

Working Together To Win: The 21st Century Acquisitions Department

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Working Together To Win: The 21st Century Acquisitions Department

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Abstract:

This paper will discuss designing an academic library Acquisitions department from square one. Strategies will be examined for interacting with other library and campus units.

It's now time for Acquisitions 101, and together we are ready to develop this department. I would meet with the staff, individually, and ask four key questions:

1. Tell me what you do, and for how long.
2. What do you like about your job?
3. What changes would you like to see? Suggestions for improvement?
4. What can I do to make your job better? (Not only your job, but we could discuss your work environment, start/end times, lunch hour, etc.)

I would evaluate all of the reports and see if there were any common themes and work to address them. I would then focus on the Core Team, and together we would begin to function in a team environment based on shared governance and an awareness of all of the elements that make up an Acquisitions department. Our primary mission is to acquire materials in the format requested in a timely and cost-effective manner to support the students and faculty.

The Top 5 Priorities (to develop the functions of the department):

1. Budget
2. Positions
3. Vendors
4. Subscriptions
5. Procedures

First of all, I would need to learn the materials budget, funds, and fund allocations. I would also need to learn my authority (Can I shift funds if I see them being expended?), as well as learn about the bibliographer's selection processes and their subjects—how the process works. Collection development drives the materials budget. I would spend

time with each member of the Core Team and start to learn their jobs—the day to-day-operation—so that I could begin to help them and assess for any training needs. I would also ask about their learning style: visual or written.

Procedures & Workflows

How are the invoices posted and paid? Learn how the orders—firm, approval, e-resources, arrives at Acquisitions. How are renewals processed—who works on them?

Learn all of the procedures and workflows of the department. Ask the Core Team for their input. Have weekly staff meetings with the Core Team throughout the first semester. Then change to every other week. This would be a time to discuss project status, budget updates, upcoming renewals, and just talk. I would have monthly meetings with the entire staff—to touch base, discuss any problems, make sure that everything was running smoothly, and discuss library happenings from my meetings.

Discuss each member's system knowledge and its capabilities and how the system responds to the individual tasks. How is an order record created? Each library has a different way of doing things, and it'd be my job to learn your ways of handling the processes.

Who are our vendors? I would want to establish contact fairly quickly. Meet with the major vendors and review the profiles, discounts.

What do we subscribe to? What are our packages? What are the consortia agreements? How are they negotiated? The main focus of Acquisitions is on the fiscal year—there's the setting of the budget and the allocations entered, there is fund monitoring throughout the year, and as the fiscal year begins to wind down, purchasing decisions have to be finalized.

Now that we have our department, where do we fit in, how does our work impact the other library departments and even the campus? The Acquisitions department does not stand alone; we need the cooperation and seek the collaboration of many library departments and other campus offices.

It's vital for Acquisitions to interact with the other departments of the library, and needs to have contact with and visit the branches. Some departments will of course work more closely with Acquisitions as functions are inter-related and there will be collaborative projects.

Need to make sure that it's known that Acquisitions is willing to go the extra mile to provide outstanding service—willingness to work with faculty, able to rush an item here.

Communication is a priority—we have to talk to each other to solve problems, develop new processes, and to understand where we fit into the organization.

The point I want to make is: commit to develop plans to take action to work with the other departments to provide exemplary service.

I would meet with the heads to see how Acquisitions could better serve their mission and see how Acquisitions would interact with the various departments.

First off, I would want to build a strong relationship between Acquisitions and the other Technical Services departments. I would encourage Acquisitions staff to know key elements of these departments. I would envision a close working relationship with Cataloging Services as our functions are inter-related. I would want to know their workflow, from how the carts of books get to Cataloging to the complex processes.

Outside of interactions with the Technical Services departments, there should be a close working relationship with Collection Development. The staff members of Reference and Circulation are on the front lines of the library that have to deal with students, staff and faculty and you never know what is coming next.

As far as other significant interactions outside of the library, I would establish a beachhead with the University Purchasing and Accounting departments. These are the departments that I feel would need to have significant interactions with the Acquisitions department.

The Acquisitions department has been designed and developed, key interactions with other departments have been decided; now it's time to acquire the materials.

Denise Davis, in "The Conditions of U.S. Libraries: Academic Library Trends, 1999-2009," remarks that 95% of Americans agree that college and research libraries are an essential part of the learning community. It is encouraging to know that what we do is still needed.

In "Trends in Academic Libraries, 1998-2008," it is stated that information resources consumed a larger portion of the budget than did salaries. Academic libraries are buying materials; the format of the content purchased has changed dramatically since the turn of the century.

- Academic Libraries (1998-2008): Increase in e-book purchases from 64 million to 102 million.
- Academic Libraries (1998-2008): Increase in serial subscriptions from 16 million to 25 million.
- Academic Libraries (1998-2008): AV materials added fluctuate across academic libraries.
- Academic Libraries (1998-2008): Microforms have shown a steady decline since 1998, most marked decline was in FY 2008.
- Academic Libraries (1998-2008): paper materials added were at 24 million.

Academic libraries are buying materials; however, the format of the content purchased has changed dramatically since the turn of the century. (Trends in Academic Libraries) As we look at the available formats and it is decided what to buy—how will we purchase or decide not purchase materials? What are our options?

Patron-driven Acquisitions

The 2010 ACRL Report, "Top Trends in Academic Libraries," discusses that collection growth is increasingly driven by patron demand. Budget reductions and user preference for electronic access has led libraries to shift from a just-in-case to a just-in-time philosophy. This change has been facilitated by customized patron-driven acquisitions programs.

State Consortia

The cooperative purchasing agreements within states has been a salvation for libraries to have access to important e-resources and to maximize materials budgets.

Amigos and Lyrasis

These 2 membership organizations for collaborative purchasing provide discounts on resources with many benefits: renewals, invoices. Lyrasis seems to be at the forefront now, their membership fee is \$1,200.00 compared to Amigo's at \$4,000.00.

Eliminating the Big Deals

A "Chronicle of Higher Education" article from July, entitled "Libraries Abandon Expensive "Big Deal" Subscription Packages to Multiple Journals," tells of the Univ of Oregon's library's financial double punch in 2008: budget crunch and soaring journal subscription prices, particularly Elsevier and Wiley. The Big Deals provide large collections of journals but lock you into multiyear deals that eat up budgets faced with reductions. Southern Illinois Univ had the same problem—the deals ate up 40% of the materials budget. Plus there's an increase of 5% or more every year. Both univ's renegotiated some and cut others altogether in favor of a return to individual subscriptions. The consequences that many librarians feared—loud objections from faculty members and financial penalties from publishers have not come to pass. Southern Illinois cut 230 subs mainly in science and engineering (the most expensive) and saved \$300,000. They now have scaled back agreements with Elsevier and Wiley and purchase title-by-title from Springer. Oregon joined forces with Oregon State and Portland State to collaborate on purchases and eliminate duplications. All of this takes hard work on the part of librarians and it can be tough negotiating with the big publishers. Something to think about, time for librarians to fight back.

Speaking of Elsevier, they are taking inspiration from consumer-driven sites such as Apple.com, Netflix.com and putting its content API up for grabs and opening an app marketplace. Content API (Application Programming Interface)—a way for 2 computer applications to talk to each other. Elsevier states that applications are going to be the new content and that it would open content API's to subscribers of ScienceDirect, Scopus and Hub giving users a gateway to search across Elsevier. This has come about from extensive interview with librarians, engineers, and members of the scientific community. A strong role is seen for librarians to connect patrons with the people who can build applications for their community.

Interlibrary Loan

Academic libraries (1998-2008) nationwide reported Interlibrary loans of more than 11 million books, articles and other materials. ("Conditions of U.S. Libraries") We need to start looking at the need to purchase the materials that are being loaned and weigh the costs of loaning vs. purchasing. Format + Purchase = Management. We know what Acquisitions needs to purchase and how to purchase, but how will we manage it?

Budget

The materials budget drives Acquisitions. There are budget priorities—the sustained subscriptions, then monographs: e-books/print/dvd. The planning of these budget priorities are important—the time of the year that the large subscriptions invoices arrive. Fund structure/Order records:

The fund structure has to be set-up as an accurate representation of expenditures and re-examined on a monthly basis. The order records have to reflect the accurate fund or it will skew expenditures.

Serials ERM Priorities

An article from the March 2011 issue of *Library Journal* entitled "Building a Better ERMS," did a survey to establish librarians top ERM priorities. Here are three:

1. Workflow Management—biggest deficiency and disappointment.
2. License Management—is a benefit, but a laborious manual process to load.

3. Acquisitions Functionality- no centralized system for fund mgt, budget projections support, expenditure by categories reporting, ready access to cost data.

We subscribe to all these wonderful e-resources, but managing them can be problematic.

Serials on the Run

JSTOR and Open Access: the big, recent announcement from JSTOR about the freely available content to more than 500,000 articles from over 200 journals, including the pre-1923 U.S publications and the pre-1870 global publications. This is very exciting in light of the JSTOR hacking incident.

Collaborative Efforts

There are increased collaborative efforts that expand the role of the library such as the Hathi Trust shared digital repository which is open to research institutions world-wide. Cornell and Columbia University Libraries have formed an innovative partnership called 2CUL that will result in a pooling of resources and integration in cataloging, e-resource management, collaborative collection development, and digital preservation.

Vendor Relationships

The vendor world continues to change rapidly. Ebsco is really rocking and rolling—might be time to buy stock, as they have purchased NetLibrary and most recently Wilson, which is being called the merger of the century. Ebsco's goal is to have the Wilsons's available by December 31. Other mergers are that ProQuest acquired two Lexis-Nexis products: Congressional Information Service and University Publications of America. These mergers can have advantages and disadvantages. No need to contact these vendors separately. But are they get-

ting so large and diverse—will these merger impact products and will customer service suffer?

Cardinal Rules of Acquisitions (applies to purchasing and management). All three are inter-related:

Art of the Deal
Cost-effective
Quick Delivery

Work with your established vendors to provide better deals at discounted costs. I have noticed in recent years that vendors are increasingly offering deals of 2+ years or more s in order to lock in libraries. And finally, you want the item delivered quickly no matter if it's a print book or a system.

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