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Exploring Collection Development for Library Technical Assistants

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For 38 years, the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, IL has trained a large number of library technical assistants through their Library Technology Program. The idea of ACQUTY was introduced a couple of years ago to give acquisitions students in this program an opportunity to improve their understanding of collection development. ACQUTY, as it is shown, is an activity that provides a practical introduction to those with little or no previous experience with collection development. The process of developing a community profile and a policy allows the students to familiarize themselves enough with the concept to feel knowledgeable about it.

In 2001, access to collection development policies, particularly in the local Chicago area were problematic, if not impossible (yes, a student and local taxpayer was denied a copy of her local public library’s policy); however, as time has progressed and more libraries became virtually accessible, the collection development policy became a highlight of the local library’s Website. At that time, the assignment for the acquisitions class was to bring into class a copy of a collection development policy for discussion. Although this was a productive assignment, the students were, seemingly, uninvolved. One of the tools used for the assignment included viewing ACQWEB, http://www.acqweb.org/, finding a policy there and reading about collection development from the site as well as from other assigned readings.

After reviewing this process, it became apparent that the ACQWEB could be the door to a more interesting method of training. In order to provide a more intimate experience with policy development, the acquisitions class was recreated as a Collection Development Committee. As with most committees, the members held differing, competitive opinions and were placed in a situation that inherently creates interaction. In the classroom it was necessary to break the class into small groups or retain the one group if there were not enough people. One of the core classes at COD is a basic class called “Today’s Libraries.” Since this is a required class, most students were familiar with library terminology prior to taking the acquisitions class. The exercise began in earnest with the introduction of ACQUTY, an imaginary town/city whose citizenry is motivated to support the public library and whose policy committee is motivated as well.

In order to get a cross section of ideas and understanding of the policy, the students were initially assigned to either get a copy of a local policy or one from some “wishful” town on the ACQWEB. Like most Chicagoans, the south and west were very popular (why wonder?). However, the purpose this time was to have each student bring to class a different reference copy in order to see the depth and breadth of various policies. Some of the representative policies were just two pages and some were twenty-six pages, as was the one from Newark, New Jersey.

In order to have the students invested in the process, the next assignment required each individual group to create a town/city — this town could be as creative as each group could allow within the understanding of a reasonable policy.

Some of the towns the students created included Working Stiff, IL — a town of 30,000 people, mostly blue collar workers, who were extremely committed to the public library; Pooka City, Arizona, a retirement community near the Arizona-Mexico border comprised of wealthy retired Americans, Papago Indians, and Hispanics; and finally, Treadwell, IL — whose population was distributed 50:50 between males and females of varying racial backgrounds and whose interests were health and well-being.

Since the students had a copy of an actual policy, they all learned that demographic information played an important part in each policy. At this point the second assignment was made to establish the demographic make-up of the town or city. In many cases the demographic information had already played some part, consciously or unconsciously, from the previous assignment of naming the city. The ACQUTY demographic profile was defined to include age, gender breakdown; blue collar/white collar; location — urban, rural, etc.; economic basis; size; institutions; or special identity. After a period of time, a representative from each individual group reported the name of the particular ACQUTY and the demographics of the town.

Yes, there was a Perfectville — everyone was perfect and the town was perfectly sized, with perfect people and, of course, perfect weather. Even though it was perfect it, too, had particular demographics.

Since each group gave a presentation, often someone addressed an issue that was not clear to another group. This provided the other students the opportunity to learn about and review additional information that could be added to their particular demographic study.

At this point the groundwork had prepared the groups to use the policy that each had selected as a reference tool and begin the next aspect of the group assignment to create the actual policy. Policy criteria had been introduced in a lecture given prior to the ACQUTY assignment: these include a community profile; community needs assessment; collection goals; selection responsibility; selection criteria; acquisitions; collection evaluation and assessment; deselection (weeding); reconsideration of library materials; intellectual freedom statements; policy review and revision (who is responsible) and other appendices. (Slusar, “Essential elements of collection development policy, Lecture,” 1/2005). The decision to in-

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Bill of Rights” (www.ala.org) are addressed. Likewise, the class has a selection and ordering assignment that tests student knowledge of selection and verification resources, as well as budget and accounting activities, serial management issues and gifts. The culminating activity encompasses much of the information introduced in the class — weeding (de-selection) and includes a discussion of the “Library Bill of Rights”.

The class progresses through the various assignments beginning with the selection exercise, which allows each person to be an expert on a particular topic in which they are well read or interested, and then to select a group of titles. This selection process is based on a previous assignment in which various useful and available selection and verification resources were reviewed. Then the students progress through ordering, hands-on verification, and an accounting problem assignment (which is always laden with sighs). The weeding project requires many of the skills introduced already: analysis, selection, decisions, statistics, and other analytical tools to complete this assignment. At this point the student usually feels that they have accomplished quite a lot. Most are ready to replace every out of date book in their local library.

In the various student collection development policies, as well as in actual policies — various adherence to “the ALA Library Bill of Rights” and the “Freedom to Read” are mentioned. These are documents that the students have discussed and find important enough to have included them in their ACCQ CITY policy. These documents make the student aware of the library’s responsibility to each citizen and the role the library plays in citizen’s lives, including their own. It is very important that as the quarter ends, the class is drawn back to the community by the necessary perception that maintaining a professional attitude in acquisitions is a service to the community. The goal of ACCQ CITY is to guide the students toward understanding the nature of collection development, which is based explicitly on the relationship between a particular library with its community and implicitly on the relationship between the staff with the library in its own community. By the end, the class has made a full circle from the community to the community, whether that community is a town, a business, a college, or even just a group of people who share a common interest.

**Sources used:**