

Michael Rodriguez

Absolutely FABulous

Collecting and celebrating faculty-authored books

In 2019, the University of Connecticut (UConn) Library began systematically collecting faculty-authored books (FABs). We envisioned the collection as a service—a program to capture and celebrate faculty work and ensure that their intellectual contributions were represented in the library’s collections. Under the leadership of our new dean, we crafted and communicated jargon-free program parameters, collaborated with liaison librarians and book vendors to purchase more than 220 FABs, and collaborated with communications staff to pursue events and marketing to publicize this new collecting area. UConn is a large public research university with more than 30,000 students and 1,500 full-time faculty who publish scores of books yearly, so this FAB service resonated with faculty and senior administrators alike. Though we are adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact, FABs have become a signature initiative for UConn Library.

Situating the program

Collecting FABs is a widespread practice among college and university libraries. An email query to the Acquisitions section of the Association of Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS) garnered 15 substantive responses. Respondents ranged from research universities (Case Western Reserve), regionals (Governors State University), private colleges (Elon University), law schools (University of Texas-Austin), and tiny seminaries (Lexington Theological Seminary). All collected FABs. Many expanded the concept, purchasing books

authored by alumni as well as books with only chapters contributed by faculty. Some libraries purchased two copies, one for the circulating collection and one for special collections. Several used approval plans to identify and automatically acquire FABs. Respondents tracked and marketed their FAB services, flagging FABs in the catalog, hosting author events, or showcasing titles on the library’s website. Florida Gulf Coast University even sponsored a popular Book of the Month series celebrating authors.

A literature review revealed similar patterns. In 2014, the University of Michigan Library installed permanent physical and digital exhibits, hosted a reception for authors, and conducted outreach to the faculty to ensure it purchased all FABs.¹ Boise State University hosted a popular annual reception and since 2010 has compiled a comprehensive annual bibliography of faculty scholarship (articles and books), leveraging the bepress Digital Commons platform.² Touro College and University System built a faculty publications database.³ Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai devised a technical workflow to identify faculty-authored ebooks

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already part of the library's collections.⁴ Many library websites feature pages describing their FAB programs.

In addition to conducting a landscape scan and literature review, we sought out complementary activities already happening at UConn. The UConn Humanities Institute sponsored the Sharon Harris Award for best humanities monograph. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) hosted an annual authors' reception, albeit just for the college's own faculty. The Law Library was already collecting its own faculty's monographs. We learned and sought collaboration.

Developing the program

Before launching this program, we had never systematically collected faculty-authored books. Our liaison librarians had frequently purchased FABs from their subject funds, but they had no mandate to do so. No library-wide effort existed to identify, acquire, or publicize FABs.

In 2018, Anne Langley became dean. A firm advocate of integrating the library into the scholarly lives of faculty, Langley charged the Collections & Discovery department, where I work as collections strategist, with devising a plan to acquire FABs.

As Langley reasoned, "We are in the unique position to cross disciplines and celebrate faculty work while strengthening our collections" and boosting our profile and goodwill among faculty. Planning began in summer 2019, and the service officially launched—right on schedule—in October 2019.

Through a literature review and listserv query, we benchmarked with libraries running similar programs. Our book agent, GOBI, gave us a spreadsheet of FABs published from 2017 through 2019—more than 200 titles—which GOBI flagged using its Faculty Affiliation field. Acquisitions staff deduplicated these titles against our holdings. We projected annual costs to run \$5,000 to \$6,000 and decided to cover these costs using proceeds from library endowments. With best practices, data, and goals in hand, we felt confident making decisions about parameters.

To contain costs and manage expectations, we established limits on the service, though we left the door open to exceptions. We committed to purchasing books authored, coauthored, edited, or translated by full-time or emeriti faculty—books by staff, students, and adjuncts we acquired as funds allowed. We did not routinely purchase books or multivolume sets costing more than \$250, books with only chapters contributed by UConn authors, encyclopedias, textbooks, latest editions of books already owned by the library, or works available only in unsupported formats. Neither did we purchase books "unrelated to the fulfillment of your academic responsibilities at UConn"—in other words, while we purchased fantasy novels by creative writing instructors, we would not necessarily buy an engineer's self-published thriller or a chemist's speculations about extraterrestrials.

Print books are cheaper than ebooks and lend themselves readily to displays and author signings, so we opted to purchase print books only. We purchased ebooks only if we anticipated high demand or if the book was available only in digital format. Finally, we did our best to purchase faculty-created media, such as movies and music albums, in addition to books. These parameters are on this public page: <https://lib.uconn.edu/find/faculty-authored-books>.

Building the collection

We began by purchasing the backlog of 2017–2019 titles flagged using GOBI's Faculty Affiliation field. We purchased 130 titles at an average price of \$100 per book. Then we collaborated with GOBI to set up a slips-based approval plan. GOBI sends the me weekly email notifications ("slips") of newly published FABs. We preferred to receive notifications rather than ship books automatically because we wanted to ensure that we purchased only unique titles in scope for the FAB service. Next, the I manually navigated through hundreds of academic department webpages and faculty profiles, looking for FABs that GOBI missed. I found 30. We obtained a title list from CLAS, whose donor development office

monitors the college's scholarly output. We identified a couple more titles via CLAS. Our final step was in January 2020, when we obtained a data export of all self-reported faculty publications, including monographs, from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. This data enabled us to identify and purchase another five books. Since October 2019 we have purchased another 50 books, for a grand total of more than 220 titles.

We planned to review departmental webpages and request OIRE data each year. These reviews proved rote and time-intensive, so student employees will do this work in future. In addition to centralized collecting efforts, we added a special template to the GOBI profiles of all our liaison librarians, empowering them to order FABs themselves, should our approval plan miss anything. We encouraged faculty

to notify us of forthcoming publications and donate their own books to us—six or seven faculty, as well as campus offices, have done so. We offered any second copies to our Archives & Special Collections department for incorporation into existing collections.

To facilitate tracking and discoverability, our metadata management librarians crafted a custom metadata normalization rule in the library's Ex Libris Alma library services platform. They added local series notes ("UConn faculty-authored books") to the 490 and 830 fields in each machine-readable cataloging (MARC) bibliographic record. They added local project

notes ("uconnauth") to 901 fields, as well as 561 notes ("UConn faculty-authored books") to local holdings records. The 901 field is searchable in the library's Ex Libris Primo discovery service. To limit results to FABs, patrons need only include "uconnauth" in their searches. These standardized metadata notes make it easier for us to pull borrowing counts, update exhibits, and run batch analyses.

Promoting the service

To showcase our faculty-authored books, we built permanent physical and digital exhibits. Our New Books Shelf is a longstanding feature of the main campus library, Homer Babidge, located on the building's heavily trafficked plaza and near the elevators and staircases. We repurposed half of the New Books Shelf to feature a selection of new FABs, rotated monthly as new books joined the exhibit and older titles went to the regular stacks.

Our regional campuses designed similar exhibits. We created a companion digital exhibit using the Collections Discovery feature of Alma and Primo. This feature let us build a visually engaging, interactive exhibit showing our FAB covers and titles. We can refresh this virtual exhibit in mere seconds.⁵

In addition to standing exhibits, I chose two FABs a month to showcase on the library's homepage and marketing screens throughout the buildings. We selected titles based on currency and diversity of authors, subjects, campuses, and faculty status. We sought to



Michael Rodriguez speaks with Till Frank at a UConn authors reception on February 18, 2020. Credit: Jean Nelson/UConn

showcase FABs that reflected UConn's diversity, multidisciplinary, and geography. Highlights included books by a Latino professor-in-residence of music, a tenured Asian American materials science professor, a nontenure-track female biologist, and an African American historian based at one of our regional campuses. Eye-catching titles or topics of contemporary resonance also influenced our selections. We emailed authors to alert them about the library's celebration of their work. Authors were gratified. Several made special trips to the library to view the Faculty-Authored Books Shelf. One psychology professor even borrowed his own book to share with his students—the professor's own complimentary book had not yet arrived from the publisher.

Finally, we engaged in face-to-face promotion, sometimes in conjunction with other university units. To mark the October 2019 launch, we hosted a reception in the Homer Babbidge Library. Although lightly attended, the event signaled the library's commitment to the service. Our dean spoke about the service in university leadership meetings. In February 2020, we were invited by CLAS to table at its own faculty authors' reception. We stocked the table with a representative selection of books by CLAS authors. We heard from more than a dozen faculty who appreciated the library's collecting their works and who happily browsed the selection. We even envisioned annual receptions cohosted with CLAS and the provost's office. The COVID-19 pandemic, which closed campus starting in March 2020, upset those aspirations.

Future directions

Before the pandemic, we were considering FAB-related programming: hosting a speaker series, cosponsoring an annual authors reception, soliciting increased donor support for the program, and maybe eventually sponsoring an annual award series, with top books selected by a faculty panel. Then the COVID-19 pandemic suspended nonessential or in-person efforts. With libraries closed, physical exhibits inaccessible, and no public events held for months, COVID-19 forced a pivot toward virtual programming. We began purchasing ebooks in addition to print, ramped up digital

marketing, began assessing the work it would take to flag all pre-2017 FABs retroactively in our catalog, and began reconsidering what faculty engagement might look like in a pandemic future. The School of Fine Arts recently asked if the library would be interested in collaborating on interviews of the school's authors. Naturally, we were interested. To collect, celebrate, and showcase the scholarship produced by the UConn community is fundamental to our mission as a research university—and a FABulous contribution to the intellectual life of any institution.

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Notes

1. Jennifer Bonnet, Barbara Alvarez, and Sigrid Anderson Cordell, "Let's Get This Party Started: Celebrating Faculty Authors in the Library," *College & Research Libraries News* 75, no. 4 (2014): 550–559, <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/9210/10208>.
2. Michelle Armstrong and Julia Stringfellow, "Promoting Faculty Scholarship through the University Author Recognition Bibliography at Boise State University," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 18, no. 2 (2012), 165–175, <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2012.717901>.
3. Sara Tabaei, Yitzchak Schaffer, Gregory McMurray, and Bashe Simon, "Building a Faculty Publications Database: A Case Study," *Public Services Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2013): 196–209, <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2013.816127>.
4. Sonali Sugrim, Laura Schimming, and Gali Halevi, "Identifying E-Books Authored by Faculty: A Method for Scoping the Digital Collection and Curating a List," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 107, no. 1 (2019): 103–107, <https://www.doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.514>.
5. All are welcome to browse this virtual exhibit at <http://s.uconn.edu/facultyauthoredbooks>. 