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Something's Gotta Give: Is There a Future for the Collection Development Policy?

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Abstract:

Many libraries and library types utilize collection development policies as the standard for guiding the content and format of current and future collections. While these documents retain value as a summary of departmental desires and acquisitions planning, the multidisciplinary nature of teaching and publishing may be diminishing their use and effectiveness as a means of disseminating library intent. The on-demand nature of new purchase and approval plans, along with the advent of patron-driven acquisitions, has affected much of the ability to engage in the same year-to-year planning best complemented by the traditional collection development policy. If these policies are to remain the standard, or part of a continuing comprehensive collections plan, they must be relevant, available, and understandable in the context of the entire process. Adding to the fun are new models of budget and acquisitions planning used at the University of South Florida, as well as many other institutions, such as patron-driven and purchase on demand acquisitions, the development of an overall (or comprehensive) collections policy, and other elements of the new economic paradigm shift. Other new and updated concepts from the literature also contribute to the discussion on collection policy changes, as well as other ways in which these documents may be altered to adapt to new fiscal and environmental realities.

Much has changed over the last decade with regard to the format, selection, and acquisition of library materials. At the University of South Florida Tampa Library in 2004-5, \$2,092,304 was spent on print monographs and serials and \$2,566,404 on their electronic counterparts. Fast-forward to 2008-9 and that figure has gone through an accelerated transition; \$1,662,524 is now spent on print monographs and serials and a drastically higher number of \$4,236,350 goes to new electronic resources and other materials (*USF Libraries Academic Resources Annual Statistical Summary*). Despite this increasingly radical shift in spending, which is mirrored by other libraries and consortia, collection development policies have remained largely unchanged at many institutions.

The conspectus model, long the standard of proactive and well-planned collection building, may not apply directly to the other important facets of developing and maintaining a research-rich library. To put it more succinctly, is there a future for the collection development policy? A few moments pondering this question leads to other discussion points related to this exploration:

- Do the changes in format and economics require policies that address these shifts?

- If policies remain integral to building collections, does the continued effective use of this type of document require minor tweaks, or massive changes?
- Is the conspectus model relevant/upgradeable?
- Can we use new and other tools to supplement, or replace current policy formats (i.e. comparative tools, such as *WorldCat Collection Analysis* and *GoldRush*)
- What types of policies or methods are needed for balanced collections? For collections of distinction?

A quick review of the literature finds experts and publications on both sides of the fence. In 2005, Kennedy makes the argument that these documents are important in the planning of new collections, regardless of format, and that they are needed now more than ever (p. 241). He also makes the argument that the ever-changing format and platform for digital materials makes collection decisions even more important as "preservation implications" are much larger than in the print universe (Kennedy, p. 242, 2005). Is a standard collection development policy the right weapon for this future battle, or are other more comprehensive changes required?

In reviewing many of the articles on this topic, it was often difficult to discern whether there was a call for the large-scale changes in the continued development of policy documents. In the specialized medical library environment, Douglas makes an elegant argument regarding the drastic update to fight the fact that "rapid changes in the library's environment quickly overcame the policy's usefulness" (p. 16, 2009). This was the first of many that noted the lack of flexibility in the continued use of the conspectus model in the electronic environment.

There are many versions of this model and a classic example is exhibited by the IFLA document titled "Guidelines for a Collection Development Policy Using the Conspectus Model". This document, updated thoroughly in 2001, appears to represent the zenith of purchasing power and format harmony in the academic library format. Even this document, however, references to the move "from holdings ('just in case') to access ('just in time') strategies" (Biblarz, et al, p. 1, 2001). The document itself is now somewhat dated, but continues to hold some value in helping libraries to develop and target quantitative, qualitative, and other measures. The depth indicators included in this document have long been the standard, but how can these systems be effectively upgraded to suit new platforms and other environmental changes?

The current environment also presents a number of other pressures on collection development and acquisitions librarians. Covi and Cragin posit the need for different measures of use and for collection gaps depending on format. These authors argue that each type of resource becomes "lost" or "invisible" in different ways; do these concerns warrant policies to address the unique facets of the print and electronic materials (Covi & Cragin, p. 321, 2004). Other authors, such as Horava, also make grand arguments about the changing face of collections and that it's not just important to measure the level of content, but also the ability to disseminate the information (Horava, p. 143, 2009). How do these influence libraries to build new types of collections and policy documents?

Selecting peer and aspirant libraries for collection goal setting is not a new practice, but the availability of new comparative tools have drastically in-

creased the ability of institutions to target balanced collections, as well as those that are purposely unbalanced. At the USF Tampa Library, the *WorldCat Collection Analysis* tool has been frequently employed to compare holdings to those at other libraries. This has been most comprehensively employed in the Arts, where this tool was combined with other authoritative lists to build collections that serve both the general and research populations.

With LibQUAL results at many libraries strongly asserting the desire of patrons and scholars to find, access, and archive materials on their own, do current policy models address the needs of this new model of user? With the ever-expanding power of web tools and databases (specifically, Google Scholar), more and more is 'findable'. These pressures certainly place more emphasis on the ability of the library to react to the research scholar. This is combined with an overall reduction in fiscal and planning ability to proactively collect a wide-range of materials. This encourages librarians to carefully monitor and respond to faculty needs, as well as to gain maximum input into any possible collection planning efforts.

In the near future, the literature suggests more of the same; Bracke, et al, suggest expending less time on "approval plans and shelf-ready books" and more effort "on higher level tasks to support the changing needs of students and faculty" (p. 257, 2010). The ability of the subject and public services librarian to guide the collections not been diminished, just moved slightly in another direction. Less time perusing the new books means more time to develop new types of collection policies and other collection-guiding efforts. Richard Snow titled his 1996 work, "Wasted Words: The Written Collection Development Policy and the Academic Library". If this was the theme 15 years ago, what truth does this hold today? If Snow was able to effectively argue then about the duplicity of effort in creating policies and profiles, where are we in 2011 (p. 193, 1996).

The near future also promises more of the same challenge of growing the collection without growing the budget. There are various ways that libraries and the literature suggest in dealing with these common pressures. As with many libraries, Chadwell writes on the benefits of the crossover of Inter-

library Loan (ILL) and Purchase-on-Demand (POD) activities. This type of user-centered collection building represents an excellent opportunity to place basic safety restrictions, while allowing the serendipitous user development of a library's holdings (Chadwell, p. 71, 2009).

These authors are not alone and many have used the popularity of e-books and new purchase programs to guide new purchases. If these activities may be properly assessed, there is potential to use this information to drive new purchase practices (spending by area, or format) and guidelines. In a 2008 article, Gibson and Kirkwood examine a Purchase-on-Demand pilot developed at the University of Arkansas. Based on early clustering and group purchase efforts, this library discusses the use of ILL, Circulation, and other data to drive collections, but argues that all are less effective than the potential demonstrated by POD (Gibson & Kirkwood, p. 49, 2008). As quoted from later in the article, "Purchasing items "on demand" is better than purchasing in anticipation of a perceived need that may not exist" (p. 50). How do libraries harness this energy, in policy or other format? The USF Libraries have also moved to purchase on demand and will continue to utilize and assess the current model.

The ability to measure the circulation (if print) and use (if electronic) of materials purchased on demand will also help to guide purchasing policies and practices. The development of interdepartmental buying will likely necessitate the existence of some documented guidelines, but the strength of libraries right now has been the demonstrated ability to react to these changes. Even with the limbs in constant motion, the heart is more important than ever; by assertively bringing faculty into the process, however it evolves, libraries will be increasingly relevant in the new and sometimes fragmented research projects and centers. This is not to suggest disorganization, but opportunity for library inclusion in the development of new overall models of research and dissemination.

Collection development policies must embrace any and all input, while simultaneously continuing to build collections that meet the goals and initiatives of the faculty and university as a whole. In his 2010 article on the future role of collection managers, Nabe coins the term "macro-selection", which now appears to be quite common method of purchase across multiple formats (including e-books) and libraries (p. 5, 2010). Libraries are often "forced" into large group or consortia purchases by economic realities or deals too good to pass up. If this efficiency may be effectively harnessed, these practices may become an important part of new collection policies.

As libraries budget with increasing care and forward planning, the collection development policy will continue to have value. As demonstrated by the literature, however, wholesale changes in other parts of the environment certainly require another look at updating or replacing the conspectus model. Some universities, such as Vanderbilt University Medical Center, the University of Virginia Health System, and the Northwestern University Health Sciences Library have moved to collection "philosophies". What makes these documents different (and does it make them better)? Many libraries, including USF, have also developed overall collection development policies that espouse the overall goals and guidelines for all elements of the collection. Perhaps the value of these documents will increase as crossover and package deals rise in popularity.

What is certain is that the human role is required now more than ever. The collection is a living object and it requires constant care and assessment to meet changing user needs and numbers. Using POD and other programs will help to ensure the maximum user input into the selection, de-selection, and retention of materials, while allowing library professionals to "prepare the menu", so to speak. The increasing number of choices demands an effective and symbiotic partnership between the library and the research community in the development of both collections and collection planning.

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