April 2011

People Profile: Glenda Alvin

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Recommended Citation

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5797

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Is Selection Dead? The Rise of Collection Management ...

the titles that patrons get to choose from, or approving titles that they have chosen. Selection thus appears to be alive and well rather than dead and is simply assuming new and different forms.

Response #2 – David Magier (Princeton University)

Some provocative propositions deployed to promote PDA and hasten the death of selection are based on false distinctions, library caricatures, and rhetorical strawmen. Outmoded libraries with “traditional,” “local” collections — consisting of printed books selected “one at a time,” “just in case” some might ever need them and without regard to the information needs of users, and created, furthermore, with wanton abandon in an unmanaged era of plenty, for the purpose of organizing a “wonderful collection” of content that no one needs and is anyway hard to discover or use — are contrasted with proposed patron-driven, cost-effective, “just in time” libraries responding digitally to users’ needs, providing Webscale discovery and instant delivery, where libraries themselves support what is available on the Web.”

Both sides of that contrast are far from reality, and betray a fearsome lack of understanding of what collection development (and selection) really are. No library (since Alexandria) tried to collect “everything.” Libraries scalably deploy limited resources. Selection — print and electronic — has always been “patron-driven”: understanding and balancing priorities among current and potential future trajectories of need of constituencies and fields is the keystone of collection development, driving acquisition decisions.

Ignoring the long tail of need, abdicating subject knowledge, liaison, and the means of collectively shaping shared collections, turning over all selection to users (and expecting “the Web” to supply whatever else is needed) will surely save space, reduce payrolls, and win the hearts of administrators. The resulting libraries, though, will be incapable of supporting research, and are likely to be cut off from access to collections of research libraries that collaborate to deploy their limited resources for that serious purpose.