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“TEN MORE ACCOUNTING TEXT BOOKS!: TURNING THOSE UNWANTED GIFT BOOKS INTO GOOD DONOR RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the possibility of creating a partnership between the College Library and the institution's Development Office. An arrangement is being established at Franklin & Marshall College and the paper will describe three specific gift situations. An overview of donations to the library – different types and related issues – will also be covered in the paper.

TEXT

Libraries are wonderful – sometimes even magical – repositories of knowledge, information, and special materials. But libraries are also warehouses of outdated, useless, and unwanted materials. Much of this latter category is the result of a pack-rat approach to collections (“let’s get everything we can on a particular subject”) and the lack of a consistent weeding policy (“we can’t throw that out!”). Another source of unwanted materials is the bane of a collection development librarian’s job: gifts. Donations. Or, “treasures that I found when I was cleaning out my father’s attic.”

Sometimes, of course, you really do get lucky and receive that rare copy of a Shakespeare folio or a first edition of Hemingway’s first novel. But most of the time, you get boxes (or paper bags) filled with battered paperbacks or well-read copies of best sellers from twenty years ago. The very books that your library might have already discarded. I’m not even going to discuss Reader’s Digest Condensed Books, which must have found their way into every household in America back in the 1960s.

I could spend my allotted time here relating anecdotes and horror stories about gift collections that I have received over the years (and I will mention a few of those). My main purpose, however, is to offer a way to use donations to your advantage. This method is probably most appropriate for college and university libraries, but could also be tried for public libraries. Maybe even public school libraries. No library is immune to the Dreaded Donation Disease (Spine Flu, perhaps??).

Here’s how it happens. You sit at your desk with the daily – or weekly – agenda carefully planned. You have meetings to attend, classes to meet, tasks to accomplish. You feel in control of your schedule. But just as you are about to go to the staff room for a cup of coffee or tea (or, even better, a fresh donut), your telephone rings. You have Caller ID but you don’t recognize the number. You know it’s not a sleazy publisher of a business directory who wants to charge you for a listing, so you pick up the phone.

“Hello! This is Pete Plankton in the Biology Department. I’m getting ready to retire at the end of the term and I’ve started to clean out my office. I’d like to send some of my books over to the library. Most of them are in good condition and you might be able to use them, or sell them, or give them away. You can probably do that a lot better than I can.”

And thus begins the Dance of Gift Negotiation. You ask the professor/donor a lot of questions. How many books are we talking about? (“Oh, probably just a couple boxes.”). What subject areas? How old are the books? Are any of these textbooks? Unless the donor is calling about

one single book, you have learned not to believe a word he or she says about their donation. “A couple boxes” usually means that at least a dozen large and heavy boxes will be delivered to your office. Donors have the uncanny ability not to be able to smell mildew on their precious books. What looks to you as a generic Biology textbook is identified as a “classic text in the field” (even if the shrink wrapping has not been removed). Usually you want to throw those texts **into** a field.

Unfortunately, donations from faculty (or the College President) are usually offers that can't be refused. You smile and try to sound grateful. “Can I come over to your office right now and get those books?!” If the offer includes 40 years worth of *Science* magazine, you cringe and smack your head a few times but you still accept the donation.

Libraries accept gifts for various reasons:

We might be a small, struggling library that is grateful for any and all donations, and depend on these gifts to build up our collection. I call this the Crap Shoot Approach to Collection Development.

We might be lusting after a very specific collection (belonging to a faculty member, an alum, a local resident) and will agree to any conditions in order to acquire the gift.

We might need inventory for the next library book sale and will thus accept all kinds of useless materials.

We are offered collections that not only will strengthen our collection but will fill very specific gaps. This scenario, of course, rarely occurs – or if it does, we also have to accept a lot of less-than-desirable items.

We want to keep valued donors happy.

In the past two years I've had to work with several very large gifts, including two that involved a connection with the College Development Office. I'm not looking for sympathy, but here's what I've had to deal with – and had to fit into my schedule of other activities.

An emeritus faculty member, who had retired from F&M 25 years ago, was moving from his house into a retirement center. He had been in his house for 60 years. I inspected his collection, which was housed (on bookshelves and in boxes) in a large unheated garage. I saw hundreds of books – not just in his fields of interest (Sociology and Anthropology) but in history, literature, politics, and psychology. Most of the boxes contained books that he had packed when he emptied his campus office; the boxes had not been touched since. The settlement date on his property was looming, so I arranged for a couple students to help him pack and move the books and he also enlisted the help of a “hired hand”. The boxes arrived at the library over the course of two or three weeks and that's when I discovered that many of the books were damp, mildewed, or worse. Some of the books went immediately into the trash, a few were added to the library collection, and most were saved for the next library book sale. Sorting that gift of over 3,500 books took many hours (months!) of my time!

While I was working on that donation, a member of the Business Department passed away and his widow contacted me about his large library. And so another pile of boxes arrived, but these books were in excellent condition and the subject matter ranged over many areas: management

to martial arts, philosophy to fencing. The final count was 792 books. I added quite a few of those books to the collection and donated others to the local high school.

A faculty member in the Art Department was retiring and developed a habit of dropping off several boxes of books, unannounced, usually on a weekly basis. His collection was also quite eclectic, though obviously heavy on art and architecture titles. When he finally made his last “drop-off,” his gift totaled nearly 800 volumes, but because they arrived in “installments” this gift didn’t seem quite so overwhelming. Also, he had researched the current value of each book by checking Amazon.com or eBay. I didn’t make use of that data, but it probably made him feel good.

For the other two gifts I was asked to give an appraisal to the donors. Normally the library does not determine a monetary value for gifts, though I always acknowledge how many items were donated and send a formal letter of thanks. For these donors, however, I did offer a ballpark figure, based on a very rough formula: two dollars for a hardback book (unless the book was unusual – such as an atlas, or a large-format art book) and one dollar for a paperback. I would later use this measure of worth when working with the Development Office.

Around the same time that I was inundated with those gifts, the Biology faculty was clearing their offices in preparation for a move to a new building. While a couple faculty sent books to me individually, this was a very well coordinated project. Books were placed on industrial shelving in a large, unused lab and the Science Librarian and I were able to review the titles at our own pace. A similar arrangement was set up for journals (and a few more books) in the department’s reading room. That review yielded almost 900 books for us, but only a few journals that we needed.

As the former Biology building was being gutted and renovated, the faculty in the Business and Government departments – who would be moving into that building – began emptying their offices and the same process began all over again. This time, though, I could not enlist the help of another librarian for I was the one who worked as a liaison to both Business and Government. I learned that the Business faculty tended not to acquire (or keep) nearly as many books as did their Government colleagues: we received 477 books from Business and 800 books from Government.

While all of these gifts were large, they were manageable – at least on my end. I was able to find room in the library to store the boxes and I sorted through them at a steady pace (sometimes with the assistance of a student). From every donation a small percentage of the books were added to the library’s collection (either as new titles or as substitutions for a worn out copy). Other gifts kept arriving, as well, usually from a cadre of “regulars” – faculty who religiously followed the practice of weeding their personal libraries. Small boxes would arrive from them several times a year.

As if this steady flow of gifts wasn’t enough, we occasionally get calls from people in the community who want to know if we’re interested in their books (or their father’s books, or their grown children’s books). Most of these gifts are relatively small, but can take an inordinate amount of time – especially if the donor wants me to look at the books and/or pick them up. Over the years I have been too quick to say yes to these requests; I am saying no, thanks, more frequently these days. Why do we bother with “non-affiliated” donors? There are several reasons. One is curiosity. The collection sounds unique in some way and you want to take a look. Maybe the donor sounds really interesting on the phone. I once had a phone conversation with a woman who sounded like Diane Keaton playing Annie Hall and it turned out

that she had a fascinating collection of radical political books and pamphlets. She had been very active in the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War and knew many of the authors. She also spent some time in prison as a result of her activities – and she lived in ultra-conservative Lancaster County!

Sometimes the timing of a donation is perfect. A few years ago I got a call from a woman who was getting ready to move and had over 1,000 books she needed to dispose of. She lived only a couple blocks from the college so I went to her house (with a colleague who owned a pick-up truck) and we were delighted to see that her books had already been boxed up. The library's book sale was opening in a couple days and we did not have a very interesting inventory that year, so this brand new gift went directly into the book sale room. We had a very successful sale that year.

I have also received referrals from faculty and staff – usually a friend or neighbor wants to “unload some books” and can the library help them? Sometimes those donations prove to be useful; but most of the times they are not. At least I get to meet some interesting people.

Where does the College or University Development Office fit into this process? The interaction, or intersection, can occur in two ways. The Development Office will contact the library and act as an intermediary for an alumus who wants to donate books or other materials. Sometimes books, etc. are merely a portion of the alum's gift to the institution and the library is expected to “sign on” to a much broader agreement. Normally this isn't a problem, unless there are extreme conditions placed on the acceptance of the materials. An example would be a donor that insisted that all of his or her books be kept as a separate collection, sometimes in a designated room. Thankfully, I have never had to negotiate this kind of demand.

The second type of interaction is when the library is contacted directly by an alumnus and we feel that the Development Office should be aware of the gift. The main reason to alert the Development Office about donations from alums is to help them identify persons who “express an interest” in the college. This could be a donor who has already made contributions or an alum who is not on their radar. Sometimes the gift of a few books to the library can lead to a much more substantial gift (monetary, property, naming a room, etc.). Donor relations from the Development Office's perspective are, however, a lot more formal and legalistic than what we are used to in the library. I never worried much about appraisals, and had never heard of a “receipt and release” document. Now I think about these terms a lot.

I will use three recent examples to illustrate the early phase of the F&M Library's relationship with the Development Office.

Case Study One:

I received an email from the College Archivist who alerted me that an alum, Class of 1949, had donated some materials to the Archives and that he had mentioned the possibility of “giving the library” most of his books. The Archivist suggested that I give the alum a call but before I could do so I received a phone call from him. He was in the process of moving from his apartment in Center City Philadelphia to his farm in Bucks County and invited me to drive into the city with a college van and pick up his books. “You'll be getting these books eventually, so you might as well take them now,” he said. I didn't want to navigate along the narrow streets of Philadelphia in an oversized van so I drove my trusty Toyota Camry, hoping that I would have enough room for all of his books. I did – but just barely.

When I arrived at his apartment I was greeted with good news and bad news about his collection. The good news was that there was not nearly as many books as I had feared; the bad news was that the books had not been boxed. He had plenty of boxes, but insisted on handling every book as I filled the boxes. He not only handled each book, but he also gave me a brief history of the book and the author. The alum had worked as a CEO of several insurance companies, he taught management courses, and served in one of the economic offices of the Nixon administration. Some of the books were written by friends, colleagues, and former students. Most of the books dealt with business or management topics, but the titles that caught my attention were some obscure government reports he had worked on.

Back at the library I contacted the Development Office about this donation and only then learned that this alum was not only a generous donor to the college, but had served on the Board of Trustees. He was definitely someone whom Development was actively courting. I gradually processed his gift and added 70 books from the 411 titles received. A month or so later the alum made a visit to the college (to discuss another donation) and he brought along one more large box of books. I have a feeling that I will hear from him again in the not-so-distant future. For this gift the Development Office only wanted an “estimate of fair market value” so that they could report back to the alum. He had not asked for any kind of appraisal or value. I used our standard rubric of \$2 for hardcovers and \$1 for paperbacks and that was fine for the Development folks.

Case Study Two:

I receive regular phone calls from an alum, Class of 1972, who lives in New York City and is very active in the arts. He usually calls to see if I’m interested in back issues of art or museum magazines, though recently his queries have included books that he wanted to give away. Some of his materials have been useful; some have not. In a typical year we have received a dozen books from him, and a similar number of magazine issues. While none of these items have been particularly valuable, I mentioned his name to the Development Office. They were not aware of his donations and added his name to their list of alums to contact for special fund drives (in his case, fund-raising in the arts). He also seems to be connected with other alums in New York City and that kind of networking could be useful for the Development Office, or for students.

Case Study Three:

Over the years the college has enjoyed a beneficial relationship with one of the prominent families in Lancaster. A building is named for the family and they have supported a variety of projects and capital campaigns. Last year, one of the family members passed away and during the process of settling her estate the college was contacted concerning her vast collection of books. The College Librarian received a call from the Development Office in February and we agreed to take the collection. It was presented to us as containing “over 6,000 books, with an emphasis on art, history, and Asian cultures. I went to the house to examine the collection and was bowled over – not just by the array of books in many rooms (including a separate two-story library wing), but by the opulent mansion itself. The logistics of receiving the collection were unusual and, in fact, the college just received the boxes of books a few weeks ago. The family had wanted the books to remain on the shelves until the house was sold. That took a while, due to the slowdown in the economy and the size of the house. In September we were informed that the house had been sold, with a settlement date scheduled for October 31st. Would we please arrange to have the books removed by October 15th? Thank you!

Normally, I would find a few students, go to a donor's house, and collect their books – sometimes even packing boxes if necessary. But this collection was easily ten times larger than anything I had ever dealt with in the past. The task was too big for us to tackle. I contacted the Facilities & Operations Department and they could not spare the time or manpower either. Ultimately, the college hired a moving company to do the packing and delivering – at a fairly high cost. Once the cost was approved, the movers flew into action and we had the books a week later. We had to find a large enough space to house the gift and, happily, there was an large empty room in our Science Library (vacated by the Computing Center when it moved to a new building during the summer), and that's where the rows and rows of boxes currently reside. Students are beginning to sort through the collection and checking titles in the library's catalog. I am very curious to see how many titles we end up adding to the collection from this gift.

The arrangement between the family and the Development Office included an appraisal of the collection done by the family and an official "Receipt and Release" document was sent to them when the books arrived on campus. I will report back to Development after the books have been checked and will send a list of the titles we decided to add.

While we want to cooperate with the Development Office on these and future donations, there is a danger in getting too closely entwined with the legalities of donor relations. As I was preparing these remarks a question was posted on the Oberlin Group's Collection Development listserv. (The Oberlin Group is comprised of 19 small, and "prestigious" liberal arts colleges) One of the member libraries had been asked by its Institutional Advancement Department to start providing them with an approximate value of all gifts received by the library. The librarian wrote: "Between hundreds (thousands?) of books and other media types that we accept as gifts in our General Collection and the myriad books, pamphlets, manuscripts, artwork, photographs, and objects that are accepted in Special Collections each year, I'm having a difficult time wrapping my head around this proposition." (1) This posting elicited several interesting responses and I will quote from just two of them.

"Briefly, I can see both the potential advantages and pitfalls of such a proposition. On the one hand, establishing evidence of the Library's contribution to the college assets would be a plus – demonstrating that the Library is doing its share to support the college. On the other hand, there is always the possibility that the value might be used to reduce allocations to the Library. And what framework of values would accommodate a gift of a used bestseller published in a run of 150,000 and the quarterly records of a local Friends Meeting? Is it re-sale value? Rarity? And whose responsibility would it be? Assigning value requires both a knowledge of the intrinsic worth of an artifact as well as an awareness of the market place. It's a risky business at best." (2)

"I send Development a copy of every acknowledgment letter I send along with a form they require. The form asks for an in-house estimate of the value of the gift. The Development office uses this value to get a sense of the donation – not for taxes or anything official. I am attaching a copy of that form. We receive perhaps a hundred gifts a year, so this is manageable. It sometimes feels a bit silly, especially when the value of the gift is very low, but of course our Development office is interested in all donors and donations. A "gift" can be defined as a single item (say, an old yearbook) or several boxes of books or other materials.

As you'll see, they have an automatic formula for books donated to the general library (\$1.00 for hardcovers, 50 cents for soft). I do not use this formula for Special Collections donations. If the gift comes with purchase information (a brand new book with a price on the jacket, an out-of-print book or a collection of photographs with a dealer's price sheet), I use that value. If not, I tend to put down \$10, \$20, \$50, \$100, \$250, and so on. Sometimes, if I suspect the book is fairly valuable, I do a little searching on abebooks.com or a similar site. I do not share my estimate of value with the donors, of course. If they are curious, I tell them about abebooks.com and warn them that such research is very subjective. (I worked for a rare book dealer for two years and feel minimally confident that I can explain the importance of condition.)" (3)

Finally, even with the best and easiest gift collections there are consequences for the library. More people, and departments, are affected than just the Collection Development Librarian. Here is what a typical workflow for gifts looks like:

- The gifts are received or need to be picked-up – this requires some staff time to either meet the donor or visit the donor's home or office
 - The gifts need to be stored somewhere, either for the short-term or the long-term (depending on the size and importance of the gift) – staff or student time is usually needed to find the appropriate space and move the boxes
 - The gifts need to be sorted – either by subject or format – this is a good use of student help
 - Items need to be checked against the library's holdings – this is another good student project (though sometimes it is quicker and easier for the librarian to do this)
 - If the library already owns the item, the condition of the gift copy should be compared to the library's copy – a good student or staff function
 - Decisions need to be made about adding items to the library collection – this is done only by a librarian – for a large gift collection, this step can have a potential impact on the Cataloging and Processing Department if too many items are added in a short period of time – also, adequate space for the new items might be hard to find in the stacks
 - The items not added need to be discarded in a responsible manner – many books are saved for the library's next book sale – some items are donated to the local high school or public library – some books are sent to an organization like Better World Books – this process usually requires a storage area in which discarded books can accumulate until the dispersal decisions are made
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We are just now beginning to ponder that impact of the 6,000 + volume gift. A year from now I hope to be able to return and report on further developments.

Notes:

1 - Anderies, John F. (Coordinator for Collections and Head of Special Collection, Haverford College). Retrieved from the CollDev Mailing List, October 27, 2009.

<http://lists.oberlingroup.org/mailman/listinfo/colldev>

2 – Raidy-Klein, Susan. (Associate Director, Collection Services, Simmons College). Retrieved from the CollDev Mailing List, October 27, 2009.

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3 – Randall, Jessy. (Curator and Archivist, Colorado College). Retrieved from the CollDev Mailing List, October 27, 2009. <http://lists.oberlingroup.org/mailman/listinfo/colldev>

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