What ARE We Thinking? Collections Decisions in an Academic Library

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What ARE We Thinking? Collections Decisions in an Academic Library

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Abstract

When faced with multiple competing priorities for investment in library resources, there are many important aspects to consider. From student enrollment to prominence of programs, there are both data-driven and intangible factors to weigh. In addition, most library collections now focus on the immediate needs of students and researchers instead of collecting for posterity. This just-in-time versus just-in-case collection development mindset prioritizes different resource attributes and requires an often unfamiliar level of acquisitions flexibility.

Collection development in academic libraries is challenging and complex. Some of the complexity is the result of numerous choices including, but not limited to:

Collection building philosophy: comprehensive or lean format options (print, electronic, streaming, etc.)

Selection options: firm orders and approval plans utilized by library staff or patron-driven acquisition

Additional factors: access models (IP-based or passworded); availability of COUNTER compliant usage statistics; accessibility; licensing terms; preservation and long-term access; pricing models; usability, etc.

Further complexity arises from institutional demands, such as curricular and research support.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of collections preferences from several viewpoints. The authors will share factors to consider, pitfalls to avoid, and communication strategies to employ. A collaboratively-created checklist for adding scholarly resources is included, and a reading list for more in-depth treatment of this topic is provided.

Large, Interdisciplinary Institution

Syracuse University is a large and diverse private institution. With more than 20,000 FTE, 1,200 faculty, and 3,500 staff, meeting the research needs of this community requires a broad view of scholarship at the University. Faculty and students at Syracuse University have high expectations that library resources and services will fully meet their needs. The University's programs range from performing arts to biomedical engineering and everything in between. Some of the more highly ranked schools and colleges include the School of Information Studies (iSchool), the SI Newhouse School of Public Communications, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, and the Martin J. Whitman School of Management. There

is an increasing emphasis on serving veterans' needs with the development of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families that provides programs related to education, entrepreneurship, and transitioning to civilian life (IVMF, n.d.). In addition, a medical school to train doctors to care for military veterans at VA hospitals is also under consideration (Boll, 2015).

Collection development is accomplished at Syracuse University Libraries by a small team of collection development and analysis librarians with significant input from subject liaison librarians. The subject liaison librarians have close working relationships with the departments and colleges they serve and are well suited to contribute to collection development decisions.

The collections budget has been healthy with realistic inflationary increases. The Libraries are fortunate that the central administration recognizes the need for highly regarded resources to support scholarship at the University.

While the Libraries are fiscally sound, staffing levels have declined after an unusual amount of staff turnover. This has led to collection development challenges as key staff are tackling multiple jobs with many competing priorities. As a result, there are electronic resource acquisition, management, and maintenance workflows that need attention and streamlining. These challenges affect the selection of resources because items under consideration need to be easy to acquire, maintain, and access.

One of the first considerations made when deciding whether to acquire a new resource is determining how well it fits in with the current collection. An overlap analysis (using Serial Solutions' product) can be conducted for journal or e-book packages. The Libraries also need to consider duplicative "types" of products owned. For example, do we currently have access to databases containing datasets, or do we need an additional product? The number of students and faculty who will benefit from a new resource is also a consideration, but many of the resources acquired are used by a narrow slice of the University community. While we rely on data-driven information when making cancellation decisions, much of the information used when making acquisition decisions is subjective. The number of students and faculty that could use a given resource is acknowledged, but so is the relative significance of the resource under consideration. New and underserved curricular needs may be of greater importance than many other factors, including prominence of programs. Syracuse University seeks to build collections to meet current and future campus demands.

Product access and usability issues are a major concern to the Libraries. We strive to acquire resources that are available to the campus community via IP authentication. The Libraries ask all vendors to fill out a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) that documents conformance with accessibility standards (ITI,

2015). Other product usability aspects include responsive web design (so that content can be easily read on most devices), unlimited simultaneous users, and the possibility of patron-driven acquisition for a resource.

The ease with which users can discover content is of significant importance to the Libraries. Resources, such as an e-book or journal package, that can be easily "turned on" in the discovery layer (e.g., Summon, EBSCO, Discovery Service, or WorldCat Discovery) are favored, as are those e-book packages that freely provide MARC records. Of increasing importance is the ability for users to discover library content via Google Scholar. In order for this to be accomplished, Google Scholar users must see at least the complete author-written abstract or the first full page without being required to log in or click through (Google Scholar, n.d.).

Of course, data are used to help make and support collection development decisions. When considering individual journal titles and journal packages, interlibrary loan (ILL) requests are used to assess needs. The Libraries often consider vendor-provided turnaway data (unsuccessful full-text e-book or article requests) as well. A demonstrated desire by patrons for unavailable materials is a compelling reason to acquire content. As alluded to previously, an overlap analysis, to determine uniqueness of content may also help inform decisions. The ability to assess materials after purchase or lease via COUNTER compliant usage data is also an important consideration.

There are many ways content can be purchased or leased by an institution, and these methods are very dependent on budgetary constraints and institutional preferences. Furthermore, content can be acquired via aggregators, publishers, or by individual selection. When conducting transactions with vendors, be certain that both parties are clear about the products and types of content access under consideration. Attributes desirable in one product (no DRM for e-books) may be irrelevant for other products (print books). In sum, there are many elements that influence collection development decisions at institutions. Librarians use a combination of institutional and

subject knowledge, user input, data, and intuition to make informed and sound choices.

Small, Specialized Institution

SUNY Polytechnic Institute (SUNY Poly) is a new institution within the State University of New York. Formed in 2013, SUNY Poly is comprised of merging a small institute of technology, SUNY IT, with a division of the University of Albany, the College of Nanoscale Sciences and Engineering (CNSE). SUNY IT offered mostly undergraduate degrees in technology and professional studies, while CNSE offered mostly graduate degrees, with a small but growing undergraduate population. With the merger, SUNY Poly will become a PhD-granting institution, and will move toward becoming a research center within the SUNY system. The merged SUNY Poly includes two main sites, one in Utica, NY, and the other in Albany, NY, about 90 miles apart. The new SUNY Poly Institute focuses on both educational excellence and economic innovation through public-private partnerships. During its first year in 2013, SUNY Poly became number one in the nation in research funding from business (NSF, 2014). In addition to corporate funding, SUNY Poly has worked closely with New York state officials to attract high-tech companies to New York, with SUNY Poly serving as the research and development partner facilitating innovation hubs across the state.

While SUNY Poly's merger creates an exciting new institution to build new educational and research partnerships across New York State, providing library services to such an institution is challenging. Finding the best fit for library resources is the most difficult part of determining what collections services are needed. SUNY Poly's institutional makeup is one that allows it to serve many different niches, but often leads to difficulty in finding a cost-effective and user-friendly manner of providing access to research resources. SUNY Poly has several qualities that create issues with obtaining library resources: a relatively small student FTE (currently approximately 2,500), with small PhD programs, approximately 250 teaching faculty, with over 750 research staff, many of whom are engineers or scientists and actively engaged in research. Also, many of SUNY Poly's programs are in engineering and related Sciences,

which many vendors use to create a subscription formula. Thus, although SUNY Poly is small, for subscription formula purposes, the large science FTE and large number of research scientists can make a full subscription to journal packages extremely expensive.

Since the merger brought together a party without any library staff (as it was a division of a larger University) and an institution that served a small campus that focused on teaching, the library staff is very small, with only 2.5 FTE librarians and 2 FTE staff. With a small staff, the amount of time that it takes to establish, maintain, and assess resources is paramount. Additionally, determining how easily it will be to either cancel subscriptions or move to a different access model is also important, as there are no staff who focus only on collection analysis. But with large amounts of funds dedicated to library resources, being able to quickly and easily interpret the cost per use for different models is necessary. Adding library resources is necessary for the research needs of the faculty and research scientists, and the library's budget has doubled each year since the merger. However, with the increasing amount of institutional investment in library resources comes increased scrutiny over funds allocated. It is essential for the library to be able to clearly demonstrate how it is serving in order to best negotiate the best option for the institution.

As a new institution focusing on high-level scientific research in very specific areas, one of the major issues has been deciding whether to "bundle" or not. Many libraries are "unbundling" or considering how best to move away from "Big Deal" packages (Bosch and Henderson, 2015). The process of unbundling is, indeed, a long and complex process; as such, the best strategy for SUNY Poly has been to avoid adding any new "Big Deals" whenever possible. To do so, SUNY Poly has taken an approach that prefers using pay per use models, or when relevant, a hybrid approach. However, when the cost is low, Big Deal packages still remain the best option, especially when the focus of the package connects to SUNY Poly's research interest. To get the best institutional fit involves a fair amount of risk, especially due to the low staffing and difficulty in getting access to

faculty and research scientists to determine what specific journals and resources they actually need. Pay per use requires adopting a model that, for at least a year (due to journal subscription calendar timing) assumes that itemized article purchasing is the most cost-effective model. In a few cases, article download tokens have been quickly used up due to unforeseen demand for a specific title. Overall, the hybrid approach has proven to be the most successful, in which a portion of the journal package is a subscription, while the rest is available via pay per use models. And, as librarians are able to better communicate with research staff and faculty, and usage data becomes available, fine-tuning for the “right fit” will be easier.

SUNY Poly has negotiated many new subscriptions as it becomes a fully merged institution with a new focus on research, and an in-depth analysis of whether subscribing to the Big Deal or full access package is the best method was not always possible. But, some assumptions about Big Deals can be made, and were used to guide decisions. First, publishers who provide a tiered pricing model are more likely to provide cost-effective pricing for large journal packages. This has proven to be true for SUNY Poly for multiple publishers such as the American Institute of Physics. Second, if the publisher is a commercial, or for-profit publisher, it is less likely that the Big Deal bundle will be a resource that is affordable long-term, and a subscription will include price increases that other libraries have found to be unsustainable in the future (Bergstrom, Courant, McAfee, & Williams, 2014). Having the following criteria in mind when contemplating subscriptions has been useful in driving the dialog with research faculty and administration in discussing how SUNY Poly will build library services typical of a research university: is the publisher for-profit and do they offer tiered pricing. The trend of resisting or moving away from the Big Deal bundles is becoming a major trend in research libraries where subscription to such packages is prevalent (Strieb & Blixrud, 2014). As many of the researchers and faculty at SUNY Poly have experience with driving economic change, these discussions of market analysis and trends have proven helpful in allowing SUNY Poly to forego

subscribing to large journal bundles and to initially look for different access options. With almost 25 years of history of large journal package trends to rely on, SUNY Poly has been able to broaden the discussion with faculty regarding how to meet research needs, while also helping to prevent adding services that will almost certainly not be sustainable in the long term.

SUNY Poly receives great benefits from its status as a member of the State University of New York system, and does receive some subscriptions such as access to Elsevier titles, as part of consortial negotiations. Other research institutions are able to negotiate large and increasing “substantial portions” of journal packages as a consortium (Strieb & Blixrud, 2014). However, SUNY Poly’s status as a doctoral institution, and the absence of wide-scale cooperation of negotiating journal subscriptions as a consortia either within SUNY or other consortia, leave SUNY Poly to attempt to negotiate most subscriptions on its own. In the negotiation with vendors, not having a readily available consortium with which to bargain has been both problematic in bargaining power, but also leaves SUNY Poly to best consider its options in coordination with the vendor.

A perfect example of the hybrid approach of subscriptions has been SUNY Poly’s strategy for American Chemical Society (ACS) journals. Although SUNY Poly’s focus on nanotechnology and nanoscience is, essentially, interdisciplinary, there are many focused journals on “Nano” or “Nanotechnology” within many different disciplines. The ACS publication *ACS Nano* is one such journal that SUNY Poly must subscribe to, as usage is extremely high for this specific journal, but other ACS publications, although essential, do not get as much usage as others. SUNY Poly’s ACS subscription in which some subscriptions are “all you can use” while others are “metered” has proven to provide a Big Deal-like experience for faculty, while providing the best cost per use scenarios. The four major areas that are most connected to Nanotechnology (Chemistry, Physics, Engineering, and Biology) are also the areas in the sciences with the highest price per title and highest amount of inflation and increases per year (Bosch & Henderson, 2015). With the

highest cost for subscriptions, models are where pay per use will be of continued interest going forward.

As SUNY Poly is a new and evolving institution, the relationship with the vendor regarding journal subscriptions is one that is important at the outset. As one of SUNY Poly's goals in its strategic plan is to "upgrade" its Carnegie Classification, and slowly grow to add 30% more FTE, and grow new small, but highly desired, PhD and other graduate programs, having vendors who are willing to negotiate different models is essential. If SUNY Poly isn't able to establish models that work for our evolving nature, then pay per use models or supplementary programs for access, such as Copyright Clearance Center's Get it Now and reliance on Interlibrary Loan, become necessary. Although the approach of using ILL and other methods of providing access to pay per use material does not allow for unfettered access to content, the extra steps of clicking through link resolver pages to submit ILLs has been shown by Knowlton and colleagues to lead to almost one-third of users to determining they do not want to request the article (Knowlton, Kristanciuk, & Jabaily, 2015). Indeed, reliance on ILL and link-resolver-based access does lead to less usage, but with downloads and requests costing money, the filtering of downloads can lead to longer-term lower costs. With many endeavors of a merging institution competing for budget dollars, more funding for subscriptions not tied to specific initiatives will remain difficult. One advantage of

ILL or purchase on demand is the ability to tie costs and purchasing back to specific departments and areas. With subscriptions, making the direct connection between the patron and the cost is less possible. Thus, when SUNY Poly isn't able to establish a relationship with the vendor that creates seamless access to the content, communication to faculty is key to let them know that ILL and purchase on demand of articles via ILL other methods is essential for access where data can then be used to request more funds to support specific programs.

SUNY Poly has merged at a time when most libraries are reviewing library resource acquisition, leading to different subscription models. As SUNY Poly matures and the academic journal market changes more quickly due to continued budget pressures in libraries, SUNY Poly will only understand its needs more, with more subscription options from which to choose.

Conclusion

The authors hope that their perspectives on collection development decisions in academic libraries will help colleagues choose resources wisely. A collaboratively created checklist of factors to consider when making these decisions is provided as a supplemental material. The bibliography also contains links to excellent resources that will help expand knowledge in collections acquisition.

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Checklist for Adding Resources

Evaluation and Selection

- Resource fit with collection development criteria:
 - Requested by faculty
 - New curricular need
 - Existing curricular need

- Access models:
 - Good usability and responsive content design (easily read on multiple types of devices)
 - IP based campus-wide access, or password protected access?
 - Unlimited simultaneous users or access “seats”
 - Demand-driven acquisition
 - “Get it Now” or other article purchase service
 - Interlibrary loan
- Content discovery:
 - Simple to add to discovery tools (Summon, WorldCat Discovery, EDS, etc.)
 - MARC catalog records available – plans for RDA?
 - Content discoverable in Google Scholar
 - Simple to remove from all discovery tools if no longer subscribed
- Accessibility for users with disabilities, as demonstrated through a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) (from the Information Technology Industry Council) and captioning for video
- Enhanced content access (or monetary credits) for resources with previously acquired print counterparts
- Perpetual access through participation in initiatives such as CLOCKSS, LOCKSS, or PORTICO
- Resource trial availability
 - Not needed – adding content to an existing platform or database
 - Yes, IP based so entire campus can use OR password protected trial for individuals
- Usage statistics that are easily accessible and meet Project COUNTER standards
- Decision Support Data:
 - Check consortial pricing and offers
 - Consider initial price AND cost of resource over long-term
 - ILL Data
 - Overlap analysis to determine unique contributions of resource
 - Citation data to determine field-weighted impact (e.g., SNIP)
 - Publication data to determine where faculty are publishing/editing
 - Turnaway data to document constituent need
 - Feedback from trials or other user experience analysis
 - Projected return on investment (ROI) for resource
- Add resource under consideration to the library’s ERM to document decision-making process and track progress through resource life cycle

Acquisition

- Determine official FTE requirements of vendors (for example “science” students, all students, research associates included, other discrete populations)
- Licensing and renewal documentation that is clearly written and understandable. Request license modifications to meet institutional requirements and needs.
 - Does the license permit interlibrary loan of purchased e-content?
 - Does the license permit non-affiliated users to access in the library?
- Smooth and minimal set up for implementation, with minimal ongoing monitoring

Additional considerations

- Availability of in-depth, specialized research options, such as text mining
- Alumni access
- Open access (OA) credits for institutional authors who wish to pay article processing charges (APC) to make content OA. Can be a subscription credit or APC credit for authors.