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The Development of Working Collections in University Libraries

An outline of the activities necessary to convert from comprehensiveness of collection to selectivity of collection in university libraries is presented. These are the development of (1) written collection policies, (2) deselection programs, (3) cooperative storage and acquisition programs, and (4) the criteria necessary to evaluate the resulting collections. Responsibility for these activities is currently too diffuse and must be consolidated within the library.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES are currently evaluating every aspect of their operations. De Gennaro ably summed up the situation in "Austerity, Technology, and Resource Sharing: Research Libraries Face the Future."¹ He calls for an end to the correlation of "high expenditures, high growth rates, and large collections with library effectiveness." Speaking of collection development, he states that "the traditional emphasis on developing large local research collections must be shifted toward developing excellent local working collections and truly effective means of gaining access to needed research materials wherever they may be."

He does not specify *how* research libraries are to accomplish this abrupt about-face, this transition from comprehensiveness in order to achieve self-sufficiency to high selectivity with reliance on access. I believe that the transition is necessary and here outline an approach to the development of working collections.

PRESENT COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Before proceeding to the outline, let's

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examine the present collection development situation. Prior to 1960, responsibility for building comprehensive collections was vested in the faculty, with faculty meaning almost everyone but librarians.^{2, 3} During the 1960s there was a shift in responsibility from the faculty to librarians (who had also in many cases become faculty). In 1967 Haro surveyed book selection in academic libraries and found that there was a noticeable trend to selection by librarians, primarily by bibliographers (in acquisitions or a separate department) or heads of divisional subject libraries.⁴ This was also reported at about the same time by Danton and Lane.^{5, 6}

After this time, collection development literature shifted from discussion of responsibility to the use of blanket order and approval plans. A recent comprehensive evaluation by Evans and Argyres summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of such plans and points out the lack of objective data by which blanket order plans can be evaluated.⁷ At present, current book selection is usually being performed automatically by blanket order with the remainder of titles being selected by library faculty.

In certain subject fields serials and periodical literature are of greater importance to research than monographs.

How are these selected? In 1962 Orr surveyed academic serial selection procedures and found that the pattern followed that of books.⁸ Funds were allocated to academic departments, which had responsibility for selection. Approval was given by a library administrator, acquisitions chief, or serials head. Only four out of sixty-six libraries reported written acquisitions policy statements for serials. Whether selection of serials also shifted to librarians as did book selection is not clear from the literature.

The picture for audiovisual materials; technical reports; federal, state, and international documents; and other research materials is even more unclear than that for serials and periodicals. In most cases they are not selected by the same librarians who select books or serials.

DEVELOPMENT OF WORKING COLLECTIONS

Working collections cannot be developed where selection responsibility is diffuse and ill-defined. To develop a working collection, it is first necessary to designate a working group which will have responsibility for and authority to make decisions relating to the acquisition of all types of research materials. At present most book selection is done by bibliographers or by heads of subject divisional libraries. These individuals are the logical candidates to be delegated the expanded responsibilities necessary to the development of working collections. Hereinafter, to simplify discussion, the collection development agents will be designated bibliographers and will be defined by their responsibilities. Their actual titles in different libraries will undoubtedly vary.

Responsibilities

The bibliographers' responsibilities should be: (1) development of written collection policies covering acquisition

of all instructional and research materials; (2) development of a collection deselection program; (3) development of cooperative acquisition and storage programs; and (4) development of criteria for the evaluation of working collections.

This list of responsibilities makes it clear that the bibliographers need decision-making authority both within and without the library. The preferred organization would be a separate department of bibliographers (or branch library heads under a coordinator) so that individual decisions could be coordinated and so that the unit head could go directly to other departments in the library. Sloan's analysis of collection development in university research libraries shows it to be a boundary-spanning activity.⁹ It would be more difficult to span the requisite boundaries if the bibliographers were a subunit of another department.

Bibliographers have traditionally interacted closely with technical services and reader services personnel and with university-wide faculty. They would have to carry on these interactions in developing collection development policies and deselection programs. They would have to extend their boundaries in the development of cooperative acquisition and storage programs and in the development of evaluative criteria.

Development of Written Collection Policies

Academic libraries have traditionally paid lip service to the concept of written acquisition policies, but few libraries have them. Given current publication rates and current acquisition budgets, each library must define its collection scope. The definition should be by subject field or area study. The subject fields chosen would be those educational and research programs which each library must support. The types of materials—serials, newspapers,

data, technical reports, manuscripts, etc.—necessary to support each program should be specified along with language of publication, level of collection, and date coverage.

ALA's Collection Development Committee of the Resources Section, Resources and Technical Services Division, has developed guidelines for the formulation of collection development policies.¹⁰ They are extremely well organized and specific and can serve as a base for the long-term task of generating a working collection development policy.

Although the responsibility for generation of the document rests with the bibliographers, it must be prepared in close cooperation with university-wide faculty and those campus governing bodies which have the closest involvement with the library. This is essential to ensure that the policies support present programs. It also serves a publicity function in drawing the attention of the university community to the fact that a transition from comprehensiveness to selectivity is taking place. New programs can no longer be planned with the assumption that the library will have the requisite resources to support them.

Collection Deselection

A logical consequence of the writing of a collection policy is the identification of materials which are candidates for weeding, i.e., removal from the collection. This is an area where very close coordination will be required with technical services. A program for the identification of weeded titles must be developed with this unit, and the time needed to revise or delete records must be integrated with the other technical services activities.

The decisions on how to dispose of the weeded materials will depend on how frequently it is expected that they will ever be used. Most recent literature

on weeding discusses the removal of monographs or periodicals from the collection to a library controlled storage area.¹¹⁻¹⁴ This should not be the only option. All materials not specified in the collection policy should be considered—whether books, documents, etc. The weeded titles may be discarded, exchanged with another institution, traded for microfilm (especially in the case of periodicals), or sold to help support current acquisitions. The decisions for various types of materials will obviously vary.

If storage is necessary, cooperative rather than simply local storage should be explored. Until national planning reaches the point where there are designated regional last-copy depositories for books, serials, documents, etc.,¹⁵ such storage should follow the lines of existing interlibrary loan networks. These networks have the document delivery systems and communication mechanisms necessary to deliver the materials in a reasonable amount of time.

Deselection involves not only weeding, but a review of materials being received on standing order or blanket order. Perhaps some subscriptions can be canceled or blanket order profiles revised. This process too depends to a certain extent on whether the materials are available elsewhere, e.g., Center for Research Libraries or within an existing interlibrary loan network.

Cooperative Acquisitions

Although cooperative acquisitions programs have existed in this country since the mid-1940s, there has not been any great economic impetus to develop them. Again, once collection scope has been defined in detail, those peripheral areas where materials can perhaps be shared are identified. The budget complexities are no less than they have ever been. One other important factor does place shared acquisitions in a more favorable light, and that is the fact that

most libraries now have bibliographic access (OCLC, NELINET, etc.) to whatever they decide to share.

Criteria for the Evaluation of Working Collections

This section can only be brief and speculative. Procedures to evaluate whether collections are working will evolve as we begin to develop them and experience the problems which will certainly occur. Once collection policies have been defined, deselection programs initiated, and some cooperative storage and acquisition programs begun, we shall be better able to evaluate where we are. If number of volumes is no longer a criterion, what is? Perhaps we shall have to measure what percent of requests are filled locally, what percent within a week, or within two weeks. We

shall need to inquire whether these delivery times are satisfactory.

EDUCATION OF THE USER

As the processes needed to develop working collections get under way, education of the library user will also be required. This education process, begun with the users' involvement in the development of the collection policy, must be carried through all the subsequent activities by the bibliographers. The university community, especially the faculty, must be aware of the impact that these changes will have on library service.

Failure to embark on such long-range planning and programs will result in randomly hacked-up collections. Action begun now should result in the definition and evolution of working collections.

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