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# Issues in Vendor-Library Relations: Another Model for Acquisitions - The University of Pretoria

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# Profiles Encouraged:

Judy Webster



**Career:** I have 26 years' experience at the University of Tennessee Libraries. I started in 1969 as a circulation clerk with no thought of becoming a librarian. During

the next few years, I received lots of encouragement from a library school professor, Carl Cox, and the Director of Libraries at UTK, Dick Boss. I finished my MSLS in 1978. A year later, I interviewed for the head of acquisitions at UTK and was hired into my first professional position. From 1987 to 1990, I doubled as the acting head of collection development. In 1992, my position expanded to include the Serials and Binding departments. In 1995, I was promoted to the rank of full professor.

**Proudest accomplishment:** Chairing the UTK Commission for Women and convincing the University Administration to open a daycare center for children of employees.

**Educational highlight and life-changing experience:** Attended the HERS program at Bryn Mawr in 1989.

**My other life:** Listening to Bach, choral singing (especially Early Music), embarking on marathon photographic expeditions with my husband Bill "Lighthouse Getaway" Britten, reading (especially British mysteries).

**Favorite authors for leisure reading:** Iris Murdoch, Susan Howatch (series on the history of the English church), A.S. Biatt, Colin Dexter, Dorothy Sayers, Robert Goddard, Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood.

**Favorite poet:** Louise Bogan.

**Faraway Goal:** To spend a summer traipsing around Oxford looking for Inspector Morse.

**Single most important piece of advice:** Trust your instincts and take a chance.

# Issues in Vendor-Library Relations

Another Model For Acquisitions: The University of Pretoria

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## Another Model for Acquisitions: The University of Pretoria

by Barry Fast

I recently visited the University of Pretoria, one of the largest and oldest universities in South Africa. They have developed one of the more unusual and innovative reorganizations of their acquisitions department. The underlying philosophy of this innovation is the concept of getting decision-making and responsibility into the hands of people who understand best the needs of their "customers," the faculty and students. In business we call it empowerment and working in customer-oriented teams. At the University of Pretoria they have adapted this new business world thinking to the academic environment.

Instead of centralized departments responsible for acquisitions of books, serials, AV materials and collection development, the library has created nine subject-oriented teams. Each team handles all the functions of the selection and acquisition of information, whether that information is formatted as a book, journal, CD or anything else. The teams each handle logically associated subjects:

1) Theology, Education & Social Science; 2) Economics & Management Sciences; 3) Undergraduate Services & General Reference; 4) Law; 5) Natural Sciences and Engineering; 6) Humanities; 7) Agriculture; 8) Medicine; 9) Veterinary Science.

The teams report to the head of acquisitions, Monica Hammes, who coordinates and facilitates their work. She provides them with a list of approved vendors, and she works with them to evaluate vendor performance and share the information among the teams. Each team does its own collection development selections in consultation with

faculty. The teams order from vendors, receive the material, process the invoices and handle most of the financial details. While each team is focused on specific subject areas and is accountable for all aspects of selection and acquisition, there is plenty of cooperation among the teams. If one team, for instance, does not acquire enough journals to justify a position for a person experienced in serials, it can contract with another team to acquire their journals. Experimentation is encouraged, and regular meetings are held to share new ideas and confirm the effectiveness of traditional procedures. Morale is high because people feel valued and free to apply for openings on other teams as they occur.

This approach to acquisitions and collection development is less than two years old, and there are still bugs to be worked out. However, it appears that there is no loss in efficiency, with no more people employed in all the functions than were previously engaged in this work. From a vendor's standpoint, there does not appear to be any confusion or redundancy. We have to make sure that the right books get to the right teams, but that is no more difficult than dealing with multiple libraries in a large university system.

The library is evaluating its innovations as they are implemented. It is too soon to have a detailed and substantial evaluation of this team approach to acquisitions and collection management. But to the people involved, the team approach is stimulating. The library "customers" are satisfied with these early results. As a vendor very much involved in the process, it is interesting to be working with a library so deeply involved in a new, experimental approach to the selection and acquisition of information.

