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The 2005-06 academic year promises to be a period of intense activity and growth for the University Library as we continue to develop and expand our services, and increase our information offerings. The library staff wishes you a productive fall term, and encourages you to take advantage of our many resources and services. For more information, visit our web site (www.brocku.ca/library/), consult the 2005-06 Library Guide for Faculty at www.brocku.ca/library/guides/facguide.pdf, or contact your librarian subject specialist.

*Margaret Grove
University Librarian*

Planning for a Learning Commons at Brock

Planning for a learning commons is well underway, thanks to the work of the Learning Commons Task Force, the Learning Commons Services Working Group, and the efforts of many staff from the Library and Student Services.

◆ *What is a learning commons?* A learning commons is an inviting place designed around the social and informal dimensions of learning. It provides an enriched learning environment to support students in their use of scholarly information, and help them develop critical thinking and literacy skills related to information, writing, numeracy and technology. A learning commons generally embodies an integrated service model where collaborative services are delivered from a common physical space by units who traditionally have worked independently. The Brock Learning Commons will be located on the main floor of the Library, and will also encompass the upper floor of the Book Store once it moves to its new quarters.

◆ *Why is a learning commons important?* A learning commons fosters and supports the informal learning that takes place outside of the classroom. As a hub of learning activity on campus, the learning commons at Brock will be a welcoming space, bringing together in one central location the people, services, resources and technologies that support and enrich the student learning experience. Services will be delivered through individual consultation, peer mentoring, workshops, group instruction, and other collaborative learning opportunities, to create a continuum of support throughout students' academic careers. Coordinated referral to other services on campus will be an important component of the learning commons service model.

◆ *Who are the learning commons partners?* The Library, the Student Development Centre, Career Services and the Centre for Teaching, Learning & Educational Technologies.

Although it will likely be 2007 before the Brock Learning Commons is a physical reality, two exciting new learning commons services have been launched this September:

◆ **Laptop Loan.** Thirty laptop computers are available for loan at the Reserves Desk and may be borrowed for up to 3 hours by students, faculty and staff for use anywhere on campus. The laptops come equipped with standard software, including Microsoft Office and Adobe Reader, and support wireless printing from the Library's public printers. Details about this major new initiative are available at <http://www.brocku.ca/library/laptop.htm>.

◆ **Peer Assistance Program.** The result of a collaborative initiative by Career Services, the Student Development Centre and the Library, the initial phase of this program will see two student peer assistants based in the Library for roughly 24 hours per week. The peers will provide students with "one-stop" information and referral to services such as study skills workshops, academic and career planning, library research, technology support and tutoring services.

Scholars Portal Update

When Scholars Portal was first implemented by the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) in 2002, the project focused primarily on building a core collection of electronic journals. A critical mass of content was quickly achieved and continues to grow as a result of new publisher agreements and the acquisition of major backfile sets. There are currently more than 8,000,000 articles from over 7,000 journals available through Scholars Portal.

Article downloads have increased steadily over the life of the project as new content has been

added. In the first four months of 2005, Ontario faculty and students downloaded just over 2 million articles from the system. As a benchmark, the number of downloads for 2003 was 3.3 million in total and 4 million in 2004. March 2005 saw the highest to-date monthly download count of 673,000. *The Lancet* is consistently number one in the top ten download list. Brock faculty and students are very heavy users of Scholars Portal, downloading a total of 82,209 articles from January through April 2005.

In addition to content loading, recent attention has focused on linking and integrated searching. Special linking software, designated by the  Look for it! icon, creates links among e-journals, databases and the library catalogue, to improve and simplify the delivery of full text. Links to RACER will be added in the near future.

The implementation of **Scholars Portal Search** is one of the project's most significant recent achievements. New software supports the goal of a "single-search" interface for electronic resources, allowing users to search a number of databases simultaneously, including all of the e-journals at Scholars Portal, other full text collections, as well as a variety of indexing and abstracting tools. **Scholars Portal Search** is the new interface for many familiar databases in a wide range of disciplines, and is also accessible by selecting it from the title list on the Database page at www.brocku.ca/library/databases/.

Millionth Request in RACER

On August 29th, 2005, a faculty member at Queen's initiated the one millionth RACER request, a significant milestone in the system's short history. RACER is the shared interlibrary loan system implemented collectively by the Ontario university library community as part of the Scholars Portal project, and is accessible from the library home page.