

The St. Pius X Library-Media Center:  
A Learning Commons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century College Preparatory Catholic High School

Sister Regina Mary Link, S.C.L. would not recognize her namesake library if she were to visit today. Although the card catalog is still there, filled with the cards that she herself would have maintained by hand, it now serves as a stand for the printer and as a remembrance of things past. Students and faculty currently search an online catalog of the library's collection of nearly 6,000 books and the exponentially greater number of items available through a consortium of member libraries, including the Kansas City Public Library, other high schools, and local colleges. The development of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and information technology has resulted in a paradigm-shift in the uses of the library for finding and using information. Students are now likely to be searching databases to access articles for academic research. They then use the same work stations to create reports and presentations that demonstrate learning. The skills and knowledge acquired at the library, now media center, transfer to college and the workplace and prepare students to be lifelong learners.

The transformation of the library into a media center mirrors the social transformation of this formerly quiet, staid space, devoted to the book, to a dynamic, collaborative learning commons. Students and teachers come together here for conversation, partnership, and knowledge-creation. They shift as easily from books and periodicals, to desktops, laptops, notebooks, cell phones, as an online searcher moves from window to window. The space is configured for comfort and accessibility, with an open floor plan, gentle lighting, and both casual and traditional furniture. The use of the media center transforms throughout the day. Before school, it combines social and academic uses, where homework is done, papers are printed, videos and music are shared, and conversations are had. During the school day, classes make presentations, research, and do group work there. After school, the media center resumes as a space amenable to study, play and interaction. It is a learning commons because all its users share in and create a space to learn in the myriad ways that one now learns.

In 1956 when St. Pius X High School was founded, the transfer of information largely occurred through lecture and the reading of books. Literacy had a very specific notion concerning the ability to read and comprehend the printed word. Now, library-media center specialists emphasize information literacy. Due to the profusion of the forms of media, students need to evaluate information for currency, relevance, and authority--a need that was less obviously urgent when one could rely on the authority of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or the canonical writers. Students must now be increasingly sophisticated evaluators of information and diligent protectors of academic integrity. The library-media center has evolved to meet these new demands and to assist in the formation of students poised to participate in the world in a knowledgeable, ethical way. This is a goal that Sister Regina Mary Link would have easily recognized.