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JUNIOR COLLEGE EDUCATORS INDICATE INFORMATION THEY NEED.

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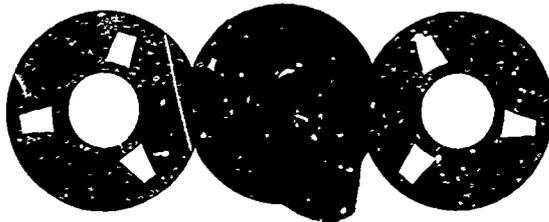
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IN APRIL 1967, A QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT TO 3700 PERSONS TO DETERMINE THE SERVICES DESIRED BY POTENTIAL USERS OF THE ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGE INFORMATION. OF MORE THAN 1,000 JUNIOR COLLEGE EDUCATORS WHO RESPONDED, NEARLY THREE-FOURTHS IDENTIFIED A PRIMARY NEED FOR INFORMATION ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION. EARLY DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS WAS REQUESTED, THOUGH THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE TRUE RESEARCH EFFORT. REPORTS OF PRACTICES IN OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND COLLEAGUES' OPINIONS WERE CONSIDERED IMPORTANT, AS WERE PROMPT REPLIES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS AND CURRENT INFORMATION. SUBGROUPS OF THE RESPONDENTS VARIED IN THE EMPHASIS ON VARIOUS TYPES OF INFORMATION WITH ADMINISTRATORS BEING MORE CONCERNED THAN LIBRARIANS ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY. LIBRARIANS TEND TO USE THEIR OWN COLLECTIONS FOR INFORMATION, WHILE ADMINISTRATORS RELY MORE UPON STATE AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. PROFESSORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, COUNSELORS, AND RESEARCHERS ARE INTERESTED IN RESEARCH PROCESSES, WHILE TEACHERS WISHED HIGHLIGHTS OF RESEARCH REPORTS AND GENERAL INFORMATION. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN THE "JUNIOR COLLEGE JOURNAL," VOLUME 38, NUMBER 3, NOVEMBER 1967. THE DISSERTATION ON WHICH THIS ARTICLE IS BASED IS ERIC DOCUMENT ED 013 097. (WO)

By Lorraine Mathies

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JUNIOR COLLEGE EDUCATORS INDICATE INFORMATION THEY NEED



*A Study by the Clearinghouse Shows That
Curriculum Information Is Sought Most*

A recent survey of information needs produced returns from 1,000 junior college educators indicating that they want more data on various aspects of the curriculum. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents selected curriculum and instruction as a primary area of information need and one-half of those replying ranked curriculum design and improvement as activities in which they desire specialized information.

Designers of an information retrieval system must know the characteristics of the information which is sought by its users. In its desire to serve junior college educators in a manner which is best suited to their needs, the Clearinghouse for Junior College Information at U.C.L.A. set out to determine what was wanted. An inquiry form, or questionnaire, was sent to a mailing list of 3,700 persons in April 1967. Responses were received from more than 1,000 junior college educators within five weeks. The returns were analyzed according to the positions of the respondents; and administration, counseling and guidance, library, research, and teaching were the principal activities.

Focus on Curriculum

In general, it was found that the information needs of junior college educators center upon the curriculum, ways of exchanging information, and research. Responses to the questions in this survey favored items relevant to matters of curriculum and instruction in the ratio of four to one. Nearly one-half of the groups in this study ranked descriptions of practices in other institutions as their first choice

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of the types of information needed and 40 per cent cited colleagues' opinions as an important area of information. One-third of the respondents considered reports of institutional research to be an important source of information. Journal articles and conference or workshop reports are the vehicles of information most frequently used by 65 per cent of the total population. The American Association of Junior Colleges is the principal agency for information.

Designers of an information retrieval system must also determine the qualities of information desired by its users. Junior college educators prefer information which has been developed within six months to one year of its use. Journal articles are the principal sources of information. For the most part, educators in this study receive only a part of the information which they need from the first source and they can wait a maximum of one month for an answer to a specific question.

Although junior college administrators made up 65 per cent of the respondents in this investigation, their responses corresponded with those of the total group. Three-fourths of the administrators expressed the need for information on curriculum and instruction, and nearly 70 per cent selected conference speeches and workshop reports as major sources of information.

Certain differences in the responses are also significant. For example, less than 40 per cent of the administrators were interested in library services and fewer than 20 per cent of the librarians were interested in personnel. Yet in the writer's experi-

ence, some librarians express dissatisfaction with personnel policies in junior colleges and in their relations with administrative officers. This may be due in part to the fact that they are removed from the decision-making processes of their institutions and therefore they tend to operate as isolated units. There appears also to be some disparity between the services which librarians need and those which they think the clearinghouse can provide.

Information on Students

Sixty-five per cent of the combined sample groups expressed the need for information concerning students, but fewer than 40 per cent of the administrators were concerned with the need for information in this area. This would indicate that junior college administrators are basically concerned with matters other than those having direct relation to students. Administrative policies and practices are generally of more interest to this group. The responses in this study seem to indicate that administrators delegate their responsibilities for matters directly relevant to students to other members of the staff.

Most junior college librarians utilize the resources of their own collections for information, while their administrators seek guidance from the American Association of Junior Colleges and state departments of education. Two-thirds of the administrators considered the opinions of their colleagues to be important sources of information, an attitude not shared to this extent by the other educators. It appears that positions held by the respondents dictate the sources of information which they use.

Though policies and procedures in curriculum development and instruction were of paramount interest in the total study, they apparently are of less concern to junior college librarians. This would be expected because librarians are not directly involved in teaching and in curriculum planning. More than two-thirds of the librarians and less than one-half of the administrators desired information on educational technology, although junior college educators are noted for their outstanding adaptation of technological processes to educational situations.

Interest in Research

Nearly 50 per cent of the professors of higher education and junior college counselors and researchers selected conducting and guiding research as the activity for which they have the greatest need of information. In their responses to the inquiry form, the professors of higher education expressed a strong interest in all items relating to research, especially detailed analyses of research reports. Junior college teachers, on the other hand, wished to receive highlights of research reports and more



general information. Counselors, researchers, and teachers alike expressed a strong concern for information on students. Research on students, as well as research on curriculum and instruction, seems to be a pressing need. Yet, the research which is being done does not fit the categories in which interest has been expressed. Most studies which are produced are summaries and reports of activities rather than the investigation of effects.

Although junior college educators profess a strong interest in various aspects of curriculum and instruction, it is apparent from the nature of the acquisitions received in the Clearinghouse for Junior College Information that they give little attention to either the development or the application of research in this area. It appears that junior college educators see themselves primarily as members of teaching institutions and therefore they are not necessarily concerned with the production of research studies. However, their intrigue with the benefits of research can be seen in their general selection of research-related services as being appropriate for the Clearinghouse to perform and in the fact that nearly 50 per cent of the respondents wish the Clearinghouse to provide the early dissemination of research findings. But the early dissemination of research findings on matters of curriculum and instruction is impossible when the acquisitions program of the Clearinghouse clearly indicates that such research is not being done.

The strong desire of the respondents for information describing practices in other junior colleges personifies the fact that the recent and rapid expansion of junior college education has left no time for the development of models whereby junior college educators may justify their own practices. Therefore they seek consolation and support in identifying themselves with the practices and procedures used in other institutions. The general attitude is that the successful use of a practice in a given institution makes its adoption appropriate for other situations.

The success of an information retrieval system is dependent upon good communication between the users and the information systems specialists. It may be that user surveys are not yet sophisticated enough to provide the insight needed to develop information storage and retrieval systems. The Clearinghouse for Junior College Information is a case in which the systems designers have assumed the responsibility for determining what is best for the user. In this instance and throughout the ERIC network, systems are being developed first and direct contacts with the user are made later. The usefulness of these information systems to the field will depend in a large part upon the ability of the user

to change his habits in his search for information as well as the flexibility of the information systems to adjust their processes to meet the changing needs of the educator.

User Requirements

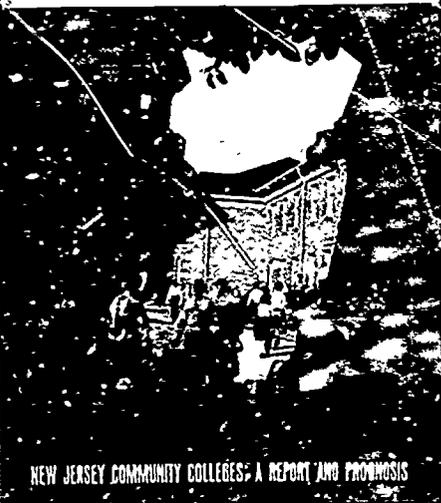
An obvious example of the importance of adaptability in the ERIC program is noted in the general attitude of users towards microfiche as opposed to hard copy in the reproduction of documents. Though the microfiche form has been accepted as a government standard, less than one-third of the user population know what it is or understand its potential uses. In this study, hard copy was consistently preferred in the ratio of four to one.

Many more critical problems lie in the area of requests for information and in their translation into terminology which can be managed effectively by an information retrieval system. Concepts in the field of education have long been noted for their vagueness and varied interpretations. This is in contrast with the scientific literature where terminology control is more rigid and definite. When one considers the problems inherent in indexing educational materials so that they may become readily available to the entire educational community, the difficulties are staggering. At the present time the development of dictionaries or thesauri to control the effects of specialized terminology and jargon appears to be the principal solution to this enigma of communication.

Informal Systems

The significance of informal information systems and the role of unplanned communication are matters of major concern to the designers of an informational system. The existence of personal files and libraries and local files of institutional reports as well as the proximity of colleagues for expressions of opinion provide features of convenience and response which are important to any user of information. Undoubtedly junior college educators utilize the opportunity to conduct a dialogue and thus modify their responses so that the right amount of information can be acquired at the right time. Similarly, they are conveyors of information as they attend conferences and workshops, serve on local and national committees, receive correspondence, produce materials for publication, and perform a myriad of other activities.

The role of unplanned communication is an effective measure which is used by junior college educators as they seek information about practices followed by their colleagues. This is an aspect of service which as yet is untouched by the Clearinghouse. It may provide unusual opportunities for service to the entire field.



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