

Running head: LIBRARY SERVICE TO ESL STUDENTS

Library service to ESL students:

A proposal to change their underserved status at XYZ Community College Library

Beth Helstien, Sarah Lander, Alexis McClurg, Janna Moser, Crystal Neal,
and Jane Sabatini
Emporia State University

LI833XO

April 15, 2008

Abstract

The XYZ Community College (XCC) Library presents a plan to change the underserved status of Latino English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students. A review of the literature identifies key characteristics of their group and the barriers they face in the academic library setting. The resulting proposal is a three-part plan of research, action, and evaluation aimed at supporting equitable library access and use by Latino ESL students. The three objectives for the current year are to make the library a more welcoming environment for the target group, ensure sufficient technology resources, and provide library orientations in English and Spanish at the beginning of the fall term. Evaluation of these pilot efforts will inform further changes.

Library service to ESL students:

A plan to change their underserved status at XYZ Community College Library

ESL students in the community college library have garnered academic attention in recent years. Crandall and Sheppard (2004) reported that ESL programs are the largest and fastest growing programs at many colleges (p. 6). They cited Census data supporting the claim that 15 million adults would benefit from ESL instruction, far exceeding the current capacity of the nation's 1.2 million ESL programs (Chisman & Crandall, 2007). In addition to the common hurdles students must overcome to succeed academically, ESL students work with linguistic and cultural backgrounds that differ not only from those of their native English-speaking teachers and classmates, but also from each other. At the same time, more is being expected of the community's educated members. As Rubin (2004) believes, it is no longer "enough to be a good locator and evaluator of information; it is the responsibility of all to continue to learn and to contribute what we have learned to our society in a beneficial manner" (p. 397). To these ends, "growing emphasis is being placed on the [academic] librarian as teacher and guide, whose function is, in part, to develop information skills in students not only for academic purposes, but for lifelong learning" (p. 410).

Although small, the ESL program at XYZ Community College (XCC) Library adequately met the needs of its ESL students for the past 20 years. However, demand for the program began to consistently exceed its capacity two years ago. Enrollment of Latino ESL students jumped to a new high, reflecting the 14.2% increase of Spanish-speaking members of the community over the past five years. The XCC Library is in a position to foster both basic literacy as well as

information literacy skills in its Latino ESL students by providing equitable service. The library proposes a three-component program to achieve this goal.

Literature Review

Understanding the demographics of this group will aid library managers in making program budgetary decisions. National statistics, however, must not be used to describe the students that XCC Library seeks to serve, as settlement patterns of immigrants vary regionally. Chisman and Crandall assert, “There is no typical adult ESL student” (p. 4).

XCC must develop a profile of this population and accurately characterize the kinds of language skills current and prospective students possess. The number of international students here on special visas is known. Other important questions include: How many “generation 1.5” students do we serve--those who have graduated from U.S. high schools, but who still need English instruction, especially in writing? How many ESL students have limited literacy in their mother tongue? Students with little formal education in their native language require a different approach from that used in teaching high school graduates.

Research on non-native English speaking students and academic libraries is both qualitative and quantitative, unfortunately little attention has focused exclusively on the community college library. In Queens, CUNY conducted three focus groups with 10 students each to assess its library services for undergraduates (Li, 1998). The results were that these students needed library instruction in how to use the catalog and online resources effectively. The university responded by developing 50-minute workshops offered during the beginning of each semester. Other expressed concerns paralleled those of the majority population, e.g. security, functioning copy machines, etc.

Adkins and Hussey (2006) reported on their qualitative study of Latino university

students' experience of the library. They found that students who had received library-skills training were more comfortable in the academic library, and those who had not preferred to use public libraries. Students felt empowered by the computer lab, and that "everything is on computer, which is a lot easier" (p. 474) than navigating the library.

A study of "students at a higher level English proficiency" (Bordonaro, 2006, p. 522) found that the library served as an information commons for these students. Supporting multiple learning needs encouraged students to become better library users and also enabled language learning.

Quantitative research of the preferred learning styles of ESL community college students identified differences among people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and between men and women (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006). The VARK questionnaire was administered to students in ESL programs, and the reported data indicated that women and men tended to exhibit different learning styles. Also, advanced students showed significantly greater preference for aural learning than did beginning students.

Collectively, this research addressed a wide range of ESL students, from those with the highest levels of English proficiency to those with very low levels of education or English skills. A common drawback to these studies is that none originated from non-native speakers of English to provide an insider perspective. Additionally, the majority of the research on ESL students in community colleges did not center on the role of the library. Research that directly addressed the role of the library focused on the more academically advanced students (Adkins & Hussey, 2006; Bordonaro, 2006; Li, 1998).

Distinguishing Characteristics

Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the United States, composing 14.8% of the total population at 44.3 million people in 2007 (Arias). Latinos come from 20 different countries and so cannot be characterized as one group. (Hispanic Research Inc.). In this country, the one factor linking these diverse cultures is limited English proficiency (LEP). A poll conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center (PHC) in 2004 found that a majority (57%) of Latinos believed immigrants must learn English in order to integrate into U.S. society. PHC conducted another survey in 2007, reporting that Latinos perceived insufficient proficiency in English to be an obstacle to their acceptance in the U.S. and perpetuated discrimination toward them (Hakimzadeh & Cohn, 2007).

The diversity of life experiences and backgrounds represented by Latinos could be treated as a great asset to the educational system, yet schools focus instead on the students' lack of proficiency in English. In community colleges, the ESL students comprise two groups: adults with low general literacy skills and those who were educated in their native language but are not proficient in English. Regardless of their prior level of education, both groups are often placed together in either ESL or adult basic education (ABE) programs (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004).

Finally, another characteristic that sets ESL students apart from the rest of the community college student body is their lack of experience in the U.S. educational system. Many received little formal education in their native language, although the statistics vary significantly depending on the country of origin, some received a portion of their education in U.S. schools. While college enrollment for Latinos has increased since 1980, the rates are still lower than for Caucasians and African-Americans, and enrollment is most often in community colleges rather than four-year colleges (Zurita, 2005).

An Underserved Group

The lack of diversity among library professionals is well documented. Academic libraries may provide more opportunities for speakers of English as a second language than public or school libraries, yet an overwhelming 85% of academic librarians are Caucasian (Davis, 2007). Racial data for 4,116 graduates of ALA-accredited MLS programs in 2001-2002 reveal that 88% were Caucasian (Wohlmuth & McCook, 2004). The notable absence of library employees representing the vast racial diversity of adult ESL students creates a less welcoming environment for them.

It is likely that the substantial barriers complicating adult students' access to ESL courses equally impede their library access. A study by the National Center for ESL Literacy Education (2003) reports enthusiasm for and dedication to continuing education among adult ESL students. However, possession of these qualities alone cannot overcome lack of time, money, childcare and transportation. Tucker (2007) writes, "According to ESL providers, the average adult ESL student is among the working poor, holds two jobs, [and] supports a family" (p. 32). He states, for example, that childcare and transportation are barriers for 23% of adult ESL students. Convenient public transportation and college childcare services are less likely to be available in the evening when the average adult ESL student can set aside time for education. In addition, typical college library policy is not known to be child-friendly.

Although not specifically addressing ESL students, Love (2007) believes "multicultural student outreach ... is essential in helping to combat the social, educational, technological, institutional, and financial barriers that leave many minority students at a great disadvantage" (p. 14) in a college setting. Alarming, then, is her review of the work of Hollister (2005), Norlin and Morris (1999), and Walter (2005), who all report on the academic library's lack of initiative and

collaboration with multicultural student services groups. There exists here an opportunity for XCC Library to be a model leader for change in providing equitable service to its ESL students.

XCC Library Plan

To better meet the needs of our Spanish-speaking ESL students, the library proposes a three-part program of research, action, and evaluation. Based on last year's task force on Hispanic Outreach, the library proposes to implement three outreach program elements in the current year and to increase outreach over the following five years, if research findings and initial programming success support expansion.

XCC Library must identify and address the key issues relevant to Spanish-speaking ESL students. The library proposes to conduct research using three distinct methods. It is important that these studies not rely on technology for student participation, due to the low access that some of the students may have to technology. Beginning with fall 2008 library orientations offered in Spanish, the library staff will conduct a brief question and answer period about students' backgrounds, family situations, and academic ambitions. This will allow staff to ask questions, as well as provide an opportunity for the ESL students to ask questions in a comfortable environment. Library staff will take notes during the session for later review.

In addition, we propose using the Hispanic Cultural Center (HCC) to conduct small focus groups in a familiar and comfortable setting for Spanish-speaking students. The HCC is a popular campus organization for many of the Latino students because of its social nature as well as the resources it provides. It also acts as a hub for community organizations and leaders to meet and work with the XCC Latino student population. Library staff and leaders at the HCC will conduct the focus groups, asking students informal questions about library services and their needs. By rearranging the library staff's schedules the cost of these focus groups will be

absorbed by library's operating budget. The library will conduct the focus groups at various times throughout the day and evening, on at least two different days, since many of the students commute and are on campus only in-between classes.

Finally, XCC requires that all students take Basic Study Skills (BSS) their first term. The fact that all students are enrolled in this class makes it an ideal place to conduct a very brief survey. The questions would be:

1. When do you study?
2. Please rank in order of most importance the following measures the library might adopt to help you as a student:
 - ___ be open more hours
 - ___ provide computers at HCC
 - ___ provide orientations in Spanish about how to use the library
 - ___ provide instruction in Spanish about databases
3. Do you use the public library to complete college assignments? If yes, do they have enough computers for you to complete your work?
4. Do you use the HCC to complete college assignments? If yes, do they have enough computers for you to complete your work?
5. What is the biggest problem with the XCC Library for you?

These three research steps will require little financial input, with the exception of library staff time dedicated to this outreach. As the Latino student population expands it is crucial that XCC Library have an understanding of their unique needs.

Using the data from these studies, as well as the information from national research, we expect to make several changes and develop a program to better serve the ESL student population.

Fiscal Year 2008-2009:

1. Increase the number of Latino student workers in the library and add bilingual signage.
2. Coordinate with the local public library to ensure that all students have access to the technology they need off campus.
3. Offer English and Spanish library orientations throughout the first week of each term at varying times and days.

Fiscal Year 2009-2010:

4. Provide social/study hours at the HCC (with food provided) where a librarian or library assistant is available to provide homework assistance.

Three to Five Year Plan:

5. Expand library hours.
6. Integrate more library visits and library instruction into the BSS class through professor partnerships.

Based on our preliminary research, we believe that these changes in the library will provide increased use of its services, contributing to better student learning. The library will adjust its programs to reflect the results of the above surveys, discussions, and focus groups.

Overcoming Obstacles to Change at XCC

We provide details of how we will implement each outreach program objective:

Objective 1: Increase the number of Latino student workers in the library.

Published guidelines for improving library services to Latinos include the hiring of Latino staff and bilingual signage (Najera, 2006). Employing bilingual/bicultural student workers is a low-cost staffing option. In addition, employing students from the HCC, where many are community leaders, will improve service to ESL students. Increasing bilingual signage and adding "I speak Spanish" (hablo español) to employee nametags will improve patron access.

Objective 2: Coordinate with other agencies to ensure all students have access to technology.

Similar to the XCC Library, the public library is also addressing issues deriving from the recent influx of Spanish-speaking newcomers. The public library and the XCC Library view collaboration as a way to make the most of limited resources. We will utilize a portion of the XCC Library technology budget to place computers in the public library. The public library will gain computers for public use, while XCC students will have priority to use these computers in their neighborhood and at times when the college library is not open.

In addition, we would like to help increase the number of computers available for research and homework at the HCC, possibly adding Spanish keyboards. The following sources may enable the installation within the HCC: LSTA grants, OREGON! Ready to Learn grants from the Oregon Community Foundation, Capacity Building and Technical Assistance Grants from Meyer Memorial Trusts, the Ford Family Foundation, and the Comcast Foundation.

Objective 3: Provide English and Spanish library orientations.

As Santo (2004) reported, ESL students are motivated to attend college for self-improvement, continued education, and improved job prospects. With the collaboration of instructors and support from the HCC, student attendance at the orientations is expected to increase. Providing both English and Spanish orientations will enable students to select their preference, as the level of comfort with native and second languages varies. To achieve greater attendance at the orientations, the library will offer them at varying times and days throughout the first week of the term to accommodate student schedules.

Objective 4: Provide social/study hours at the HCC.

Studies have shown that Latino ESL students are anxious about speaking with native English speakers (Buttaro, 2002). To build student familiarity with our librarians and staff we propose implementing study hours at varying times at the HCC with snacks and a librarian or assistant available for homework help. Partnership with the students and staff at the HCC will require balance, in that their primary role as a student social organization should not be overshadowed by the introduction of too many curriculum-oriented programs. The HCC is prepared to host these events, as its layout includes both social areas and quiet study areas. The social/study hours may include some technology training, but will retain an informal atmosphere. To accommodate parents, some sessions will include childcare, while other sessions will have a

child inclusive atmosphere. In addition to offering librarian assistance, we hope to cultivate an environment of peer assistance and language learning.

Objective 5: Expand library hours.

The library will await the survey results to see if current library hours are a problem for the students. Expanding library hours is one of the more expensive suggested improvements. However, many ESL students are parents and/or have full time jobs. Having longer hours might provide these students with needed library services.

Objective 6: Integrate more library visits and instruction into the BSS class.

A main goal of the program is to increase faculty collaboration while incorporating library skills into the curriculum. The BSS course is offered every term and is mandatory for incoming students, except those transferring from other colleges. This is an appropriate setting in which to provide outreach, as most of the Latino ESL students are not transfer students. We have developed positive working relationships with the professors who teach BSS. It is important to incorporate library visits into class time because voluntary orientations will never reach all students.

The visits will cover the computer lab, group study rooms, individual study cubicles, and demonstrations of reference and homework center services. Within the BSS class, trained librarians will teach students research tools and techniques. Then, when the students enter the library, they will have more confidence in their abilities and may even see a familiar face behind the desk. Bordonaro (2006) found it effective for libraries to provide a comfortable, inviting, quiet place to study for improving the English skills of ESL students.

Evaluating Success

The library will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the success of the program. Quantitative analysis will be used to evaluate the social/study hours at the HCC by recording attendance and the number of students that interacted with library staff. Attendance at the orientations will also be used in evaluation.

Focus groups and short surveys will provide a more qualitative view on the impact of the programs and areas for improvement by providing student feedback. The BSS instructors may also agree to lead a class discussion to determine if the changes met student needs.

Other activities, such as collaborative efforts with the public library, will be more difficult to evaluate for impact, but follow-up surveys will help reveal whether students are using our computers at the public library.

Conclusion

With the recent and continued influx of Spanish-speakers into the community, XCC is experiencing unprecedented enrollment of ESL students. The XCC Library is in a powerful position to equitably support their academic success. Review of literature for best practices indicates that the first step to improve service is to know the needs of the target community. Providing library skills training improves comfort in the use of library facilities. Also, access to technology may significantly improve language acquisition (Kasper, 2002). Therefore, we propose to develop a profile of this student group to accurately characterize the current skills and needs of its members. Simultaneous with our efforts to learn more about ESL students' needs, we will offer two programs known to address some of the barriers to access found in the national literature. The information we collect from students about their backgrounds and stated

prioritization of potential program improvements will inform future steps. Next, we will proactively work toward campus- and community-wide collaboration to achieve a broad support base for the proposed changes. Finally, our evaluation of the outcomes of the initial phase will inform further program implementation for Latino ESL students and, ultimately, all ESL students at XCC.

References

- Adkins, D. & Hussey, L. (2006). The library in the lives of Latino college students. *Library Quarterly*, 76 (4), 456-480.
- Arias, B. (n.d.). School desegregation, linguistic segregation and access to English for Latino students. *Journal of Educational Controversy*. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from <http://www.wce.wvu.edu/Resources/CEP/eJournal/v002n001/a008.shtml>
- Bordonaro, K. (2006). Language learning in the library: An exploratory study of ESL students. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 32 (5), 518-526. Retrieved March 15, 2008, from Library Literature & Information Science Full Text database.
- Bunch, G. C. & Panayotova, D. (2008). Latinos, language minority students, and the construction of ESL: Language testing and placement from high school to community college. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 7 (6), 6-30.
- Buttaro, L. (2002). Second language acquisition, culture shock and language stress of adult Latina students in New York. Retrieved April 7, 2008, from Education Resources Information Center Full Text database.
- Chisman, F. P. and Crandall, J (2007). Passing the torch: Strategies for innovation in community college ESL, executive summary. Retrieved from the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy Web site March 31, 2009, from <http://caalusa.org/eslexecsummary.pdf>
- Crandall, J. & Sheppard, K. (2004). Adult ESL and the community college. Retrieved from the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy Web site March 24, 2008, from <http://www.caalusa.org/eslreport.pdf>

Davis, D. M. (2007). Diversity counts. Retrieved March 30, 2008, from the American Library Association, Office for Research & Statistics Web site:

http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/diversitycounts/diversity_counts_cor.pdf

Davis-Wiley, P. (2002). A demographic profile of diversity in the United States: Who are the newcomers of the 21st century? *International Education*, 32 (1), 49-57.

Foundation Directory Online Plus. (2008). Retrieved April 5, 2008, from The Foundation Center Web site: <http://fconline.fdncenter.org/>

Hakimzadeh, S., & Cohn, D. (2007). English usage among Hispanics in the United States. Retrieved April 3, 2008 from the Pew Hispanic Center Web site:

<http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=82>

Hispanic Research Inc. (n.d.). Home page. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from <http://hispanic-research.com/home>

Kasper, L.F. (2002). Technology as a tool for literacy in the age of information: Implications for the ESL classroom. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College (Special issue on "English in a New Key: Reporting on, and Critiquing, Technology-Mediated Instruction")*, 30(2), 129-144. Retrieved March 24, 2008, from <http://lkasper.tripod.com/technology.pdf>

Li, S. D. (1998). Library services to students with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (24) 2, 139-143.

Lincoln, F. & Rademacher, B. (2006). Learning styles of ESL students in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 30, 485-500.

Love, E. (2007). Building bridges: Cultivating partnerships between libraries and minority student services. *Education Libraries*, 30 (1), 13-19.

- Najera, D. (2006). U.S. public library services to Latin American immigrants: A survey of information needs, barriers to access, best practices and guidelines for developing library services at a local level. Retrieved March 20, 2008, from <http://www.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=14626>
- Rubin, R.E. (2004). *Foundations of library and information science* (2nd ed.). New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.
- Suro, R. (1999). Recasting the melting pot. *American Demographics*, 21 (3), 30-32.
- Tafoya, S. (2004). Shades of belonging. Retrieved April 3, 2008 from Pew Hispanic Center Web site <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=35>
- Tucker, J.T. (2007). The ESL logjam: Waiting times for ESL classes and the impact on English learners. *National Civic Review*, 96 (1), 30-38. Retrieved March 11, 2008, from Expanded Academic ASAP database.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Facts on the Hispanic or Latino population. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from <http://www.census.gov/pubinfo/www/NEWhispML1.htm>
- Wohlmuth, S. R. & McCook, K. (2004). Equity of access: Igniting a passion for change. Retrieved February 11, 2008, from <http://www.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=5507>
- Zurita, M. (2005). Improving the education of Latino students. *Minority student achievement network: Invitational paper series*. Evanston, IL: MSAN Publications.