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FROM MY LIBRARY TO OUR LIBRARY: CHANGING THE CULTURE IN TOUGH TIMES

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INTRODUCTION

Management of collections has become more challenging in these tough economic times. While libraries have experienced collection budgetary constraints, they still need to meet user needs to support their research, teaching, and learning activities. Collection development at Penn State has experienced many changes in the past five years – changes in organization and culture. This paper will not describe how Penn State did everything correctly, because not all changes have resulted in positive outcomes. But the paper will describe how Penn State University Libraries are changing ways of thinking to better respond to ever changing needs of a very large, complex, and diverse university community. Agility is defined as being nimble and quick moving. In the context of library services and resources, it could mean being able to quickly and effectively change priorities and or strategic directions to meet user information needs. Collection development at Penn State five years ago was probably not as agile as it should have been due to its organization and culture.

The primary change that needed to take place was a change in the culture of collection development at Penn State. Culture can be defined as a shared, learned, symbolic system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shapes and influences perception and behavior – an abstract “mental blueprint” or “mental code.” Five years ago, the culture was more focused on local decision making rather than global needs across the university system. A better balance between local and global approaches to collection development at Penn State needed to be found for the good of the Libraries and its users.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Penn State University is the land grant university for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and it is designated by the State Library of Pennsylvania as one of four state-wide library resource centers. The University consists of 24 campuses located across the Commonwealth. The University considers itself a single university, geographically dispersed, not an organization of 24 semi-autonomous campuses even though the culture at the time might have led one to believe otherwise. All campus locations are expected to adhere to the same set of core values outlined in “Priorities for Excellence: Penn State’s Strategic Plan for 2009-2010 through 2013-2014.”¹

Penn State University Libraries provide a wide array of services, collections, and facilities to support teaching, research, and learning. Each of the 24 Penn State campuses strives to tailor their collections and services to both meet the needs of the individual campus library and to also take into account the needs of the local community and broader Penn State community. One of the fastest growing campuses is the World Campus, which offers more than 70 online degrees and certificates. User needs varied across all campus locations, including University Park (the largest campus). Most of the research and graduate study is conducted at University Park. Several of the College Campuses offer graduate degrees and all currently offer undergraduate degrees in selected areas.

Five years ago, the University Libraries reorganized in part to reflect changes in the overall University organizational structure. The budgets of each of the College Campus Libraries had just been moved from each campus administration to the University Libraries, with the exception of the Dickinson School of Law Library and the George T. Harrell Library for the Health Sciences at Hershey Medical Center. The Assistant Dean for Scholarly Communications had just left to assume the role of dean at another institution and the Assistant Dean for Technical and Access Services had also left several months before for a similar position. The Dean reorganized the administration of the Libraries so that all of the Assistant and Associate Deans reported to the Dean. Collection development responsibilities were moved from the administrative level down to the subject, branch, and campus level. A council was formed comprising three subject librarians from University Park, and three from the campus libraries. In addition the Electronic Resources Librarian, head of Serials & Acquisitions Services, and the Assistant Deans serve in ex officio capacities. Council coordinator responsibilities were assigned to a University Park Collections Coordinator and the head of University College Libraries (comprises 14 of the 20 campus libraries). The other significant change was the Dean's decision to separate content decisions from management of the collections budget.

The University Libraries' collections budget is approximately fifteen million dollars allocated between 22 of the 24 campuses. The exceptions are Dickinson Law and Hershey Medical Center libraries that are separate cost centers. While the overall University Libraries' collection budget is a single entity, the budget is divided into three distinct categories – University Park, College Campus Libraries, and system-wide. The University Park collections budget was allocated on a historical basis and included the following categories: print serials, approval plans, firm orders (print monographs, film, etc.), binding, and endowment and gift funding sources. General endowments were allocated across most subject areas and designated endowments assigned to subject areas based on donor instructions. College Campus Libraries collection funds were allocated by a formula implemented over 10 years ago for firm orders, print serials and binding. Each location received an allocation from the main general endowment (Paterno) as well as designated endowments from donors associated with a few campuses. Finally, the largest allocation now supports system-wide resources (databases and e-journals) and services such as document delivery. Unallocated reserve funds generated from savings and new income are also managed on a system-wide basis.

The division of the collections budget into University Park and College Campus Libraries (20 individual campus collection budgets) combined with significant differences in user populations and differing campus cultures resulted in at least the perception of two separate entities that did not necessarily work in concert. There was also the perception, whether true or false, that at least some campus collection budgets were over funded.

MOTIVATION FOR CHANGES

The primary motivation for change in the collection development culture is in support of the Libraries' Strategic plan. "The University Libraries Strategic Plan 2008/2009 – 2012/2013"² provides the framework to ensure library services, resources, and staff meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff. The second goal of the plan addresses collections and states "We will develop excellent collections and information resources in support of scholarship and research worldwide, while promoting new models of scholarly communication based on the developing Cyberinfrastructure."

The economic environment was another important motivator for change. Penn State's collection budget has enjoyed modest increases throughout most of the last ten years due to the apportioning of technology fees assessed to students being assigned to library collections.

However, inflation combined with reductions in other income, such as endowments, has resulted in a reduction in discretionary funds available in recent years. The ability to effectively meet user needs in the near future was threatened as large e-journal package agreements were reducing funding for other resources such as monographs. Clearly, Penn State was not very agile and while a great array of resources were made available to users there was concern for the future and the sustainability of the funding model.

The strategies and tactics on collections in the University Libraries strategic plan emphasized the need for collaboration and cooperation across all campus locations.

STRATEGIES

1. We will steward our collections, making them equally available at all campuses, where feasible, and reallocating resources as necessary to support existing programs and growing areas of teaching and research spawned by interdisciplinary programs in the life and health sciences, international programs, and other key areas.
2. We will work with the University's academic leadership and administration to determine suitable funding models and resources to augment our collections in appropriate areas and accelerate the migration to electronic collections in support of Penn State's strategic initiatives.
3. We will be leaders in national collaborative efforts to make all of our collections and materials more accessible and findable worldwide.
4. We will partner with other research libraries and organizations to promote more openly accessible research findings and data as a public good that benefits society as well as higher education.
5. We will partner with our colleagues in the CIC and around the nation to develop and support digital library programs that make accessible Penn State's unique collections and support our research specialties.
6. We will steward our collections with programs that support the creation, preservation, and discovery of information in all formats for future generations of scholars.

HIGH LEVEL TACTICS

- Reexamine our historical funding models to ensure that our collections funds are used to best advantage in support of Penn State's new and existing areas of academic strengths.
- Analyze disciplinary needs at Penn State to determine how best to acquire and build print collections and continue developing our unique Special Collections.
- When digitizing from our collections, we will focus on our strengths and participate in complementary projects, including the Google Library project, CIC Shared Digital Repository, and other digitization efforts through national/regional organizations.
- Use the Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing to collaborate with the Penn State Press to identify a range of sustainable services that support our researchers' ability to publish their work in ways that best advance their goals.

STRATEGIC INDICATORS

- Investigate and track overall user satisfaction with library collections.
- Review and analyze collections expenditures by disciplinary area and by format.
- Monitor usage of print and electronic collections

Like most other libraries, Penn State needed to better manage its collection budget. The complexity involved effectively managing budgets across so many locations. With so many campuses a more coordinated approach was needed to address important issues such as:

- Format duplication across all formats but especially monographs across all campus locations
- Document delivery and binding costs
- Redefining approval plans
- Cancelling print serials, especially when an e-version is available. Licensing at the system-wide level greatly reduced the need for duplication of print serials. The same can be said for e-books as they are licensed system-wide.

While the university is considered one university, geographically dispersed, the University Libraries has experienced some of the same issues a consortia or large library system have experienced. If the library cannot resolve issues within a single institution, one can imagine how much more difficult change would be in a system of semiautonomous institutions.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Opening of new communication channels between and among librarians at all locations has been one of the most important outcomes. While you can never communicate enough, there has been improvement in this area. Subject groups comprising selectors representing specific disciplines that were formerly based at University Park are now open to librarians at all campuses. Collections funds that were formerly seen as “mine” are now being pooled across several locations to acquire important system-wide online resources. Additionally, all locations are asked to submit collection resource needs to the “Collection Development Wants List”. The improvement in communication has resulted in a much more integrated approach to collection development at Penn State.

Governance by a council can be positive and negative. There is more shared decision making but selectors have expressed concern that the council’s decision making process is not always transparent and inclusive.

Campus libraries are now much more integrated in the overall collection development decision process. This was due to cultural change as well as the need to provide system-wide access to e-journals, databases, and now e-books. That being said, there continues to be some resistance to change on the part of campuses and University Park selectors.

Resistance on the part of some University Park selectors to let go of the notion that the research materials needed to be located at University Park needed to be addressed. This has greatly changed in recent years. In particular, the increase in system-wide electronic resources and decrease in print has overcome the need to locate resources at a particular campus. Recently a campus wide e-slips approval plan was developed that provides selectors at all locations (including University Park) with a tool for selecting monographs that support their campus needs and/or system-wide needs.

A realization on the part of many (but not everyone) that the current campus formula as well as the University Park historical model no longer provides the support needed to effectively address curricular and research needs of such a large complex institution. At least there is now agreement that change in the budget allocation process needs to happen by next fiscal year and this is something that will be undertaken this year.

Finally, like many other libraries Penn State is struggling with developing a more comprehensive approach to collection assessment. However with the establishment this past year of the library-wide assessment council and the need to demonstrate how the library is responding to university strategic initiatives, the library is now planning on launching a library-wide assessment program.

¹ The Pennsylvania State University. "Priorities for Excellence: Penn State's Strategic Plan for 2009-2010 through 2013-2014" <http://www.psu.edu/president/cqi/plans/index.htm> (accessed Jan. 28, 2011)

² The Pennsylvania State University Libraries. "The University Libraries Strategic Plan 2008/2009 – 2012/2013" <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/admin/stratplanjune08.html> (accessed Jan. 28, 2011)