

# College libraries evolve to meet 21st century needs

by Philip Anselmo  
Photos by Walter Horylev

Part 3 in a series  
on area libraries

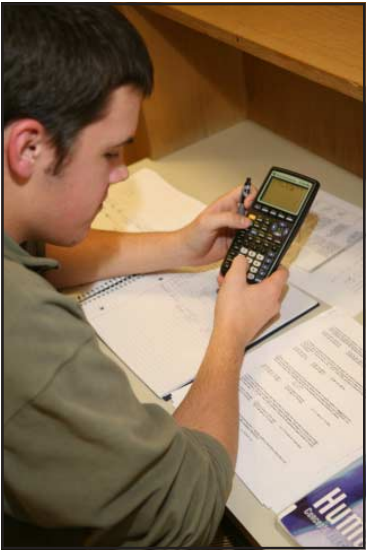
### Information Commons

On June 30, 2007, Roberts Wesleyan College will welcome its library into the 21st century. The Golisano Library, currently under construction, will nearly double the square footage of the Sprague Library, which, though aging and crammed, has served campus research needs since 1965.

“Technology and space needs have caught up with us,” said Linda Jones, reference librarian at Roberts.

In 1965, the Sprague Library housed a print collection of less than 39,000 items, as compared with the nearly 130,000 volumes that cramp the space today. And though thousands of journals, rendered nearly obsolete by online databases, have been relegated to a vault for storage of such material somewhere in the mid-west, space has still grown limited in libraries. Researchers, computers, video viewing stations, group study areas - demands for more space come from all.

Perhaps the library is not so different than the once adequate family sedan, whose popularity has been usurped by the now ubiquitous SUV, bringing with it more space, more amenities and more comfort.



Freshman **Marty Farchione** uses a calculator while working on a statistics problem at MCC.

If a student must spend several solid hours with Miguel de Cervantes’ thousand-page epic, **Don Quixote**, for example, that student would likely prefer to do it in comfort. Thus, the hard-backed wooden chairs that currently clutter the reading nooks of the Sprague Library will be replaced with lounge seating and task chairs when the move is made to the Golisano Building.

Now comfortable on his leather couch with his legs up, the researcher yearns for yet another perk of modern living: mobility.

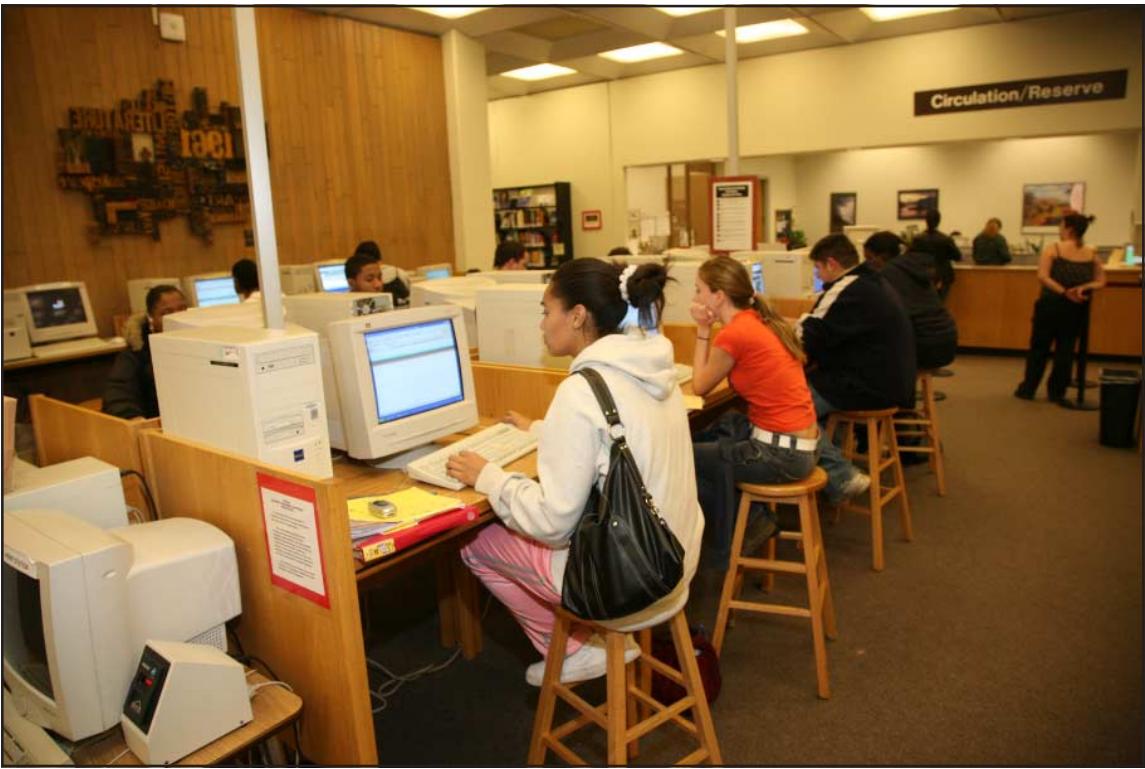
“Combined with wireless network connectivity, laptop computers and handheld computing devices give students much more flexibility in choosing study locations and seating,” says Al Krober, library director at Roberts.

“The Golisano Library is designed on an Information Commons or Learning Commons model, with features that include: a computer lab, two instructional labs, a café, numerous group study rooms, two gas log fireplaces, a graduate student research room, an Archives and Special Collections storage and display area, and a Curriculum Materials Center for the Teacher Education programs,” Krober said.

Whether a benefit or a bane, academia has received an upgrade from consumer culture. So grab a mochaccino, a DVD copy of “Man of La Mancha,” a laptop, a group of six peers, and head to the group study room. Plug in, sip, watch, discuss.

“I believe the library has become more of a ‘destination’ for students,” Mary Jo Orzech, library director at SUNY Brockport said. “With the addition of the Aerie Café, many students now come here not only to do research and to study, but to relax and socialize as well.”

Not too long ago, the tendency to turn the library into a social center was more of a nuisance. Krober remembers the challenge he found on a landlocked campus in North Chili in the 1970s, when the library struggled to maintain quiet study space while continuing to accommodate the undergrads who had no



It may have the appearance of a lunch counter at first glance, but it’s a counter where information is supplied via computers to MCC students. Freshman **Danielle Lundy**, a liberal arts major, checks out a profile.

ready means to get off campus.

Now that many students commute in vehicles which they own, the search for an academic hangout has since spread to sites off campus, and the library has regained a sense of studious solitude.

Yet it would seem that libraries missed the hustle and bustle of their more gregarious patrons. Drake Memorial Library had the Aerie Café installed a mere stone’s throw from the circulation desk; and, in addition to the lattes, creamers and mugs, it boasts leather couches and chairs large enough to seat a small family. The Golisano Library shall soon follow suit with the added bonus of two gas log fireplaces.

“The popularity of large chain bookstores has altered student expectations,” says Krober of Roberts Wesleyan College.

It is nothing out of the ordinary to find a student tucked into a reading room at any local college library with a laptop computer, a cellular phone, a stack of books and a bag of sandwiches.

“Though a handful of students don’t like the idea, access to food and beverages is important for most,” said Krober.

“There is a dual purpose for libraries,” says Jeff Delbert, IT graduate assistant with the library. “They are a big meeting space, as well as a place where

students can get away from their dorm, a place where they can quietly study. For me, I need more space. My apartment is cramped, so I come here to do work.”

### Information Literacy

“Until very recently,” said Orzech, “anyone doing any type of scholarly research had to use print indexes to find citations for relevant articles, then track those articles down in print



**Linda Lewis** peruses a book containing stories of classical ballet for a theatre class project regarding “The Nutcracker.” She is a junior majoring in sociology at SUNY Brockport.

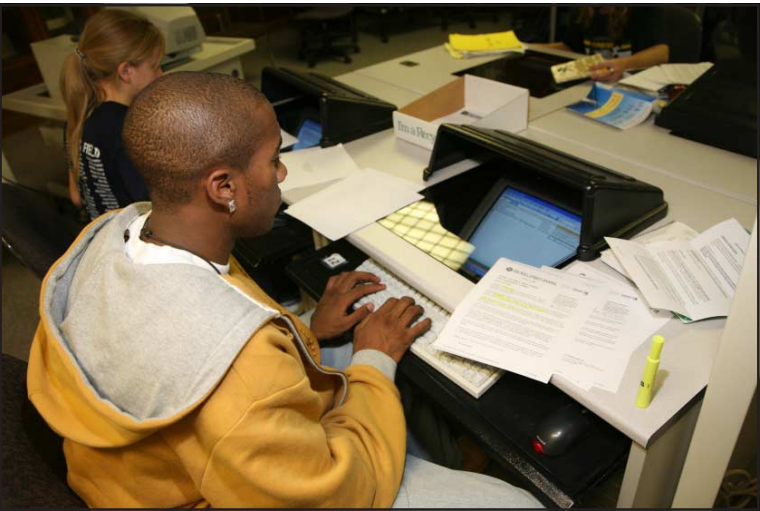
journals if the library had a subscription to that journal.”

“Now, with the advent of online databases, highly

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**Ted Crambor**, assistant director of the MCC library, leafs through the latest edition of a news magazine.



**Alfonso Evans**, a senior with a corporate finance major at Roberts, checks a spreadsheet for a merger and acquisition project.



**Courtney Osgood**, a junior majoring in broadcasting, works the Circulation counter at SUNY Brockport in releasing a tape to **Joe Zanghi**. Joe is a senior majoring in history.



Students are busy on computers in the Historical Room/Literacy Center Information Room at Roberts Wesleyan College. **Janice Cantrell**, a senior with a major in nursing, makes copies from a health history publication.

**Photographs by Walter Horylev**



# College libraries evolve

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sophisticated searching of thousands of articles can be done in seconds,” Orzech said.

With reference databases available through online subscription, the research has easier access and quicker response time, and the university can provide far more journals than it would have ever fit on its shelves. In turn, storage space becomes less necessary.

The searchable online catalogue WorldCat, for example, scans a database of over one billion holdings on books, articles and journals culled from libraries all over the globe. SUNY Brockport, which offers WorldCat access to its students, also subscribes to over 50 online databases of academic journals, including: American Mathematical Society, GenderWatch, Institute of Physics, and the Military and Government Collection.

Equipment, too, has changed. One no longer needs the clunky Minolta MS-6000 to browse microfilm copies of century-old articles from the **New York Times**, whose archives (from 1851) are available online for members and subscription holders.

Many see the explosion of easy-access information as a mixed blessing. The internet search engine Google may turn up over 24 million search results for “Cervantes” in seconds, but how does one orient oneself amid such a deluge of information? Which sites are academically valid and which are for general consumption? “Students who are inundated with information desperately need guidance in

how to shift through all that is out there with a critical eye,” said SUNY Brockport’s Orzech.

Much like the town librarian, the academic librarian has had to evolve. At MCC, librarian may be synonymous with information literacy instructor, web site editor, electronic reservist, and distance learning librarian.

“We now have students emailing or even instant messaging us their research questions,” Orzech said, “sometimes from within the library!”

“Technology also presents challenges for the library,” Krober said. Student demands become immediate; requests made remotely (telephone, email, instant message) expect remote responses; the exponential proliferation of trivial or dubious information requires a greater effort to recognize valid information; changes in format, style and methods of research and modes of research force the librarian to adapt quickly, even to anticipate those changes.

### Adapting to change

“This is not your father’s Oldsmobile,” said Orzech. “It’s a really exciting time to be in libraries. Usually revolutions happen quietly, but not in libraries. They’re dealing with some huge ground swells of change.”

As with the Golisano Library, Drake Memorial is in the process of constructing its Learning Commons, complete with group study clusters (amoebae-shaped tables with three or more computers arranged each across from another as are the points of a star); video viewing areas, where several students can watch a video; and digital media



**Rachel Howe**, a junior majoring in communications, **Thomas Schumacher**, a senior majoring in marketing and **Rosella Brown**, a junior majoring in journalism, were discussing a group project for a make-believe advertising campaign at the Aerie Café adjoining the library at SUNY Brockport.



Books are still checked in and out of libraries! Sophomore **Emma Krisher** moves a cart of books for stacking in the Reference section of the library. She is a psych and Spanish major at SUNY Brockport.



The B. Thomas Golisano Library takes form on the Roberts Wesleyan College campus in North Chili. It’s expected to be completed in June 2007. Photography illustrating this article by Walter Horylev.



The line of students on computers stretches quite a distance at the Drake Memorial Library on the SUNY Brockport campus, with **Sarah Beaumont**, a sophomore with a business major, working on a class assignment, as are many others in this photo.

stations, which provide more diverse and professional multi-media capabilities.

Some of the instructors are requiring that their students produce, rather than a research paper, a Power-Point presentation with illustrations and visuals,” says Greg Toth, reference librarian at Drake Memorial at SUNY Brockport. “The Physical Education Department is becoming more and more biomechanical. They’re concerned with kinetics, the mechanics of motion, and sports performance. They want graphics, pictures, video clips - performing certain motions in a sport, for example.”

Despite the influx of new technologies, many academic library directors feel that the central premise of the library remains the same.

“The role of the academic library in the 21st century remains what it was in the 20th century and even earlier,” says Krober, “to provide research and study facilities for faculty members and students ... to assist students and faculty in finding the information they need, and to help students to become information literate.”

Though there has been obvious change, Library Director at Genesee Community College, Judith Sikora, would not say there has been a revolution. There has been, rather, an

evolution. The tremendous changes in how libraries approach the demands of an increasingly technologically-oriented public should not obscure that “what” libraries strive for has remained much what it has always been: an institution of learning and research.

“The basic role of the library has not changed with the 21st century,” Sikora said. “The library is still the academic heart of the college and provides the resources and services to support research and learning.”

Yet, not everything in the library has gone digital. As MCC Library Director Peter Genovese notes, only 10 percent of the world’s books have been digitized, and most attempts to make the switch to the all-digital library have frequently met with failure.

“There are very few libraries that are totally virtual,” said Genovese. “Some, such as California State at Monterey Bay, have tried the virtual approach and had to reconsider and redeploy with print.”

“I think books will always have a place in the library and in the academic lives of students,” Orzech said.

### Engaging students

In the spring semester of 2006, the LeRoy V. Good Library at the Brighton campus of MCC

teamed up with a group of artists from the Visual and Performing Arts Department at the college. Library staff met with students and teachers to discuss the challenges and issues faced by libraries. As a group, they read **Fahrenheit 451** and the Patriot Act and discussed privacy and censorship. From their efforts, the students produced a mural, a modular piece composed of twelve separate images which were combined and hung across from the information desk. The students were graded on their work, and the college community was welcomed for its unveiling.

“The college provided a new innovative instruction process, the students learned about library issues which were reflected in the artwork, and the library now has a beautiful mural,” said Genovese, who cites the experience as a prime example of how academic libraries must engage the student population more directly.

**Note:** This is Part 3 and the last in a series of articles by Philip Anselmo, illustrated with photography by Walter Horylev. Parts 1 and 2 considered the changing roles of area local libraries. Parts 1 and 2 are available on the Westside News Inc. web site at [www.westsidenewsonline.com](http://www.westsidenewsonline.com).