

# The Library and My Learning Community

## *First Year Students' Impressions of Library Services*

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*During the 2002–03 academic year a team of reference librarians at the Kent State University main library began working with two freshman learning communities as part of an initiative to learn more about the needs of first-year students. This article reports on the outreach to one of those, the Science Learning Community, and on the results of a focus group undertaken with members of that group. The study found that the students valued the library instruction offered and were even inclined to request that more library-related instruction be incorporated in the future. Students revealed apprehensions about using the library and also offered suggestions for new services, including the idea that all freshmen should have the same learning opportunity. The community program director was very pleased with the library's contributions to the students' learning experience. The initial outreach was considered a success by all involved and it was decided that the Main Library continue to develop the services and to further integrate library components into the students' curriculum for future semesters.*

**I**n the spring of 2002, a team of four reference librarians at the Kent State University (KSU) main library began thinking of

new ways to market the library's services and information resources. Most traditional marketing plans begin with "an investigation of needs in a given market, together with an analysis of organizational talent and resources to determine which needs the organization is best fitted to satisfy."<sup>1</sup> The selection of a target market, or a subgroup of customers, upon which to concentrate ones' efforts is the next step.<sup>2</sup> Early in the process, several key patron groups were identified, of which the team hoped to gain a better understanding. First-year students were one of the identified groups. The quickly changing information environment was making it increasingly difficult to make assumptions about their experiences, skills, and needs, as well as their expectations from the libraries.

The team's first task, therefore, was to devise a means of learning more about the freshman class. An article in a university-wide faculty-staff newsletter made the team aware of several new learning communities beginning on campus in fall semester 2002. The article also highlighted a few communities that had been ongoing for several years, none of which had had any involvement with the libraries. Lippincott confirmed "involvement in learning communities can provide academic librarians with a

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window into the thinking of students who have grown up with technology and who regularly use the Web to locate all kinds of information.”<sup>3</sup> The team immediately recognized the potential inherent in belonging to such a community and began brainstorming about ways to become involved and what could be offered to the community.

Learning communities vary greatly in their organization, goals, and activities. At its simplest, a learning community may be defined as “an intentionally developed community that will promote and maximize learning.”<sup>4</sup> Each of the communities on the KSU campus had a unique focus and drew on different criteria for forming the community. Some were based on academic major, others on lifestyle (healthy living, fitness), and others on interests (community service). Each community promoted and maximized learning from a unique perspective. However, none had yet tapped into the resources of the library. The librarian team believed that the library had a unique role to play in enhancing the first-year experience for these students. Becoming involved with learning communities could be an opportunity for librarians to provide additional guidance and nurturing of students’ information literacy skills, and to discover new and creative ways to interact with students. This would coincide with KSU libraries and Media Services’ mission to find new and effective ways to infuse information literacy instruction into the curriculum. The librarians would in turn benefit from the close-knit structure of the communities by fulfilling their need to better understand first-year students’ needs and expectations. It was with these goals in mind that the team set out to become involved with learning communities on campus.

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## THE LEARNING COMMUNITY AND INFORMATION LITERACY

A review of the existing literature on learning communities reveals that, although not a new concept in education, learning communities and similar forms of collaboration are in the forefront of the minds of many librarians across the country. Recent Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) presidential themes focused on such collaboration and were based on ACRL’s Strategic Plan 2005.<sup>5</sup> In his 2003–2004 theme, Cannon stressed that “partnerships, connections, learning, and knowledge building define present-day higher education.”<sup>6</sup> Reichel, in the introduction to her 2001–2002 presidential theme, highlighted the recent shift in emphasis from teaching to learning and stressed that librarian-faculty collaboration in promoting information literacy creates meaningful learning experiences for students. She noted that

information literacy “focuses on the learner and the process of learning.”<sup>7</sup> Even with such emphasis on the learning community theme, Frank, Beasley, and Kroll noted in 2001 that “the number of articles that include the academic library as a key element of the learning community is surprisingly small.”<sup>8</sup>

The literature does, however, reveal the key reasons there has been such a focus on new collaborations with learning communities. In the first place, as librarians become involved with learning communities, they can establish themselves as partners in the learning enterprise in new and important ways.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, in addition to developing new and valuable working relationships, involvement in a learning community enables librarians to try out new services that could benefit all students making library visits.<sup>10</sup> Last, it is now recognized that information literacy initiatives must reach beyond the walls of the library to achieve their full potential.<sup>11</sup> The nature of learning communities allows for a deeper level of integration of library components and is a natural environment for information literacy instruction.<sup>12</sup> Still, Iannuzzi stresses the importance of approaching each new collaboration initiative with the appropriate motivation. She notes that instead of focusing on how to advance a library’s information literacy agenda, it is important to stress and question the way in which information literacy efforts can help others succeed in their goals and initiatives.<sup>13</sup> This was the intent of the team’s approach to becoming integrated with learning communities on the KSU campus.

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## NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

### Becoming Part of a Community

It is necessary for librarians to be proactive, to initiate collaboration, and to be willing to leave the library building itself to become actively involved in the greater community.<sup>14</sup> The notion of “if you build it, they will come” does not necessarily work in regard to library collections and services. “They” may indeed come. But the question remains, will they then use the resources to their best advantage? The team’s proactive approach began by contacting the interim dean of undergraduate studies, under whom all learning communities were organized, and arranging to meet and discuss with him becoming members of the communities. The meeting was a great success, largely due to an unexpected element. KSU’s dean of Libraries and Media Services had already paved the way for an open, enthusiastic attitude at a recent dean’s retreat, where new roles for academic librarians had been discussed. This demonstrated the importance of an ongoing

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and consistent message from the library about its role in building information literacy competencies. The interim dean recommended two communities to approach, based on a preference for communities serving at-risk students: the EXCEL Program, which is open to any exploratory major, and the science learning community (SLC), intended for first-generation college students in a science-related major. The program directors in turn welcomed the team with very enthusiastic attitudes about the library's possible contribution. The librarians involved decided to split into two teams. However, one librarian remained involved with both; therefore, SLC had a total of three librarians interacting with it over the course of the academic year (the science librarian, the humanities librarian, and the head of the library's instructional-services team). This article will report on the activities, challenges, and outcomes of working with SLC.

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### SUPPORTING RETENTION GOALS

SLC was in its first year at KSU, so it was necessary to anticipate some of the challenges these students might confront and to help equip them with the related skills and information resources they would need to face and overcome those challenges. SLC is composed of twenty-five freshman science majors, all first-generation college students. They are enrolled in three courses together, two of which—English and biology—have integrated curricula. The students also live on the same floor of a residence hall. In addition to their similar course schedules, learning community members are required to attend several extracurricular activities per month allowing for further enrichment and social interaction.

The learning community offers a very practical way for librarians to contribute to the retention of at-risk students. Components were to be spread throughout the academic year, building on each other and building student comfort levels as they became more familiar with the staff, services, and resources in the university libraries. This required taking into consideration two key characteristics. First, they were all new college students. The literature has established library anxiety as a detrimental barrier to student success in the library, and freshman students are more anxious than any other group of students.<sup>15</sup> Studies have determined several key approaches to easing library anxiety. Scoyoc found that face-to-face interaction with a librarian was the best method of instruction (versus online tutorials) for increasing student comfort levels with the library. The presence of a librarian was found to be critical, regardless of the students'

experience level. This study also found that student perceptions of staff are a major determiner of library anxiety.<sup>16</sup> The Jiao and Onweugbuzie study also concluded that students who take library skills courses have fewer effective barriers to library use and recommended that interventions target freshman students. Both this study and the Keefer study concluded that library instruction should affirm that library anxiety is natural and that the frustrations the students experience doing research are normal.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Keefer noted that students who are lacking time and under other stress will have more difficulties. They will begin to miss external cues such as library directional signs and other forms of help. Thus, it is critical that these students are reached before they arrive at that critical melting point. Keefer also notes that students who most need assistance are the least likely to ask for it.<sup>18</sup> This helps reinforce the need for early intervention and the development of a trusting relationship between librarians and new students, both issues that the learning community environment are particularly geared to address.

The second important characteristic to consider is that the students were all science majors. A study by Kuh and Gonyea found that science majors were part of a group of those least likely to use the library (along with business, math, and undecided majors).<sup>19</sup> Leckie and Fullerton's study may offer some insight as to why science majors fall into this group, noting that most science courses rely primarily on standardized texts well into the first two or three years of study. "In other words, it is quite possible for science and engineering undergraduates to avoid the library, if not completely, at least until relatively late in their educational experience."<sup>20</sup> These studies seem to emphasize the need for individualized attention for students similar to those in this particular community.

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### PERSONALIZED ATTENTION IS THE KEY

Sherona Garrett-Ruffin, director of the KSU SLC, immediately emphasized how important it was for all of those involved in supporting SLC to be willing to become a part of a close-knit community and to want to interact regularly with the students. She stressed that it was key for students to be able to receive personalized attention whenever needed, and that all faculty and staff members in the community should maintain an open-door policy. The librarians were very encouraged by this philosophy and indicated their desire to be fully integrated.

The librarians' contact with SLC students began on the very first night the students moved into the residence halls. Two of the three librarians involved were able to attend an opening social arranged by the program director. This was an opportunity to meet the classroom faculty involved, as well as enabling the librarians to be a part of the community from day one in the minds of the students and faculty. It also offered a unique opportunity for students to be introduced to the idea of a librarian being an integral part of their learning experience.

The SLC director saw personalization as a necessary component of the community experience. Thus, the first and most basic service the team could offer the community was to provide a more personalized approach to services already in place. All university orientation classes have an integrated library component. This component was designed by KSU librarians, but is typically presented by the student or faculty orientation instructor (which is due to the limited number of librarians available on staff to serve the more than 150 sections of the course). For the SLC orientation section, however, a member of the librarian team, the instructional services head, visited the class and presented the library component (which introduced the research process, stressed the importance of evaluating information, and encouraged students to solicit help from librarians). This enabled the students to meet the third librarian working with their community and also allowed the librarian to see firsthand how a class reacted to and interacted with the lesson plan she had created for orientation.

A second preestablished service is that of PERCs, or *PErsonalized Research Consultations*. This service is open to all students and promoted to all freshman English courses. Normally, students phone or stop by the reference desk to set up an appointment during any available librarian's office hour. The personalized touch for this service simply entailed introducing the learning community students to their own personal librarians early in the semester and encouraging them to call their librarian directly for any needed help. SLC students were specifically guided to the librarian for biological sciences, who they had already met at the opening social. Several students took advantage of this personal contact by e-mailing and phoning questions to their librarian. Those that took advantage of this option have commented that they appreciated having a personal contact in the library.

Next, an instruction session on information resources for the students of the biological diversity course was presented by the biological sciences librarian. This session included instruction

on finding resources for biological topics, how to cite material properly, and caveats for using and evaluating Web resources. The biology and English courses for the community are integrated, both focusing on biological-control issues. The students read texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Therefore, a second instruction session was offered in the spring semester that concentrated on information resources for literary studies. This was presented by the humanities librarian, who had previously met the students at the opening social. This session was also course-integrated. The two sessions were intended to build on one another, helping students tie skills already learned into the new disciplinary setting. The community director and the biological sciences librarian also collaborated on the design of a research assignment for the SLC students. Garrett-Ruffin was pleased to note that students were discussing the assignment on a higher level than she has experienced with freshman students in the past. She attributed part of this success to the improvements made to the assignment via collaboration with the biological sciences librarian.

Librarians went beyond providing traditional course-related bibliographic instruction. In the spring semester, the library prepared a session on "Careers in Science: Using the Library to Learn about Careers." Students were introduced to print and electronic sources for exploring career information. An instructional session on issues related to "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It" was the last official instructional offering of the year, also offered jointly by the biological sciences and humanities librarians. Attendance at these last two offerings was lower than the others. However, this was expected because these sessions were offered in the evenings and were part of a larger selection of extracurricular sessions from which students were able to choose. Both drew more than one-third of the community, and feedback from those who attended was very positive.

The libraries also sponsored a pizza study break late in the spring semester. One of the librarians from the team decided to take advantage of this opportunity to invite students to stay after the pizza party for a focus group study. The purpose of the focus group was twofold: (1) to assess the success of the libraries' outreach to the learning community in particular, and (2) to gauge a freshman's outlook of the library experience in general. From the students' responses, the researcher hoped to gain broader insights into more far-reaching questions. For example: Which of the new instructional offerings presented to the learning communities may be worth trying with a larger population of first-year students? What was learned from this small group of

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freshmen that could change the approach to other areas of service outside of instruction? What was learned could then be taken back to the instructional services team and incorporated into new marketing strategies and instructional approaches.

### FOCUS-GROUP METHOD

The researcher saw great value in using the focus-group method, for, as noted by Goulding, this method “elicit(s) relatively spontaneous responses and interaction” and allows the participants to bring to light topics of importance to them that may not have been on the researcher’s radar.<sup>21</sup> She also noted that this method provides an element of “safety in numbers,” helping to alleviate any nervousness that one-on-one methods could cause.<sup>22</sup> This is particularly important in relation to the research noted earlier regarding student anxiety toward the library. Recognizing that focus-group results are “not used to project results onto a larger population, it merely gives a sense of the group as a whole,” the researcher still felt that this method would enable the librarians to make better-informed decisions regarding outreach to the first-year student.<sup>23</sup>

All SLC members were invited to come to a one-hour focus group on a Wednesday evening after the already-scheduled pizza study break sponsored by the library. An extra incentive of prizes was offered to encourage students to stay for the focus group. Invitations went out by direct e-mail as well as via the internal SLC calendar and a newsletter produced by the community director. The researcher hoped to draw Glitz’s recommended group size of six to ten participants, as it “is sufficient to give a range of ideas and opinions and to allow real participation and discussion by all.”<sup>24</sup> Six students arrived for the voluntary focus group. Because these individuals all knew each other already, very little time was used for ice-breaker activities. The session was conducted in one of the library’s classrooms, which happened to have a large conference table. All were able to sit around this table and to see each other clearly (including the researcher). The community director was also present, but sat off to the side as an observer. The focus-group session was tape recorded to ensure accurate note-taking. The students appeared at ease, and all six participated regularly in the discussion. The researcher did not interject other than to ask for clarification to ensure comprehension and accurate note-taking. This is in accordance with Goulding’s recommendation that “focus-group participants should be encouraged to interact with one another rather than the researcher so that themes emerge relatively spon-

taneously as participants respond to one another’s experiences.”<sup>25</sup> Although scheduled for one hour, the students continued the discussion for one hour and fifteen minutes.

It is important to note that all but one of the questions asked of the group pertained to their overall library experience as first-year students and were not limited to their specialized experiences as members of a learning community. In this way, the researcher hoped to access their “whole library experience,” including time spent on their own using the library and its services. It was understood that their interactions with librarians and library instruction were likely more frequent and more advanced than the average freshman, and thus would have an influence on their responses, and would be reflected in their demonstrated knowledge of resources and services. Justification for broadening the scope of the questions can be found in St. Clair’s observation that drawing participants from learning community members is the most successful way to attract undergraduates for focus groups, and that learning community students “had enough exposure to the library that they were able to make a number of astute observations.”<sup>26</sup> Broad, open-ended questions were prepared in hopes of encompassing all of the possible facets of their library experience and to encourage the students to answer freely and thoroughly. It was with this in mind that the researcher developed the following eight questions:

1. What do you feel have been the most valuable interactions with the libraries and library faculty and staff this year?
2. How do you feel that library services and instruction to first-year students can be improved?
3. What are your impressions of the libraries’ resources?
4. What are your impressions of the libraries’ facilities?
5. What are your impressions of the libraries’ faculty and staff members?
6. In what ways should the libraries continue or change their involvement and interaction with SLC in future years?
7. If you were giving advice to a new freshman student next year, what things do you feel would be most important for him or her to know about the libraries?
8. Are there any other comments or concerns that you would like to share?

In addition to these, the SLC director asked permission to ask a few extra spontaneous questions of her own at the end of the session. These were:

1. Why did you not use the library at first? What do you use the library most for now?
2. Why do you think people did not come to all the programs offered by the library?
3. What is the single most important threat to the library?<sup>27</sup>

All discussion was transcribed and then each comment was coded with general labels by the researcher. These labels were analyzed to find similarities and to classify the comments into major themes. This type of approach to data analysis was described and endorsed by Von Seggern and Young in their focus-group method, which was based on grounded theory, and allows for theories and concepts to be built from the analysis of the actual data. They found this method to be particularly robust for library and information science research, especially noting that as librarians, they had “an affinity for the coding and classification process.”<sup>28</sup>

All of the learning community students’ concerns, comments, and suggestions were organized into the following categories: staff interactions, instruction, facility or environmental issues, resources, new services desired, attitudes or preconceptions, and advice for new freshmen.

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## STUDENT RESPONSES

### Staff Interactions

The group participants all agreed that the reference desk service was valuable, and that the librarians and graduate students there all “try their best to help.”<sup>29</sup> Just getting help with finding “journal articles and the like” was one of the first services mentioned when asked about the most “valuable interactions” with the librarians. One student noted that a graduate student who kept looking for materials for her long after she left the desk particularly impressed her. Another student, however, had a negative experience and said that the person helping him intimidated him. He was able to note that on another occasion he was impressed by a librarian who remained on the phone with him for a long period of time. This same student also stated: “The librarians help me more when my computer is down” than the other help services on campus. One thing that the students didn’t like to experience at the desk was for a staff member to speak too loudly when helping them. A student noted that “you don’t want anyone to know that you don’t know what you are doing” and that speaking too loudly “makes it apparent that you don’t.”

### Instruction

When asked how services and instruction could be improved, the students agreed that more instruction should be offered and should be required for everyone. Specifically mentioned to be of value were the library tours, the sessions on how to cite materials and avoid plagiarism, the session on finding science career information, and library instruction for their English and biology classes (course-integrated sessions). One student also mentioned that she felt that it would be valuable to have sessions based on subject fields, noting that she did not know “at all” how to search for resources in the field of education for her English paper until the library instruction session she had in SLC’s English 10002 course. Several students seemed to agree “every class should have this opportunity.” All agreed that it would be more valuable to have each of the instruction sessions in the first semester so as to prepare them with the skills as early as possible. This included the career and plagiarism sessions.

Also related to instruction, one first-year student noted that more explanations and help screens linked within the library catalogs and research databases would help students researching on their own. With regard to topics for instruction, two students noted they felt they needed to learn more about how to search by keyword versus subject heading, how to find related key terms, and how to “work around the words to find better information.” Two of the six focus-group participants indicated that they found the libraries’ Sixty-Minute+ Seminars to be of value (they attended seminars voluntarily and not as a part of the SLC program). These seminars are free and open to all faculty, staff, and students, and cover a variety of topics (such as various research databases, multimedia and Web developing tools, and data-analysis software). Specifically mentioned were those seminars on using PowerPoint, Excel, and scanners. Interactive Web training was also mentioned by one student as a preferred means to learn about library resources and tools.

### Resources

Although the students had less to say about the resources available, they were decidedly split on their impressions. Two students complained that most of what they wanted (books and articles) was available only at other libraries through the statewide consortium and that “it was sort of a pain” to have to request materials and wait for them. Yet in contrast, another student said she “[was] always

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able to get the resources [she] needed” and felt that “the libraries provide a good collection.” One area that she did find lacking was in the audiovisual category, “at least for psychology videos.” Currency of these materials was of the utmost importance to the students.

### New Services Desired

The students agreed that it would be nice to have staff stationed on every floor of the twelve-floor main library tower (especially floors four through ten, where most of the books are). They find it troublesome to have to return downstairs to the first floor for assistance when unable to locate a needed resource. One student suggested the creation of a library newsletter for students, which could be sent to learning community members as well as the student body at large. Another service that the students agreed they would like and use regularly is a “plug-in anywhere” network access along with the option to check out or rent laptops to use in the library. One student was already aware of a neighboring university’s use of laptops in this manner and the others seemed very impressed by the notion of such a service.

### Facility and Environment

It is interesting to note that when asked directly about their impressions of the main library facility, the students initially indicated that they liked it, saying it was “comfortable and organized.” Further on in the discussions, various other comments pertaining to the facility and overall atmosphere of the main library came forward. There was a desire expressed for improving the decor to make it “more appealing.” More group-study rooms were desired, yet one student described them as feeling like “interrogation rooms,” too small, too dark, and too stuffy. Student opinions were also split concerning seating choices. Half preferred having more “comfy couches” and overstuffed chairs; the other half said seating of this type was too comfortable and was likely to put them to sleep. Two students expressed the need for privacy screens on the reference center computers and the preference for cubicle-style seating in that area to maximize privacy. They all agreed it would be nice if the libraries could come up with a special room for the learning community where they could meet to study, which would house resources pertaining to the group. Last, students jokingly stated that they wished there were such a thing as library dorms, offering unhindered access to resources for the lucky residents.

### Attitudes or Preconceptions

Many of the comments made during the focus-group study revealed students’ attitudes and preconceptions toward the library and libraries in general. As new students, some were intimidated by the quiet, studious atmosphere of the library. One commented “I feel nervous . . . everyone is doing their work.” This same student did note that once the new café opened, with coffee, tea, and pastries, she felt a bit more relaxed and comfortable in the atmosphere. Another participant expressed “when you think of a library . . . [being] in one spot, sitting there . . . it’s boring!” And yet other students seemed to think that was what was expected. They indicated that it was too hard to study in the dorms, and thus it is best to come to the library to get things done. One student even said that it is “one of the best resources on campus.” When asked why they thought students opt not to come to library-sponsored programs and services, the students indicated that it was “too far away” from the dorms and that “it takes time for people to get here and people are lazy.”

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### PASSING ON ADVICE

When asked what advice they would give to next year’s freshman class, students all agreed that first-year students should not hesitate to ask for help or be afraid to come into the library (not be intimidated by its size). They also would recommend exploring the building . . . “go[ing] beyond the third floor” to see all that is available. Two students also said they would highly recommend that new students take advantage of the libraries’ Sixty-minute+ Seminars to learn about computer programs such as Excel and PowerPoint, scanning, and more.

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### WHAT WAS LEARNED

The librarians were pleased to discover that the students really seemed to appreciate the instruction, outreach, services, and help offered by the library. Also, the most pleasant surprise came when it was learned that they were more inclined to ask for *more* services and instruction, even though they themselves received far more personalized attention than the average first-year student. The librarians also realized that students appreciate learning important skills such as how to cite materials, avoid plagiarism, and search for resources early on in their careers, so as to take advantage of them sooner. Fitting all of the planned sessions for the learning community into one semester would be very difficult to schedule. This will provide a chal-

lenge in balancing program demands with such considerations as: (1) the constraints on available staff resources, and (2) the librarians' desire to not overwhelm the students. The SLC director has suggested incorporating more of the library sessions into class time so as to make this less imposing on their study and free time.

The librarians have also learned that new students are particularly sensitive to being able to blend into the environment, as noted by the comments pertaining to feeling "stupid" if people overheard them asking a question at the desk and of being intimidated by the seemingly "hard-working, studious" students all around them. The libraries need to consider ways to ease that initial tension, to make the environment more warm and inviting, and to be sensitive to students' desire to blend in, even while going out of the way to provide individualized help to them. Keefer, in her study on library anxiety, suggests that librarians choose proactive means, such as using the roving reference librarian approach, asking students if they need help, instead of waiting to be asked. She also recommended using peer mentors and tutors to help alleviate this problem.<sup>30</sup> Some students of the previous year's learning community will be asked to stay involved and serve as peer mentors to new SLC students. This will help build continuity for the program as well.

Based on how well received the sessions were to this small group of individuals, the library may wish to consider how to reach a wider audience for sessions on "Avoiding Plagiarism" and "Career Information in Your Library." Adding these two topics to the lineup of the Sixty-minute+ Seminar series in the future is an option that would allow optimal visibility, given that this program is already widely publicized by the library. Also for consideration is how to move beyond the walls of the library and take services and instruction directly to students, as the focus-group participants cited a variety of reasons why the library and its programs might be avoided (that is, feeling awkward and intimidated by the atmosphere or being too lazy to walk all the way across campus). This raises the question: would consultation services and instruction be successful if offered in the common areas of the community's residence hall?

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## THE FUTURE FOR THE LIBRARY IN SLC

Feedback was also solicited from the program director at both a mid-year meeting and a planning meeting for the start of the following 2003–2004 academic year. Garrett-Ruffin was pleased with

the reactions of her students to the library components and spoke to the librarians of the value she sees in the themes that were addressed. She also has shown great interest in continuing to develop new components, which led to the introduction of a new session on "Evaluating Library and Web Resources" during the 2003–2004 year. She was very appreciative of the collaboration on her research assignment and even requested assistance in grading the project. She also helped secure integration of one additional library component (the plagiarism session) into the university orientation course during the 2003–2004 school year. She has requested that the team of librarians collaborate with the learning community faculty to help continue to develop the integrated curriculum. Brainstorming for new ways to help the students get a better understanding of and assimilation to the culture of higher education is also on the agenda for future communities.

Much of the success of the integration of the library components into this community was due to the very open, positive attitude of the SLC director. From the very start, Garrett-Ruffin recognized and conveyed the consistent attitude that the librarians were faculty members with an integral role to play in the students' success at the university. This appears to have had a strong influence on the students' attitudes and approach to the library offerings. Having this type of support from the community director is essential to the success of the library's involvement with learning communities.

Overall, the process of getting connected with a learning community has been a very worthwhile and valuable experience. As was noted by Lippincott "librarians who have had the experience [of being involved with a learning community] feel empowered and connected to the educational process in new ways."<sup>31</sup> Promising relationships have been established with faculty colleagues, and it is anticipated that this will have an impact on other areas such as requests for course-integrated library instruction and consultation services. One aim is to draw a larger percentage of the community to evening sessions offered by the libraries, understanding that any instruction not fully incorporated into course time, and requiring the use of study or leisure time, will draw fewer students. The librarians hope to alleviate such concerns in the future by making better use of student feedback regarding their availability, developing better promotional techniques (combination of e-mails, handouts, and in-class announcements), and by simply continuing to get to know the students better. The library will continue to search for ways to better position themselves to be the session



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of choice for these students in future semesters. Also, as all of the learning community faculty and librarians continue to work together to build more interconnectivity between library programs and course curricula, the successes noted in these early collaborations will continue and grow, thus setting an example that could help pave the way toward securing a place for information literacy in the curricula of many more communities on campus.

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23. Beryl Glitz, *Focus Groups for Libraries and Librarians* (New York: Forbes, 1998), 111.
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25. Goulding, "Joking, Being Aggressive, and Shutting People Up," 333.
26. St.Clair, "The LEAPing Librarians Role in a Campus Learning Community," 29.
27. It is duly noted that the students may not have known what was initially meant by the idea of a "threat" to the library. However, their discussion seemed to indicate that they did. They listed such things as the Internet, online accessibility to journals, and the need for a better library atmosphere and decor as possible threats.
28. Marilyn Von Seggern and Nancy J. Young, "The Focus Group Method in Libraries: Issues Relating to Process and Data Analysis," *Reference Services Review* 31, no. 3 (2003): 279.
29. Please note that all participants were assured anonymity. All quotations within the "Responses" section are those of one of the six freshmen participants.
30. Keefer, "The Hungry Rats Syndrome."
31. Lippincott, "Developing Collaborative Relationships," 192.