separate remedial courses, librarians do not seem to understand the importance of specially instructing remedial students. In a survey of 120 library directors at two-year colleges nationwide, Affleck found that 32% of two-year college libraries did not modify BI for developmental students. Furthermore, 41% modified it only by simplifying content (rather than creating innovative solutions or introducing special technologies). Only 2% employed specially trained librarians.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, Affleck's study found that BI was not a required part of the basic curriculum at 66% of the colleges surveyed.<sup>18</sup>

Why should the libraries become more involved in developmental education programs? They should because most research indicates that library involvement has a tremendously positive effect. Rippey and Truett referred to studies conducted by Wagner, Breivik, Mallory, Wright, and Josey; studies which generally concluded that library involvement in developmental education has a positive impact.<sup>19</sup> Truett pointed out Brooklyn College, where developmental students who worked with librarians gained more academically and were less likely to drop out than developmental students who did not receive instruction from librarians.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Kingsborough Community College in New York and Chattanooga State Technical Community College reported successful LRP contributions to developmental programs.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the LRP at Austin Community College's Rio Grande Campus was particularly successful and provides a useful model since its philosophy was simple: each developmental class had to complete at least one library exercise. This is a realistic model because no additional space is needed; no new or special education of librarians is necessary; no new funds are required for special collections; and no additional staff are required since there are no class visits. Students simply go to the library and receive instruction there. Of course the discipline faculty and the library faculty must work closely together

(Holleman et al., 1990). In a recent e-mail, Julie Todaro confirmed that such cooperation continues today.<sup>22</sup> Todaro and her colleagues have created an excellent web site, which includes developmental assignments. These assignments are used by about 75% of the developmental faculty, and they can be viewed at <http://miles.austin.cc.tx.us/staff/jtodaro/devstud/devstud.html>.

The North Campus Library of Miami-Dade Community College actually created an Information Skills Lab in the library. This lab helped students achieve information literacy by providing activities that “. . . challenge students to read carefully, think critically, develop alternatives, write accurately and neatly, fulfill responsibilities and develop appropriate habits . . . ”<sup>23</sup> so that they can accomplish their professional and personal goals. In addition to creating this lab, the library completed a successful project in which librarians taught the discipline faculty how to create the best library assignments possible for students.

Suarez and Holleman et al. had strong opinions about the success of the programs they studied (and in some cases helped create). Miami-Dade and Rio Grande both benefited from strong discipline faculty and librarian faculty collaboration. Both strove to provide individualized instruction and assignments for each student instead of traditional group instruction and common assignments. The Community and Junior College Libraries Section (CJCLS) Committee on Services to the Disadvantaged concluded that “. . . a significant aspect of successful programs is their high degree of individualization.”<sup>24</sup> Holleman et al. also specified the importance of special materials like handouts, of an appropriate environment for learning, and of collection development, including much “high-interest/low-reading-level material.”<sup>25</sup> Suarez emphasized the importance of the library housing the developmental program, of reading assignments *in* the library-*of* library materials, and of library administrators giving priority to the library instructional sessions for developmental students.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned suggestions, which could be expensive or impossible, there are affordable and feasible library services that could be extended to developmental students. Person and Phifer suggested bibliographies of available instructional materials, adult books in simple language, and special shelves of such materials.<sup>27</sup> CJCLS mentioned the importance of signs and handouts, which should be effectively placed and simply written.<sup>28</sup> These older suggestions are not outdated by emerging technologies; instead, this advice

can be applied to online materials, CD-ROM selection, and the language and design of LRP web pages. Librarians should demystify as much of the library's visual materials as they can. For example, a handout about online databases should clearly define what a database, in fact, is. Finally, and most importantly, collaboration between discipline faculty and library faculty is free and feasible, too. It appears to be the primary tool in building an effective collaboration between developmental programs and Learning Resource Centers.

LRP librarians must recognize how important they are and how much they can contribute to the education of the developmental student. It is unfortunate that many librarians are not interested in becoming very active in this education<sup>29</sup> when students desperately need them. Librarians who will make a difference need to be prepared. Specifically, they need to teach well, and they must be able to “. . . access readability levels” of books, tests, software program text, and on-line catalogs.<sup>30</sup> Baker adds that community college librarians should be trained in and educated about instructional methods and development as well as curriculum planning.<sup>31</sup> Rippey and Truett's report in 1983-84 suggested that librarians-85% of whom were white-must be sensitive and responsive to the special situations of many developmental students-75% of whom were minority members-who in many cases are without economic or social advantages.<sup>32</sup> That they are without educational advantages is the point of this discussion.

It is not exactly logical to conclude that people of different races and/or backgrounds will not “understand” or respect each other. Nonetheless, most people would agree that the entrenched upper-middle-class, standard-American-English whiteness of most professional positions, librarianship included, may intimidate the working-class student, the impoverished student, the student of color, and the ESL/ENS student.

If a developmental student does not acquire information skills at the library or at least use the library, he or she may be more likely to drop out of school. Truett quoted a study conducted at California State Polytechnic University, at Pomona, by Lloyd and Martha Kramer: “. . . of those freshmen who failed to use the library, 43% did not return the following year. But of those who did borrow at least one book, only 26% dropped out.”<sup>33</sup> Truett paraphrased related comments by Thomas Atkins, past president of the Library Association of New

York: “. . . he considers the possession of inadequate library skills a potential first step in the dropout process, for these skills are necessary to prepare almost any type of college writing assignment.”<sup>34</sup> Students’ self-esteem, often challenged by library mystery and seeming complexity, may plummet if students feel lost in the library. Students may suffer further when they enroll in college-level courses in which the professor expects the students to utilize the library’s resources. Developmental students who learn how to use the library may develop better self-esteem and become academically motivated. They are likely to succeed and excel, even, in college-level courses.<sup>35</sup>

The 1994 Standards for Community, Junior, and Technical College Learning Resources Programs did not articulate a strong, committed position in support of developmental education. In fact, the only specific reference to developmental education was in section 6.3. The *collection* should support “. . . remedial programs for nontraditional and underprepared learners.”<sup>36</sup> In the statements about *services* provided and about *information literacy*, there was no mention at all of developmental programs. At least the introduction to the Standards mentioned that the LRP “. . . should accommodate different learning styles.”<sup>37</sup> Affleck wrote that the 1990 Standards were an improvement of the 1982 Standards because, finally, in 1990, the teaching role of the librarian was emphasized in regards to making students information literate.<sup>38</sup>

Necessary for an outstanding LRP is librarian familiarity with education literature. After all, the librarian is increasingly expected to teach much and well, and to be a great teacher is difficult without training. Ideally, assignments should be individualized for each student, reflecting the student’s interests and needs. Most importantly, as Baker wrote, the librarian is urged to create, with discipline faculty, library assignments whose content reflect that professor’s *specific*, pedagogical concerns.<sup>39</sup> Of course remediation is focused on the three R’s, so the librarian dealing primarily with developmental students can focus on reading, writing, and math skills. In the future, according to Suarez, the two-year LRP could function as the center of developmental education. The librarian would manage developmental activities and work closely with discipline faculty.<sup>40</sup> New studies need to be drafted and executed in order to determine whether or not the LRP is becoming the hub, or not.

In fact, Suarez fears that entrenched sexism could prevent the LRP

from becoming the heart of the developmental experience. She suggests that libraries are still regarded as “female” environments that “support” but do not lead.<sup>41</sup> In the author’s opinion, some discipline faculty do not recognize the intellectual abilities and talents of librarians. Faculty might regard librarians as helpful but passive, not dynamic or intellectually equal to them. Such a belief is probably more common in four-year universities and colleges, where the terminal faculty degree is a PhD and where the terminal degree for faculty librarians is a Master’s.

Life-long learning is impossible without basic information literacy, and it is the library, any library, that is responsible for educating its patrons or students in information retrieval, critical thinking, and evaluation of sources. Librarians at two-year colleges need to become dynamic presences. They must lead, organize, and facilitate. Librarians and discipline faculty need to cooperate, to create an environment of mutual respect, in order to create excellent library assignments; and they just might need to be creative and innovative in order to reach the development students. Community college librarians must remember their commitment to both the library and college professions. If an administrator or professor does not provide leadership or is not concerned, then the librarians should persist, doing whatever they can to help developmental students succeed at the community college level.

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