

## Communication and Collection Accountability through Clusters: Case Studies from Two Institutions

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## COMMUNICATION AND COLLECTION ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH CLUSTERS: CASE STUDIES FROM TWO INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstract

Collection development and collection management can be approached by individuals or groups. In discussing collection practices at two institutions in Virginia, the presenters realized that clusters were being used at both institutions (The University of Virginia (UVA) and James Madison University (JMU)) but in different capacities. UVA has clusters built into the overall organizational structure and the composition is determined based grouping the physical libraries into rough subject groups. On the other hand, JMU created clusters to aid in the work and communication of decisions of the Collection Development Committee. This session covered the clustering approach to collection development and how clusters are being used to achieve two different aims based on the needs of each institution.

### Introduction

Founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, The University of Virginia is made up of twelve schools in Charlottesville, plus the College at Wise in southwest Virginia. The University offers bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, educational specialist degrees, first-professional degrees in law and medicine, and doctoral degrees. A highly competitive, comprehensive research university, UVA enrolls over 21,000 students, of which, just under 14,000 are undergraduates, approximately 5,000 are graduate students and 1725 are professional school students. The University of Virginia has many highly regarded graduate programs, but particular strengths include British Literature, African-American Literature, American Literature, U.S. Colonial History, Political Science, Developmental Psychology, and Teacher Education. Funds for library collections come from both state and local endowments, with approximately 80% of the total funding coming from the state.

James Madison University is a comprehensive university that is part of a statewide system of public higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. JMU offers programs on bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels with its primary emphasis on the undergraduate student. As of Fall 2009, JMU has an enrollment of nearly 18,000 students, of which only about 1,100 are graduate students. JMU has particular curricular strengths in the areas of Business, Audiology/Speech Pathology, Assessment (Psychology), Education, Music, and Nursing. Additionally, the majority of the funds that JMU spends on library collections are from the state rather than from local endowments.

Both institutions belong to the Virtual Library of Virginia, VIVA. It is the consortium of the nonprofit academic libraries within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Members include all of Virginia's state-assisted colleges and universities, as well as 33 private, nonprofit institutions and the Library of Virginia. The majority of VIVA's funds come directly from the Virginia General Assembly, augmented by the local institutional library budgets and some outside grants. VIVA provides access to both databases and journal collections.

## The Cluster Structure at the University of Virginia

The University of Virginia Libraries implemented the cluster system in collections as a part of a wider reorganization of the Collections & Public Services Unit in 2007. This system was chosen to ensure even representation in a variety of venues and to encourage two-way communication through a series of representatives. The representatives are integral to the collection management process at many levels, including operational, budget allocation, policy-making and direction.

Three clusters report to the Associate University Librarian for Public Services and Collections, and this structure covers not just collections management, but the daily public service operations of eleven of the libraries in the University Library system. Each cluster is lead by a Director, who is responsible for the all the operations of the libraries in the cluster, including developing strategy appropriate to the disciplines covered while keeping the larger system-wide vision in mind. The physical libraries are grouped roughly by subject to create the clusters. The table below contains a listing of the libraries by cluster and some of their associated subject areas.

| Arts, Music & Media   | Humanities & Social Sciences   | Science, Engineering and Education  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine Arts Library</li> <li>• Music Library</li> <li>• Clemons Library               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Media Center</li> <li>○ Undergraduate/Popular Collection</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alderman Library               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ History</li> <li>○ Anthropology</li> <li>○ Commerce</li> <li>○ English</li> <li>○ Language &amp; Cultures                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ French</li> <li>▪ Asian Studies</li> <li>▪ Etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Political Sciences</li> <li>○ Sociology</li> <li>○ Economics</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Astronomy Library</li> <li>• Biology/Psychology Library</li> <li>• Chemistry Library</li> <li>• Education Library Services</li> <li>• Charles L. Brown Science &amp; Engineering Library               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Engineering</li> <li>○ Environmental Sciences</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mathematics Library</li> <li>• Physics Library</li> </ul> |

## Collections Structure at the University of Virginia

There are three groups with collection management responsibilities at the University of Virginia: the policy-driven Collections Steering Group (CSG); the procedure-driven Collections Coordinators; and the practicing subject librarians. The first and largest group is that of the Subject librarians. This is a complex group to manage and communicate with as they are a large group distributed throughout the libraries and do not all report through the Public Services and Collections administrative structure. In order to improve communications, the subject librarians, regardless of administrative reporting structure are, for collection management purposes, assigned to a cluster, based on their subject area. This means that in addition to the monthly Subject Librarian meetings, there are also cluster-level meetings, which are smaller and more discipline-focused. These two traits encourage more discussion and subject librarian input.

Each cluster has an assigned coordinator, who oversees collection management projects in their area, facilitates communication between cluster members and the Collections Steering Group, and serves as a local collections resource person. Coordinators represent their cluster in collection management discussions and to communicate the discussions, decisions and requests of the CSG back to their cluster. As the local collections resource person, cluster coordinators are expected to set up meetings for their unit, oversee training of new subject librarians and foster discussion of discipline-specific collection management issues.

The Collection Coordinator group includes, in addition to the three cluster coordinators this group, the Head of Acquisitions, a representative from digital collections, a coordinator from the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library and CSG member. This group also works closely with the CSG, as that group sets the policy and vision for collection management, while Collection Coordinators handle the implementation of the vision and the continuing operations of collection management. Sample agenda items for the Collection Coordinators group include an electronic resource renewal process, the budget request process, and the creation of documentation for subject librarians.

The Collection Steering Group is a policy and vision group. Discussions take place in a framework of global, long-term decision making for collection management. The members of this group are director-level and it is expected that they will represent the disciplines in their cluster, but also place them in a wider context. In addition to the Director of each of the subject clusters, this group includes the Director of Interlibrary Services (who also oversees the remote shelving facility), the Head of Acquisition, a digital collections representative, The Director of Content Management Services and the Director of the Albert & Shirley Small Special Collections Library. This group is responsible for setting the direction related to collections for the University Library (exclusive of Health Science, Law and the Darden School of Business.) This includes developing policy, setting budget allocations and developing collection management strategies.

Since the Collection Coordinator and Collections Steering Group in particular should be informing one another, there is overlap in topics and the two groups have overlapping meeting times, so that in addition to the dedicated meeting time for each group, there is a shared meeting time to make announcements and discuss recent news from both groups. Agendas for each group and the overlapping time are shared with all participants and there is some fluidity to attendance to ensure that the appropriate people are present to yield a fruitful discussion.

### **Future of Clusters at University of Virginia**

While the clusters are built into the structure of the organization at U.Va, the structure separating policy and process is an experiment that is eight months old and is due to be evaluated in the late Spring of 2010. While there are more meetings as a result of this structure, they tend to run more smoothly as each group concentrates on the topics from their strength, rather than having a simple procedural question turn into a policy debate, or having a policy discussion move too quickly to implementation questions. A great deal of attention to agenda setting and information sharing is required, which is time-consuming. However, since both of these are good practice for effective meetings and contribute to our goal of greater transparency in collection management, it seems likely that we would want to continue those practices even if we reform these groups. While overall, this structure has increased communication and transparency, communication patterns need to be more clearly defined. With more people involved in the process, it is possible that each thinks another will be sharing the news or

decision results and have these items slip through the cracks. While we post the notes to all of the meetings to central location, available to all with collections responsibilities and anyone else by request, very few people take advantage of these and depend more on the filtered discipline-specific discussion led by their collections coordinator.

### **The Cluster Structure at James Madison University**

Within the JMU Libraries, the Collection Development Committee (CDC) makes decisions regarding resources with ongoing costs. It also sets overarching Library Collection Development Policies. Clusters were implemented as a part of the CDC in 2008 at JMU in order to clarify the decision making process of this committee within the libraries.

At JMU, clusters were formed in order to provide more information to the CDC when budget fluctuations occur (either influx of funds or cutting materials.) Clusters act as advisory groups for the CDC and they are elected positions for two year terms on the CDC. Clusters give broad input for the CDC decisions in order to provide well-rounded collections. At JMU, clusters increase two-way communication between the selectors and the CDC and make informed recommendations when:

- a. There are new resources that cross disciplinary lines.
- b. There is one-time money, primarily at the end of the year.
- c. Addressing cancellations to be good stewards of university funds.

During the first year of clusters, there were three standing clusters. Arts and Humanities was composed of: Art, Music, Theater/Dance, Philosophy/Religion, Justice Studies, History, Political Science, SMAD, Sociology/Anthropology, English, Foreign Languages, and Writing/Rhetoric. It contained 12 subject areas, 9 selectors, and 2 ex-officio attendees (Head of Special Collections, Head of Media Resources.) Science, Technology & Business was composed of Business, ISAT, Engineering, Biology, Physics, Geology, Computer Science, Math, and Chemistry. This cluster had 9 subject areas and 6 selectors. Finally, the Applied Health Sciences was composed of: Communication Sciences and Disorders, Psychology, Education, CFI/Professional Studies, Communication, Kinesiology, Nursing, Social Work, and Health Sciences. It covered 9 subject areas and had 7 selectors. Additionally there was an ad-hoc cluster to examine resources related to general Reference. This clustering of disciplines may seem haphazard but it guaranteed that selectors only served in one cluster, a major concern based on the number of additional meetings each selector would have to attend.

One academic year after implementation the cluster approach and structure was evaluated via focus groups with selectors. Overall the feedback was positive and selectors were in favor of clusters. Some concerns were expressed about the composition of the clusters as well as the purpose and decision making ability that each cluster possessed. Based on this feedback the roles were further clarified, clusters were reorganized, and an additional cluster was added. Current clusters are: Arts & Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences, and Applied Health Sciences.

New cluster structure for FY2010

**Arts/Humanities (new rep in 2009)**- Writing/Rhetoric, Women's Studies, History, English, Foreign Language, SMAD, Art, Music, Theater/Dance, Philosophy/Religion. 10 areas, 7 people, 3 ex-officio (Head of Special Collections, Head of Media Resources, Assistant Director of Public Services- Learning Commons Coordinator)

**Sciences (new rep in 2009)**- Math, Geology, Computer Science, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, ISAT, Engineering. 8 areas, 5 people.

**Social Sciences (new rep in 2010)**- Education, Business, Political Science, Communication, Anthropology/Sociology, Justice Studies. 6 areas, 5 people

**Applied Health Sciences (new rep in 2010)**- Communication Sciences and Disorders, Nursing, Health Sciences, Social Work, Kinesiology, Psychology. 6 areas, 5 people

### **Roles of Stakeholders**

There are three main groups that require additional definition in order to clarify roles and decision making power in relation to library collections at JMU.

**1) CDC**- The CDC is responsible to: the library faculty for university-wide collections policy and the Dean of L&ET for final authority of expenditures. The CDC is charged with recommending collection policy to the JMU Library faculty and coordinating collection development activities.

Additionally, the CDC will:

- Ensure effective communication and coordination among librarians on collection issues, CDC decisions, and collection management<sup>1</sup> projects.
- Support liaison collection management work through cluster coordination and representation.
- Serve as a forum for the discussion of campus-wide collection management activities and develop strategies for adapting to economic fluctuations and technological change, and maintain an awareness of trends in the library and publishing worlds.
- Identify user needs and propose collection adjustments to support long-range trends at JMU.
- In conjunction with the Collection Management Department, arrange and prioritize funding for system-wide acquisition of resources as appropriate.

### **Roles within the CDC**

**Chair, Collection Management Librarian**- The Chair of this committee calls meetings, sets the agenda, and keeps the meeting on task. Currently this is a non-voting position and only votes in cases of a tie. Being that this person is also the Collection Management Librarian, information about new resource requests as well as potential cancellations often is brought to her attention by either the Collection Management Department or the Acquisitions Department. Another role of this individual is to provide an overarching, balanced perspective of collections at JMU.

**Associate Dean, Collections & Technical Services, ex officio**- Though this position is ex officio, it is currently a voting ex officio. This position provides information about consortia relationships, particularly VIVA, which dramatically impacts local collections decisions, and budget implications. This position also provides the CDC with information related to the budget including developments on funding directions and university trends, which might influence short and long term strategic priorities of the committee.

**Cluster Coordinators**- Cluster coordinators are expected to represent the recommendations of their constituencies at the CDC meetings. They should bring their cluster perspective to discussions and represent the wishes, needs, and concerns of

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<sup>1</sup> Collection management refers to the act of growing and assessing collections. It is broader than merely collection development which is only adding to the collection. Collection management encompasses the areas of weeding, collection assessment and collection development. In this document delineations will be made between the Collection Management department and the process of collection management.

their cluster. Coordinators also need to have a broad vision of the collection in order to make decisions based on short-term and long-term strategies to serve user needs. The cluster coordinators are expected to disseminate and distill the relevant information to their cluster following CDC meetings. Cluster coordinators are expected to call cluster meetings, set the agenda for these meetings, and ensure that minutes of these meetings are taken and posted. This information should be shared with both the individual cluster as well as the other cluster coordinators to ensure maximum communication between the clusters. Cluster coordinators are expected to facilitate CDC projects on an as needed basis.

**2) Clusters-** Clusters provide additional information to the CDC when budget fluctuations occur (either influx of funds or cutting materials.) Clusters act as **advisory groups** for the Collection Development Committee and they provide elected representation to the CDC. Cluster discussion should continue to focus on collections. Clusters provide the much needed broad input for CDC decisions in order to provide a well-rounded collection at JMU.

**3) Collections Admin-** The third group provides insight into budget, systems, consortia, vendors, and other outside influences that impact collection decisions at JMU. This group, including the L&ET Administration team of Dean, Associate Deans, and Assistant Dean, sets strategic priorities related to resource and materials budget allocation. The Collection Management Department often receives information about vendor deals as well as provides analysis regarding the balance of collections at JMU.

#### **Who makes decisions regarding collections at JMU?**

**Collections Admin-** This group works to set allocations at the beginning of the fiscal year. These decisions establish the amount of funding that will be available for serials and monographs for each year as well as funding lines for special projects and new resources.

**CDC-** The CDC has the primary responsibility for managing continuing expenditure commitments (e.g., periodicals, licensed electronic resources) and makes decisions on major purchases and licenses in response to recommendations from librarians, university faculty, and the library Collection Management Department. This responsibility includes making decisions and managing aggregator packages, multidisciplinary journal collections, e-book collections, and other resources that support general collections.

**Liaisons-**Liaison Librarians make decisions about specific one-time purchases (firm orders) for AV/monographs that come out of their subject allocations. Liaisons also make decisions about departmental approval plans.

#### **Who makes recommendations?**

**CDC-** The Collection Development committee makes recommendations to clusters or individual liaisons regarding the evaluation of resources. This may result in the CDC charging ad hoc committees as necessary.

**Clusters-**Clusters make recommendations to the CDC and establish cluster priorities, including recommendations for big-ticket items with on-going costs.

**Individual Liaisons-** Liaisons should make recommendations to the clusters for cancellation of resources or examination of new resources that would benefit the university.

**Collections Admin-** In response to budget reversions within the university, it may become necessary for the L&ET administration to establish broad guidelines on disposition of collection funds. The Collection Management Department provides data for recommendations to individual liaisons, clusters, or the CDC about new or existing resources based on information from vendors, usage data, or the university.

Clusters will be evaluated at the end of AY 2010 to assess whether they should continue. Some library faculty have expressed some concern that clusters cause extra meetings; others have indicated that the clusters have greatly contributed to increased communication about decisions and have added to the general understanding how collections are handled at JMU.

### **What we learned from each other**

Having clusters follow the overall organizational structure, like at UVa, helps to enforce and reinforce communication channels and accountability standards. While clustering is possible without being a part of the organizational structure, creating buy-in to overall ideas takes more time; however, it is much easier to make big changes to the cluster structure when it isn't part of the organizational structure. Fluidity of structure is a trade off with accountability of individual selectors.

Clearly defining the roles of the clusters and developing communication expectations of the cluster coordinators allows for clarity and transparency of decision making processes related to collections. However, educating the cluster coordinators in the representational aspects of the coordinator position is crucial. The cluster coordinator is representing their cluster in collections committees not just their individual discipline. The success of the cluster is determined by the cluster representative's awareness of their role in the structure.

Staffing in support of Collections is a real asset. Having staff to support the collections, assess them, and promote them allows for clear consistent messages to be distributed to clusters. At JMU, the Collection Management Department gathers and distributes data related to the collections to both the CDC and the cluster representatives. Any selector can request information from the Collection Management Department related to their discipline. At UVa, the information is available but all selectors may not be aware of its existence or know who to make requests to for this data.

While the structures in place at both JMU and UVa both exhibit the cluster structure, both authors acknowledge that while clusters may be in place at both institutions, the cluster might be the only feasible working model and the cluster structures at both institutions will undoubtedly continue to grow and change as the institutions grow and change.

### **What works well with clusters**

Clusters have allowed both UVa and JMU to increase communication about collections. The awareness of collections as well as the transparency of decision making at both institutions has been heightened since the inception of clusters.

Collection development is a moving target, particularly given the budget and the changing



nature of scholarly communication. The distributed nature of clusters allows more participation in discussions related to collections as roles and collection philosophies are redefined. Additionally, clusters allow for more representation in the decision making process since the selectors have a voice at the table with their cluster coordinator. Having more input creates an environment of participation where selectors feel included in the decision process.

Clusters also help centralize processes but allow for discipline-specific flexibility. In the past when budget crises have occurred, each discipline was asked specifically to reach target amounts with a type of resource, such as books or serials. However, with clusters in place UVa asked each cluster to determine where the cuts are made, rather than dictating a specific type of resource cut. Additionally, clusters allow a venue for training. Cluster-specific resources can be highlighted for the relevant disciplines.

### **Areas for Improvement and Future Directions**

Communication continues to be an area where improvements can be made because distributed structures constantly leave areas for misunderstandings. It is important to note that each cluster is only as good as its collection coordinator. If the collection coordinator fails to communicate effectively, the entire cluster is confused. Clustering has created additional meetings for the cluster members. It has also increased the amount of layers in decision making and reporting. Generating a mechanism for continual feedback will continue to be important if clusters are to successfully continue. Cluster members need to see clearly the benefits that being part of a cluster adds to the structure and function of the collections committees.

Clusters contribute to a sibling relationship of comparing "what we get" with "what they get" rather than a collegial relationship with the idea of what is best for our collection as a whole. At JMU, several clusters wanted an indication of how the other clusters were reacting before providing their own cluster feedback. Providing the clusters with explanations on how decisions were reached rather than just what the decisions were should help provide a broader perspective to collections as a whole and steer clusters away from silos of knowledge and expertise by discipline.

At JMU the clusters will be reassessed during Summer 2010 and a recommendation will be made to the library faculty about whether they should remain in place. Since the cluster system is part of the overall organization structure at the University of Virginia Libraries, it is likely to continue to be the central organizing principle for collections management as well. While collections continue to grow and change, clusters at both institutions will have to respond to these changes and continue to evolve.