

Profile

The Status of Media Centres in Canadian Universities

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Abstract: The budgets, personnel levels, and activities of Media Centres in Canadian Universities are compared to develop a profile of the conditions existing in these centres. In an era of restricted university budgets, the effect of financial constraints and the moral support of upper level administration for Media Centres is assessed. The study explored the broad range of activities of media centres in both revenue generation and instructional support areas. Findings in this study suggest the direction of future development in media centres and the challenges faced by current university media directors.

INTRODUCTION

In December of 1983, a task force of AECT, titled The Task Force on the Status of Media Centres in Higher Education, under the chairmanship of Michael J. Albright, published the results of a study which developed a profile of the conditions existing in higher education Media Centres.

The purpose of the task force was to investigate and document such factors as:

- 1) current trends in budget and personnel levels;
 - 2) the degree of moral support provided by supervisors and the faculty clientele;
 - 3) the extent to which media centres participate in those areas that might strengthen their status on campus, such as providing instructional computing services or contributing to the institution's distance learning effort;
 - 4) the degree to which media centres support their operations by generating income and promoting their services; and
 - 5) media directors' own perceptions of the overall health of their centres, particularly from the perspective of whether this health has improved or deteriorated over the past five years.
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The report of the study came to the attention of the Ontario Universities' Media Directors in the spring of 1984 and generated lengthy discussion. The directors found that the study seemed to confirm their own informal views of Media Centres in Ontario. At the 1985 fall meeting of the Ontario Universities' Media Directors the decision was made to conduct a study of media centres in Canadian Universities using the AECT study as a model. There were several advantages to this approach:

- 1) the objectives of the AECT study were in line with those of the Ontario directors;
- 2) the survey instrument had been designed and tested and only required modification in updating and translation to the Canadian instructional media scene; and
- 3) a comparison of the profiles of the U.S. to Canadian centres could be conducted at the conclusion of the Canadian study.

DATA COLLECTION

Forty-two media centres were identified in Canadian Universities from the mailing lists of AMTEC and the AUCC. This was deemed a manageable number and survey questionnaires were mailed to all of the forty-two institutions in January, 1986. Completed questionnaires were received from nineteen institutions or 45% of the total. Time did not allow a follow-up mailing. Questionnaires were received from universities reaching from Nova Scotia to British Columbia (See Table 1) and the response was judged to be representative of Canadian university media centres.

TABLE 1
Distribution of Sample Across Canada

Provinces	f	%
Nova Scotia	1	.05
Quebec	4	.21
Ontario	10	.53
Saskatchewan	1	.05
Alberta	1	.05
British Columbia	2	.11

RESULTS

Health of Media Centres

Media directors were asked how they perceived the health of their centre. First they were requested to describe the trend between 1977 and 1982 and then the 1985-86 health status. In general, the directors were positive about the health of their centres. Approximately 58% rated their centre as improved during the five year period, 10.5% saw it as unchanged and 31.6% perceived it to have deteriorated during the period.

Directors were asked to give their perceptions of the current health of their centres. The response supported the trend of improved health; 78.9% considered their centres to be healthy while 2 1.1% felt their centres were in trouble.

Directors were asked to explain why they believed their centres were healthy or unhealthy. The two reasons cited most often were: 1) appreciation for the value of instructional technology and 2) the centre's quality of service. These were followed closely by attitude and ability of staff and moral support of the administration. Only six directors gave reasons for their centre's lack of health. Budget cuts were the only reason mentioned more than once.

Funding Patterns

In 1972-73 the number and size of media centres was quite small. Over the 13-year period, 1972-73 to 1985-86, both the number of centres and their budgets increased considerably (See Table 2). During this period, five centres reported budget cuts and one centre remained unchanged in its level of funding.

Over the same period, the median budget level increased approximately 20% per year. Those centres with increases totalling less than 60%, lost ground in terms of the inflation factor, all other things remaining equal (e.g., staff levels).

TABLE 2
Minimum, Median and Maximum Budget Levels

Year	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Median	Maximum
1972- 1973	9	\$37,321	\$130,000	\$357,232
1977- 1978	13	65,000	364,272	1,723,000
1981- 1982	14	80,000	437,000	3,547,000
1985- 1986	16	125,000	492,000	4,000,000

Revenue Generation

Of the 19 media centres reporting only two indicated that they did not generate revenue. Of the remaining 17, fourteen retained the revenue, one retained 80% and two contributed it all to the university's general fund. Three did not report the amount generated.

Most media centres reported generating revenue through the sale of supplies and by renting facilities and equipment to non-university clients. Most said that they use the revenue in support of the services. Only two centres were required to support the university general fund with the revenue. The amount of revenue generated is considerable. Seven centres generated from \$50,000 to \$200,000 while eight centres each earned under \$50,000 in 1984-85.

Revenue Producing Activities

Directors were asked to identify the revenue generating activities from a list. The most frequently mentioned revenue producing activities were: 1) charges assessed for AV services; 2) sale of supplies; 3) equipment rental; and 4) sale of film and tape programs.

PATTERNS IN PERSONNEL LEVELS

Sixty-three percent of the media centres surveyed had between 5 and 29 full-time employees in 1985-86, 15% had less than 5 staff, while 22% had more than 30. In terms of

change in staffing over the 9 year period, 1972-73 to 1981-82, 42% of the centres increased the number of full time positions, 32% suffered reductions and 26% experienced no change in staff. As a net increase in staff was experienced, one may interpret the period as one of growth -- a healthy sign. On the other hand, during the period 1981-82 to 1985-86, 20% experienced increases in staff positions while 41% suffered position losses and 37% maintained staff levels. The net decrease in positions may be considered a sign of deteriorating health. Technical and production positions were most often deleted in the reduction process.

Part-Time Non-Student Personnel

Trends in the employment of non-student personnel can not be determined from the data reported. A few centres (3) use a great many part-time, non-student employees. A larger number (7) employ four or fewer and the largest number of centres (9) employ none at all. In 1977-78 only four centres employed part-time, non-student employees. In 1985-86 this grew to ten centres.

Part-Time Student Employees

Media centres generally made extensive use of part-time student personnel. Sixty-six percent of reporting centres used part-time student employees to supplement the staff in 1985-86. A trend has developed over the 13 year period with the number of part-time student positions increasing at a greater rate than full-time positions. One may conclude that budget restraints have caused centres to employ more low-wage personnel than might otherwise have been their choice.

The number employed by individual centres varies from 0 and 1 to over 60. In 1972-73 eight centres employed a total of 92 students, in 1977-78 nine centres employed 214, in 1981-82 thirteen employed 167 and in 1985-86 fourteen centres employed 210 students.

PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN MORAL SUPPORT

Media directors felt the moral support provided by senior administrators is very high. No less than 90% rated their immediate supervisor as supportive. This perception extended to the next echelon as well, with 69% indicating positive moral support from senior management. Faculty support is positive too; 83% of the respondents rated their faculty as moderately supportive.

The trend in morale on the part of the immediate supervisor was rated as 42% holding about the same, and 37% improving slightly. For the next higher echelon supervisor, the ratings are 61% holding about the same and 22% improving slightly. For the faculty in general, 53% reported the morale trend holding about the same while 31% reported that it was improving slightly. The trend in morale as perceived by the directors is indicative of healthy media centres.

COMPUTING SERVICES PROVIDED

Respondents were asked if their centres provided any kind of instructional computing service. Only three directors responded affirmatively. The kinds of services are equipment maintenance and computing laboratory administration. Serving the universities' computing needs is not a function of media centres in general.

SUPPORT FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

Respondents were asked to indicate if their media centres were involved in the production of course materials for, or the delivery of instruction to off-campus students receiving credit at their institutions. And, if so, what delivery systems were employed. Twelve of nineteen centres (63%) are involved in distance education. The frequency of mode of delivery of instruction is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Mode of Delivering Instruction

Mode of Delivery	f	%
Circulating videocassettes	11	41.0
Open-circuit television	5	19.0
Cable television	5	19.0
Computer programs	2	7.0
Dial-access audio	2	7.0
Audio teleconference	2	7.0
Total	27	100.0

PROMOTION OF MEDIA SERVICES
AND COMPETING CAMPUS SERVICES

Most media centres promote their services. Flyers and brochures, media workshops and periodic workshops were reported with high frequency. Healthy centres give promotion a high priority.

Respondents were asked if their media centres were being hurt by competition from departmental or other special purpose media operations on campus. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they were faced with competition from other university departments.

MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGE

Budgets dominate the list of most serious challenges facing media directors. Equipment replacement and maintaining services are primary concerns. Next in importance is the changing of administrators' and users' attitudes toward the use of instructional media. This is inconsistent with the perception of positive moral support from both groups.

CONCLUSION

Canadian University Media Centres as perceived by their Directors are in a state of relatively good health. Growth is limited but support from University Administrators is

positive. Most Media Centres generate revenue by charging for services and/or making services available to clients outside the University. A few are required to recover operating costs. Distance Learning is the direction of future development while CAI, CMI or CBI have not been an areas of growth. The most serious challenges for the future are: keeping up with new technology, replacing obsolete and worn out equipment and maintaining service levels during periods of fiscal restraint.