People Profile: Robin Barnard Moskal

Editor
that the item should not be ordered if already owned by another USMAI library, and many of those 314 were immediately reported to Acquisitions as having been mistakes in filling out the form, so the items were ordered anyway. UMBC, with over 10,000 students including 2,000 graduate students, has a book budget of only $400,000, despite being a research institution classified by the Carnegie Foundation as Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive, and ranked number 153 by the National Science Foundation for federally funded research and science and engineering, and second 16th in NASA funding. With such a small book budget, many departments suffer a consistent lack of appropriate funds to purchase the items identified by faculty as necessary for the library collection, so we had anticipated better results.

UMBC has an approval plan and receives approval forms, but for many years, items selected on approval were added to the collection regardless of whether owned by other USMAI libraries or not, and selectors were not given an opportunity to state whether they would still want the items even if owned by other USMAI libraries. This was primarily due to the fact that our previous catalog contained separate databases for each institution and a union catalog, requiring a separate search in the union catalog to determine if the item was already owned by another USM library. This process proved to be labor intensive and did not clearly determine if an item was a duplicate of UMBC holdings, because certain items were not included in the union catalog, such as those currently on order or in process.

With the implementation of the Ex Libris Aleph system the USMAI was able to migrate to one shared database, and the determination of whether an item was owned by UMBC or another USMAI library could be made with just one search. The Acquisitions Librarian surmised that perhaps selectors might be more willing to avoid purchasing approval items already owned by other USMAI libraries, since approval items might be of more marginal interest than those directly selected by faculty. Given the simplicity of checking all orders against the USMAI database to see if the item was already owned by another USMAI library, almost immediately upon implementation of the new system library, Acquisitions began implementing procedures to reduce duplication of other USMAI collections with approval orders. Acquisitions recorded on the form orders if the items were already owned by other USMAI libraries, and returned the forms to the requesting department, with a letter attached asking the selector to determine if they still wanted the items despite already being available in another USMAI institution. This again proved to be a failure, with selectors simply retuning nearly all of the orders to be purchased. Additionally, many selectors asked to not receive the information about items already owned by other USMAI institutions at all. For example, in July-September 2004, 61%, 2,154 out of 3,639, of approval form orders submitted by selectors were already owned by another USMAI library, and the return of those items to selectors resulted in most selectors either simply returning all of the forms to Acquisitions or contacting either the Acquisitions or Collection Management Librarian, to inform them that they didn’t want this information.

So why didn’t we have more success with these endeavors? Maybe because we have faculty selectors, who really want everything to be here in our library, and don’t have the time to review selections based on information about other USMAI holdings. However, given the difficulties many departments have in stretching their budgets to get everything they want, we would have anticipated more success, even with faculty selectors. Perhaps the approval slips represent core items that must really be held by each library, and that is why the liaisons persist in ordering the items anyway, because not having them may impact on accreditation. Perhaps the departmental budgets are so small they only support core purchases, leaving little money left over for more unique items. In the end, our best estimate is that about 50% of our new book purchases duplicate other USMAI libraries’ holdings, and our attempts at reducing that number through Acquisitions procedures have failed. And the faculty objected to, after carefully selecting the first time, having to go back and decide which titles, already owned within the USM, they really want on their own campus or could do without.

PPH has had little impact on collection development, because in the end, we purchase what the selectors want us to purchase. On the whole, however, PPH is an excellent service, exponentially increasing the number of items readily available to our patrons at little cost to the library. While we have provided information on consortial holdings to our selectors in order to allow them to make the best decisions possible, in the end, they want what they want regardless of whether other campuses own the title or not, and we try our best to give them what they want. In the end, a holds request service that is utilized approximately 7,000 times each year by our patrons can only be considered a success.

Note from the Editors: The following USMAI libraries contributed input to this article: St. Mary’s College, Towson University, The University of Baltimore, and the Center for Environmental Sciences.