

Library News

a newsletter from the JAMES A. GIBSON LIBRARY

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Learning Commons: from Vision to Design

Margaret Grove, University Librarian



Planning for the Brock University Learning Commons has gained considerable momentum in recent months. With input from the Learning Commons partners, students, and various advisory groups, Diamond & Schmitt

Architects Incorporated completed a major feasibility study in late 2006, and produced an exciting design layout that incorporates and transforms the upper level of the former Book Store and the main floor of the University Library. Floor plans and artist renderings will be on display in the Library in the near future.

The successful BUSU referendum outcome last November marked a significant milestone for the Learning Commons. In that referendum, students provided a strong endorsement of the Learning Commons by approving a proposal to commit \$1 million to the project over the next five years.

In developing an architectural design for the Learning Commons, our major focus has been on the creation of academic space that will promote and facilitate informal learning (i.e. the learning that takes place outside the classroom). Our planning has been informed by site visits to learning commons at other universities and by the developing body of research related to the relationship between design and independent learning. It is clear that a number of elements are critical for such a space to be successful:

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- it should be welcoming, comfortable, and inspiring – this involves physical comfort (furniture, ambience and proximity to food), as well as display space to celebrate the accomplishments of learning
- it must provide group study space in support of collaborative learning, as well as areas for individual study, with appropriate zoning for noise
- it must offer a robust technology infrastructure where students may use provided equipment or their own wireless devices; and it must afford ready access to an array of learning support services. With respect to this last requirement, the Brock Learning Commons incorporates a Writing Centre, thereby providing increased emphasis on services that will help students improve their writing skills.

The design of the Brock Learning Commons will facilitate the integration of learning support services provided by the Learning Commons partners (Library, Student Development Centre, Career Services, and the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Educational Technologies). Collaborative programming will provide students with opportunities to acquire

essential academic skills, and will help them to establish connections among processes such as critical thinking, studying, reading strategies, information seeking and essay writing. Student peers will play a vital role in the delivery of Learning Commons programming, and will serve as important role models to other students. Referrals to additional support services on campus (e.g. academic advising) also will be an important aspect of service delivery.

We expect the development pace to increase sharply over the next few months and will be providing regular updates.

Special Library Funds for New Faculty

For the past two years, the Library has offered \$500 in collections funding to a total of 100 new tenure-track faculty members. The funds were provided for the purchase of library materials to support new faculty members' teaching and/or research needs. A sample of just a few of the 284 titles acquired thus far are:

- *Aging in contemporary Canada*
- *Carbohydrate-based drug discovery*
- *Decolonizing feminisms : race, gender & empire building*
- *Discourse analysis : investigating processes of social construction*
- *Gender, race, class, and health : intersectional approaches*
- *Governing water : contentious transnational politics and global institution building*
- *Literacies in early childhood : changing views, challenging practice*
- *Maghrebien mosaic : a literature in transition*
- *Novelas y cuadros de la vida Sur-Americana*
- *Pan-African issues in crime and justice*
- *Psychiatric nursing for Canadian practice*
- *Sex and marriage in Victorian poetry*
- *Statistical methods in genetic epidemiology*
- *Teaching to learn : a view from the field*
- *The nature of science in science education : rationales and strategies*
- *The organometallic chemistry of the transition metals*
- *The transparent body : a cultural analysis of medical imaging*
- *This compost : ecological imperatives in American poetry*

For more information on new faculty funds, please contact your subject specialist or Pamela Jacobs, Associate University Librarian, Collection Resources at pjacobs@brocku.ca or at ext. 3961.

The Importance of Information Literacy

Karen Bordonaro, Instruction
Coordinator

Marcie Jacklin, Science Librarian

Information literacy is an educational construct that promotes effective thinking about information. More than simply a set of abilities needed to find and use information, information literacy involves the following: critical thinking about the need for information, strategically approaching information seeking, judging the quality of results, making the best use of those results, and reflecting on the process in order to become an effective lifelong learner.

In other words, information literacy does not consist merely of a set of mechanical exercises; it incorporates critical thinking and reflection about the value and use of information. To that end, the subject specialists at Brock are always willing to work with classroom faculty to integrate information literacy awareness into the curriculum. We can do this through guest lectures in your classrooms, through one-on-one work with you and your students, through the development of online teaching tools, and through stand-alone workshops.

Library Workshops

Stand-alone workshops offered by the Library this term include a full set of the InfoSkills certificate classes: Smart Start Library, Advanced Information Skills, Citing & Evaluating Resources, In-Depth Database Searching, RefWorks, as well as How to Avoid Plagiarism and How to Write an Annotated Bibliography offered by Learning Skills.

A new set of library workshops designed to introduce students to the best sources in specific subject areas will also be offered. The "Library Resources in ... Series" currently includes offerings in Applied Health Sciences, Applied Linguistics, Archives, Biology, Chemistry, Education, English, Foreign Language and Literatures, Geography, Political Science, Sociology, and Visual Arts. Please check the library web site for dates and times.

New Resources

The Library continues to develop its research collection through the purchase of electronic resources. Recent acquisitions include:

Science Online

Online access to the weekly journal *Science*, founded in part by Thomas Edison in 1880, is now available in full-text from 1997 to the present. *Science* includes commentaries, news, and peer-reviewed research articles.

Times Digital Archive, 1785-1985

This digital collection offers access to two-hundred years of The Times (London) newspaper. From coverage of the royal weddings to reports of Parliamentary debates, this resource is a window into the history of Great Britain and the world.

Business Source Complete

Provides access to thousands of scholarly journals, trade journals, and magazines covering all areas of business. In addition, this database includes industry and market research reports, company profiles, and country economic reports.

For more information on any of these resources, please consult the Library's web site at www.brocku.ca/library or contact Pamela Jacobs at pjacobs@brocku.ca or by telephone at ext. 3961.

Vygotsky in the Learning Commons

Ian Gordon, Science Librarian
Karen Bordonaro, Instruction Coordinator

Academic libraries exist not only to provide services for faculty, staff, and students, but also to foster student development and learning. To build a learning commons situated within the James A. Gibson Library is to build a physical and virtual place that promotes and enhances learning through the collaboration of various service providers (the Library, the Student Development Centre, Career Services, and the Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Educational Technologies). A learning commons is an inviting, collaborative learning space where people pursue and share ideas. Central to this concept of collaboration is the development of a culture of social learning.

In recent years, social learning as an educational goal has gained great favour in institutions of higher learning throughout North America. Current research on how learning takes place is supported by a Vygotskian perspective. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a prominent Russian scholar whose reflections on situational or social learning continue to receive attention. What makes his research increasingly relevant is the shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred environment in higher education. His ideas describe learning as a social process of development that takes place through interaction, scaffolding, and use of the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky, a progressive psychologist, recognized the importance of interaction, context, and sociocultural forces that can shape educational practice and learning.

Interaction, as seen by Vygotsky, occurs when two learners are placed within immediate physical proximity to each other. What makes the interaction begin is a need to seek knowledge and understanding. Both learners work with and from each other in order to construct knowledge. Scaffolding is the use of temporary support mechanisms to induce this learning to take place. This seamless support may come from a team of providers or from individual learners, a professor,

teaching assistant, librarian, or from any other person involved in the transmission of information. The Zone of Proximal Development refers to the bridging of a gap between what is known and what is unknown. If one learner knows something that another learner does not, this gap exists until the two learners working together can successfully overcome it. According to Vygotsky, this is when learning can occur.

The concepts described above could easily play out in a learning commons. Interaction takes place between students in a physical setting that accommodates the use of peer learning, structured workshops, breakaway instruction, and group study spaces. The affective element of feeling comfortable in such a setting contributes to the promotion of social learning. Scaffolding in a learning commons is supported by students as peer learners, professors, librarians, and staff members. If someone expresses an information need in the learning commons (whether that information need was initiated by a professor in a class or through another venue) a myriad of partners is available for mediation, consultation, discussion, and the solving of problems. The Zone of Proximal Development could be manifested in such an environment, which fosters and develops a community of practice. If

one learner knows something that another does not, many opportunities will be available for two learners to arrive together at the creation of new knowledge.

The major challenges of the Learning Commons at Brock then become the assessment of the various types of learning taking place, as well as how, when, and why they occur. How will we know if learning is taking place at all? What will it look like? What outcomes will answer these questions? From a librarian’s perspective, a further challenge will be the redefinition of our professional role within a community of partners in such a setting. Rather than serving solely as providers of information, our personal challenge will be to serve as useful partners in the students’ pursuit of knowledge.

Building a learning commons is an exciting opportunity and challenge. The creation of new learning and community space is an important step to promote an institution-wide culture of social learning. It is an opportunity to encourage student engagement and thereby facilitate social learning and development. We look forward to working with you and your students in the collaborative development of Vygotskian learning values in our new venture.

Chat with Us @ the Library

Laurie Morrison, Humanities Librarian

The popularity of Instant Messaging (IM), which offers synchronous text messaging, has been increasing each year with approximately 225 million people now using it to communicate with one another. In September, the James A. Gibson Library joined the “chat world” with a hotmail account, strategic advertising, and staff trained in MSN to answer users’ questions. Weekdays from 12pm to 3pm, reference staff members are logged into MSN messenger, helping students in their dorm rooms, homes, classrooms, and even in the Library.

In the world of libraries, this service is known as virtual reference—using the ‘chat’ medium to deliver reference and research help. It has been adopted by many academic libraries and is fast becoming a standard method to reach students and provide assistance. The philosophy behind the service is to meet students where they are rather than requiring they physically enter the library for help. Help us spread the word to students by mentioning the service in class or adding the MSN address (askbrocklibrary@hotmail.com) to your syllabus or WebCT.

Finally, chat reference is not just for students! Are you on MSN? Add us to your contacts and we’ll be there for you too. We look forward to serving you through chat reference as well as through traditional means—phone us at x3233 or drop by for a visit.

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH: Niagara’s Wine Sub-Appellations Defined Using Digital Map Data

Dr. Tony Shaw, Department of Geography
Written by: Colleen Beard, Map Librarian



Names like St. David’s Bench, Lincoln Lakeshore, and Vinemount Ridge, though perhaps not as famous as the Graves of Bordeaux or Côte d’Or of Burgundy, now adorn wine labels from the Niagara Region thanks to the

research of Dr. Tony Shaw, Climatology Professor, and faculty member in the Department of Geography.

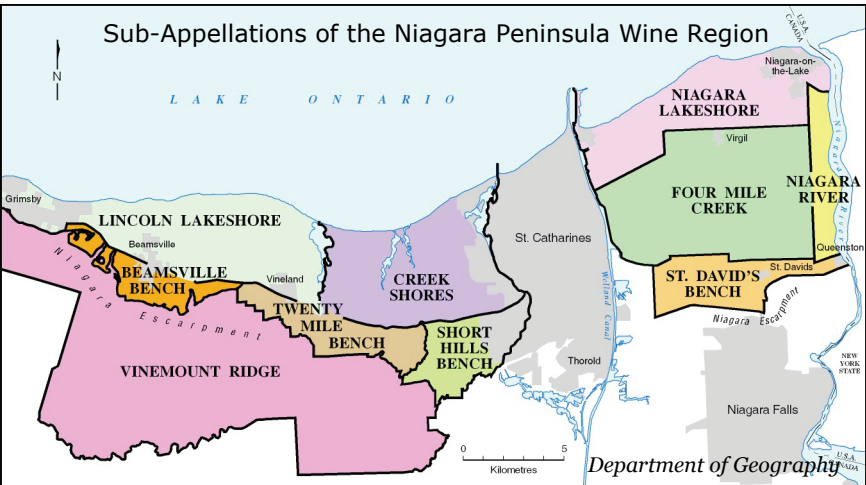
In 2003, Vintners Quality Alliance Ontario (VQA) retained the services of Dr. Shaw, who specializes in cool climate viticulture, to identify spatially distinctive grape producing areas (or sub-appellations) within the Niagara Peninsula wine region. As a result, ten sub-appellations have been established (see illustration), and are now defined in Ontario government legislation. This means that consumers can now identify a wine by the origin of the wine grape, and not simply where it was bottled.

Producing quality wine that truly reflects its geographic origin requires as little intervention as possible in the winemaking process. The

better a grape is suited to the local growing conditions, the more likely the winemaker can bring out its true character. Each of the Niagara sub-appellations possesses a combination of physical characteristics that create unique grape growing conditions. These characteristics also influence the choice of grape varieties and the quality and style of the wines.

Much of Shaw’s research was based on the analysis of digital map (geospatial) resources provided by the Brock University Map Library. The digital data, when used with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) methods, allow for analysis and the creation of digital map images that contribute to the delineation of the sub-appellation boundaries.

According to Shaw, without the use of digital data and the ArcMap GIS software, the accuracy of his research would not be possible. Topographic data for the Niagara Region were especially useful for Shaw’s research. These allowed for analysis of the spatial distribution of physical features, such as slope aspect and gradient, water bodies, natural boundaries defined by contour lines, and the use of 3-D images generated from the elevation data.



(To view the map in its entirety, search the title in the Library Catalogue)

These topographical features also have a critical influence on the microclimate of an area.

GIS processes allow for additional digital soil and geological map data to be combined, or overlaid, with the topographic data. The soils data, produced by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, display detailed soil-type boundaries, depth, and drainage characteristics. Geology data, derived from the Ontario Geological Survey, include bedrock composition and depth of the sub-surface materials. The combination of all these conditions makes the grape growing areas unique in character.

With the availability of improved climate data, combined with chemical and sensory (tasting) analysis, Dr. Shaw continues to research these unique characteristics to determine which grape type is best grown in the sub-appellation regions. In the meantime, pass the Creek Shores vintage, please!

‘Spotlight on Research’ highlights the use of library resources by Brock researchers. If you would like to be featured in this column, please contact Pamela Jacobs at ext. 3961 or pjacobs@brocku.ca.



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Brock’s Map Library participates in several consortia that provide access to a substantial number of geo-spatial data sets for Ontario and Canada, including soils, road networks, geology, topography, hydrology, and orthophotos.

For detailed descriptions of the geospatial data available to Brock users, visit the Map Library website www.brocku.ca/maplibrary or call ext. 3468.