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**Biz of Acq — Acquisitions in a Career College Library**

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Career colleges, also called for-profit or proprietary colleges, are one of the fastest growing areas in education today. They range from schools that specialize in one subject and have one location, to schools that have many different locations and offer courses and degrees from diplomas to PhDs. Larger schools may have campuses located in several states, some are growing internationally, and some schools exist totally online. The Minnesota School of Business/Globe University (MSB/GU), a privately owned career college in Minnesota, stayed relatively small for its first 100+ years and by 2002 had only four campuses, all located in the Twin Cities. Since 2002 MSB/GU has built four additional campuses, added an online MBA program, and continues to expand and grow with arrangements and partnerships in other states. This is due, in part, to a growing segment of the population that is looking for an alternative to the traditional college or university, and to the fact that most career college students qualify for federally funded financial aid.

Circumstances are unique in a career college library, and very different from the traditional academic library. Most career college libraries start out small, and their librarians learn to make do with limited resources, funds and people. Career college librarians are often solo librarians with many responsibilities, including acquisitions. Because MSB/GU was relatively small prior to 2002, each of the four college campuses had its own library and campus librarian. There was no need for a titled Acquisitions Librarian because there was no budget for collection development and no books were being purchased in large quantities. Each campus librarian submitted his or her own requests for materials. There were no acquisitions policies or procedures, and every campus librarian basically did his own thing. Because there was no catalog, no one knew who was ordering what.

Because of changing standards with the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), the main accrediting agency for career colleges, the MSB/GU libraries, like many other career college libraries, began to weed out textbooks and donations and started to buy new books. The school was expanding and adding new campuses, each with its own library, and there was a need to develop an acquisitions position. At MSB/GU, the title and role of Acquisitions Librarian were created in 2002. The new title was given to a librarian who was already a campus librarian, which meant that she continued to run her own library, supervise her staff and do bibliographic instruction, while adding duties related to acquisitions and collection development.

Career colleges are businesses and are looking to make a profit, so they expand when a new market in the population is found, or with increased demand for a particular field or subject. They may close or cancel programs and schools just as suddenly, when the market or need is no longer there. Career college libraries often have few established policies and are slow to create them, as with MSB/GU. If a librarian creates a policy, it may not be approved by the owners of the school or retained from one quarter to the next. The first Acquisitions Librarian at MSB/GU was free to create procedures and define responsibilities of the position, which included ordering books and other materials via stores, vendors and publishers, organizing collection development librarians to turn in materials on time, and sending check requests to the corporate headquarters. From the beginning, she had to use what was available to do the job, as there were no new funds, no additional salary and no library resources added to help with the new role. Through trial and error and the extensive use of Excel spreadsheets, she custom-made order forms for tracking orders, approvals, continued on page 53
receipts, and dates when items were sent to cataloging. Since there is no acquisitions system, the current Acquisitions Librarian continues to use Excel spreadsheets to keep track of all orders.

The history and reasoning behind MSB/GU’s lack of an acquisitions module is not surprising or unique. The time and investment in a fully integrated library management system with an acquisitions module is very high for any academic library, and even higher for a career college library with its limited funds. Most career college libraries are seen as a cost expense, because they take money away from the school and do not contribute to bringing money in. In 2003, MSB/GU finally purchased the integrated library system PALS, but only the catalog, circulation and administration modules, and the public Web version. In 2006, PALS upgraded to Ex Libris’ Aleph, which PALS operates and supports, but once again only the cataloging, circulation, ILL and administration modules were purchased. Many reasons were given for not purchasing the acquisitions and serials modules in 2003, but the main factor was the cost. In 2006, cost and the migration to Aleph again were factors in not buying the acquisitions and serials modules. MSB/GU now had eight campuses with eight libraries and no main library. It was decided that PALS and MINITEX would see the MSB/GU libraries as a mini-consortium, which would complicate Aleph arrangements.

Librarians at career colleges may have authority to order what they want for their libraries, or the heads of academic programs may approve all purchases. At some career colleges, the director of the school approves purchases. At the Minnesota School of Business/Globe University all items to be purchased for the library (usually books, eBooks and DVDs) must first be approved by the Program Head of that particular academic program. The MSB/GU librarians are not allowed to purchase items that are not directly relevant to the curriculum.

Career college librarians order their materials from a wide variety of sources, from local independent bookstores or used bookstores, to national bookstore chains and American and international publishers and vendors. From 2002 to 2006, MSB/GU purchased most books from the online bookseller Amazon.com. Amazon.com was used because of its low prices, no tax, free shipping and handling (most of the time), and its ease of use. Another factor was that MSB/GU had an Amazon.com corporate account, which the library was allowed to use. While this made ordering easier, there was a downside to having access to the corporate account. The MSB/GU corporate account was created for the bookstore, and when the account became overextended, the library’s books were the first cancelled. (Bookstore business is another way that career colleges make money.)

The MSB/GU Acquisitions Librarian soon learned to avoid ordering books at the end or beginning of school quarters or the end of the calendar year, so as not to conflict with the large quantities of books that were ordered for the bookstores at those times.

MSB/GU orders were also placed directly with the publisher. Because the library had no credit card or checking account, it was necessary to request a check in advance from the corporate billing department and place the order after receiving the check. The process involved extra forms, extra time, and the occasional missing check.

Each MSB/GU library is separate and independent, and technical services are located on different campuses. Once the number of libraries started to grow, better organization was needed. In 2007, it was decided to use YBP’s GOBI for book buying and to move away from using the Amazon.com corporate account. GOBI is a Web-based service, and it allows purchasing to be done from one source and with relative ease. As with Amazon.com, one can search GOBI by title, ISBN, author, etc. All of the college’s collection development librarians can enter in GOBI books that have been approved for purchase for their subject area, saving their selections in folders. The Acquisitions Librarian reviews the folders and places the order. YBP’s system allows email notification after the order has been placed, and the Acquisitions Librarian sends notices to the MSB/GU Cataloger, the collection development librarian whose books were ordered, the Lead Librarian, and herself. This informs everyone that the books were ordered and identifies the order date. With the YBP GOBI account, items can be processed and shipped complete with barcode and classification number to the MSB/GU Cataloger. The Cataloger still sees that materials are “Dewey-ed” according to her system, but pre-processing speeds up technical services considerably.

Acquisitions work and the Acquisitions Librarian position at the Minnesota School of Business/Globe University continue to evolve and change. In big and small libraries, acquisitions can be a growing and changing library service. In a career college library, acquisitions functions can move and change overnight and with huge consequences. This may be a complex, multi-stage growth, depending on the size of the school and library, money that is available, the corporate culture of the school, and the librarians involved.

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people profile

Melissa K. Aho

BORN & LIVED: Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and currently living in Lexington, Minnesota.

FAMILY: Cat Che, parents Carole and Terry and twin sister Michelle.

EDUCATION: M.L.I.S. — 2001, Dominican University (Library and Information Science)
M.S. — 1998, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee (Anthropology)
B.A. — 1999, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (Art History)
B.A. — 1994, St. Cloud State University (Anthropology and History)

FIRST JOB: My first “real” library position was in 2000 as a Research Librarian at the Saint Paul Pioneer Press in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I try to do as many Webinars as I can and I am constantly reading blogs by librarians.

IN MY SPARE TIME, I LIKE TO: Read and travel.


MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Having my first article and then book review published (I had them both framed!).

Endnotes
1. Melissa Aho, MLIS, MS is the current and third Acquisitions Librarian (as well as Campus and Business Resources Librarian) at the Minnesota School of Business/Globe University-Brooklyn Center campus.
2. PALS provides automated library services to various libraries, both public and private, in Minnesota. http://www.mnpals.org
3. MINITEX is a publicly funded cooperative network of libraries in Minnesota and is housed at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. http://www.minitex.umn.edu/