

## Gift-Gaining: Ideas for Effective Gift Processing

Mark C. Henley  
*University of North Texas*, mark.henley@unt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

An indexed, print copy of the Proceedings is also available for purchase at:

<http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston>.

You may also be interested in the new series, Charleston Insights in Library, Archival, and Information Sciences. Find out more at: <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston-insights-library-archival-and-information-sciences>.

---

Mark C. Henley, "Gift-Gaining: Ideas for Effective Gift Processing" (2014). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315558>

# Gift-Gaining: Ideas for Effective Gift Processing

Mark Henley, Contracts Librarian, Collection Development, University of North Texas Libraries

## Abstract

Personnel turnover and other factors led the University of North Texas Libraries to repurpose staffing to process gift items in 2014. None of the new personnel had experience in evaluating gifts. As the reassigned personnel began its work, it became clear that intensive training and a reevaluation of procedures was necessary for effective processing of these materials. This presentation looked at the issues that arose and the solutions that emerged from the reevaluation. Told from the perspective of the new gifts coordinator, the session sought to present a case study that provided attendees with examples of tools they can implement and pitfalls to avoid as they evaluate their own gift policies. Attendees also shared some of their own experiences in dealing with gift processing in their libraries.

## Introduction

In 2014, the intake of and processing of gift materials by the UNT Libraries shifted significantly to staff who were previously uninvolved in the process. With the change in the number and positions of the staff, the gift procedures needed to be evaluated and updated. This presentation walked through those procedures, exposing the issues that the staff faced as they grappled with their new responsibilities. The presentation concluded with reflections on the process, some of the lessons learned, and ideas for future success.

## Setting

The University of North Texas Libraries received 3,045 book gift donations in 2014, up from 2,675 in 2013. 1,169 or 38% of those donations were added to the Libraries' holdings, going into the current collections, added as second copies, or sent to remote storage. 1,379 or 52% were added to the holdings in 2013.

The Coordinator of Collection Development announced her imminent retirement at the end of 2013. One of her duties was coordinating gift intake and evaluation. The Contracts Librarian absorbed those duties fully at the onset of her retirement in April 2014. The Contracts Librarian had no experience with gift processing prior to assuming these duties.

Gift evaluation prior to the departure was done by the Coordinator of Collection Development and one graduate assistant. Since the departure, gift

evaluation has been done by the Contracts Librarian, a graduate assistant, a student assistant, and two ordering staff. Gift processing is not the primary duty of any of these staff members.

Gifts are governed by the UNT Libraries' Collection Development Policy (<http://www.library.unt.edu/policies/collection-development/collection-development-policy>) and the UNT Libraries Gift Policy (<http://www.library.unt.edu/policies/gifts/unt-libraries-gift-policy>). The gifts coordinator performs a triage of donations. There are five item types that are not evaluated by the gifts coordinator: those of interest to the Special Collections department, government documents, music, media, and periodicals. These types of items are sent to their respective departments. For various purposes, the extent of each donation must be forwarded by the gifts coordinator to the Libraries' Assistant Dean for External Relations. The gifts coordinator also determines if a bookplate is necessary for the donated items and maintains a spreadsheet of the names of donors and the types of items included in the donation.

Items are then evaluated for condition and retention. Books that are mildewed, have missing parts, or for some other reason are unacceptable for the collection are disposed of in the most effective way, usually discarding or recycling. Items that are physically suitable are then evaluated for addition to the collection. Some uncommon items have special rules. These include UNT dissertations, art catalogs, art books, popular works, graphic novels, UNT

yearbooks, computer books, older science books, cookbooks, and kits.

Evaluating staff first check the online catalog to determine if the Libraries already own a copy of the item. If not, the item is added to the collection if it supports curriculum or research initiatives. If the Libraries own a copy then it is added to the collections as a second copy or second volume. Items with older publication dates (older than five years) and earlier editions of things already in the collection (that have 10 or more circulation instances within the last two years) are sent to remote storage. Items with publication dates within the last five years and the most current editions of items that circulate heavily (10 or more circulation instances in the past year) are added to the current collections. High circulation is defined as circulation of 10 instances in one year. The print version of a library-owned e book is kept, as well as books that are included in the Libraries' McNaughton book rental plan. Books with CDs, disk, etc., are given to the gifts coordinator, as well as problem books such as discs where the book cannot be located and instructor's manuals where the accompanying book has not been located. If necessary, bookplate information is added and the statistics worksheet is updated. This spreadsheet indicates who processed items for a certain day and the number of items that were added to the current collections, sent to remote storage, marked as an added copy or volume, recycled, marked for surplus, or sent to another department.

### **Issues/Solutions**

As the new gifts coordinator assumed his duties, several issues arose that hindered effective gift processing. First, effective training was difficult. The two ordering personnel had been briefly trained six months prior to the retirement of the Collection Development Coordinator. With no additional practice supplemental training was necessary. Two training sessions took place in May and July. The inexperience of the gifts coordinator, the nature of the procedures document, and looming end-of-year ordering deadlines stalled the effectiveness of the training.

Bookplates presented a problem. Directions for bookplates were not in the procedures documentation. There was some recollection that bookplates were necessary for any item where the identity of the donor was known. This was putting a tremendous strain on the evaluating and cataloging personnel due to the massive amount of donations coming in during the summer break (around 10 boxes each week). In addition to the volume of donations coming in the task of keeping track of individual donations in the sorting area became problematic. After consulting with the Libraries External Relations department it was determined that bookplates would only be created only in those cases where the donor explicitly asks for one to be included.

No instruction as to what was appropriate to the curriculum was present in the procedure materials. The previous gifts coordinator was heavily involved with the collection and with the faculty of many University departments. The new gifts coordinator was strictly involved in acquisitions for the majority of his career. The new Collection Development Coordinator created a list of Library of Congress subjects that were included in the Libraries' approval plan so that staff evaluators could more easily determine if the donated item supports curriculum and research initiatives.

During the intake of materials, many items in foreign languages, particularly Chinese and Russian, were being evaluated. Since the university does not offer degrees in those languages, some of the staff suggested that those materials not be added to the collection. Similarly, the Special Collections department clarified their policies and significantly narrowed their scope of desired materials. The wording in the procedures document for Special Collections evaluation now reflects their policies. In both instances, previously evaluated materials required reevaluation.

The revisions to the bookplate policy, the foreign language policy, and the special collections policies, as well as the creation of the curriculum aid led to a revision and reorganization of the procedures document. The original procedures document was oriented toward the individual coordinating gifts, but was difficult to follow by those not familiar with the procedures or

evaluating materials. The new gifts coordinator revised the document to include an overview of the entire process at the beginning of the document and sought to make it usable by any personnel if the gift coordinator were to leave or be absent. For example, the instructions for intake, originally at the beginning of the procedures document, were moved to the end as an appendix since the majority of the staff members using the document do not need that process to complete their evaluation of materials.

### **Assessment and Next Steps**

In reflecting on the change in personnel, there are a couple of lessons learned. Although the outgoing gifts coordinator helped train some of the staff, it was only after her departure that the workflow became clearer. For any future changes of this magnitude, it would be wise to plan for considerable time after the staff change to assess workflow and make adjustments.

After the changes in specifications for foreign language and special collections materials, many items were reevaluated. In retrospect, there could have been better negotiation with other departments, and the changes could have been applied to future gifts only. Since new gifts are being taken in continually, having to reevaluate older material is possibly an inefficient use of time and resources.

Moving forward, there are several concrete steps to ensure future success.

1. Create an issues log as part of the procedures document. This will allow issues to be captured in the moment, and addressed during procedure revisions.
2. Create a working list of interest areas. This will allow the staff to quickly determine if gifts are useful to the collection, or will most likely be discarded. Positively, this could include new University programs where a collection has not been established. Or, a list of commonly donated items that the Libraries already have in the collection and that are commonly discarded or sent

to surplus could be compiled to influence the types of materials gifted.

3. Update procedures regularly. This keeps the process fresh in the coordinator's mind.
4. Provide refresher training regularly that includes hands-on instruction. Because this activity is no one's primary assignment, it is easy to forget the process and get confused when evaluating items. It might prove wise to conduct training whenever significant updates to the procedures occur.
5. Run an assessment of the efficiency of the gift processing procedure. This can be helpful to streamline workflows and direct staff resources. One potential investigation would be to evaluate the percentage of items added from donations to determine the priority of gift addition. Another area of investigation would be to see if items should be evaluated for addition to the general collections before triaging the items to specialized departments.

### **Conclusion**

Staff turnover in 2014 led to the reassigning of various roles in the University of North Texas Libraries Collection Development department. One such reassignment was the Contracts Librarian assuming the role of gifts coordinator. Very quickly, the new gifts coordinator saw the need for additional training. Training sessions allowed staff to gain gift evaluation experience and express points of confusion and clarification with the evaluation procedures. Staff comments based on their evaluating experiences led to gift workflow reassessment which, in turn, provided the impetus for the new gifts coordinator to create a new procedures document to capture information and establish consistent methods for all of the staff working on this project. With necessary maintenance and updating, these new procedures will help ensure effective gift processing in the future.