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How a New Library System Changed the Way We Think about Acquisitions and Collection Development

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Abstract

Franklin & Marshall College (F&M) is a small undergraduate institution with a full-time equivalent (FTE) of approximately 2,400 students. In the summer of 2016, the library migrated to Online Computer Library Center's (OCLC) WorldShare Management System (WMS). This change to a cloud-based library system gave us an opportunity to consider new ways of doing cataloging, circulation, and acquisitions. This presentation will primarily discuss the changes that were implemented to the allocation of funds for ordering materials and the impact of those changes, including the way we now approach collection development.

Background

F&M is a selective small liberal arts college with a student body of around 2,400. It is an undergraduate institution with no graduate or distance learning programs. The library currently has over 500,000 print books and access to several thousand e-books. The growth of the print collection has declined in recent years; less than 8,000 titles were added to the collection in 2015-2016 compared to averages in the 11,000 range that had been the norm for many years.

The print collection is driven primarily by faculty requests and supplemented by librarians and staff. The library has three approval plans that also contribute to the collection: A large university press plan in all relevant disciplines, a subject plan for philosophy, and another subject plan for American and British literature.

Behind the scenes, there was a badly outdated allocation formula that determined how much each academic department and program could spend on print materials. This approach translated into 76 distinct budget lines just for faculty purchases. The amount of spending by each department was monitored on a monthly basis, and reports were distributed. Twice a year, on December 1 and April 1, funds were reverted to the library if spending levels were not met. It was a clunky system, but it sort of worked. Nobody really understood why certain departments were allocated more funds than others of comparable size, and there was a persistent imbalance with spending. Some departments (we're looking at you, art and art history) always overspent

their allocation, while others, especially in the sciences, consistently underspent.

Surely there had to be a better way to do this.

The Big Change

In the summer of 2015, OCLC came to our rescue. F&M decided to migrate to the WorldShare Management System, and this gave us the opportunity to rethink and redo all our systems and technical procedures.

At this same time, Bonnie Powers joined the library as our new content services librarian. She started on July 1, right after F&M signed the contract with OCLC for the migration to WorldShare services. This was also at the transition point between fiscal years. Not only was Bonnie new to the college library, she was new to academic libraries, having worked in and for public libraries the previous nine years, and was also new to acquisitions. Although she had worked with budgets before, Bonnie had not worked with materials budgets. Not only was she seeing our materials budget structure for the very first time, she was seeing *any* materials budget structure for the very first time. This helped us because the questions Bonnie was asking put the rest of us in a position to view the structure from a different perspective. Rather than viewing the budget with the experience and expertise we had, we were now seeing it through the eyes of a novice.

As Bonnie gradually learned about the budget model, the fund structure, the monthly budget reports, and

the midyear reallocation of funds, we were also learning that none of our acquisitions data would migrate to WMS. We would have to start fresh with our FY17 budget once we went live. Acquisitions data simply does not migrate as part of that process there is no choice. This proved to be a unique opportunity for us.

In her preparation for the migration to WMS, Bonnie read acquisitions listserv posts about eliminating departmental allocations in favor of a new and simpler, less structured model. She began asking questions such as:

Why do librarians insist that academic departments spend their book budget money but don't allocate department-specific money for other resources such as journals, databases, and media? If it's the responsibility of faculty and librarians, together, to build the collection, then why do librarians limit faculty to ordering books only? And why do librarians badger department chairs and coordinators with monthly e-mails designed to get them to spend their book budget allocations?

Bonnie was concerned that we were giving the wrong impression about priorities for the library by emphasizing the importance of book purchasing over other formats or services or use of our spaces. By providing faculty with department-specific funds to purchase books only, there was a chance the library was leaving a mental impression that it was stuck in a different era of library collection development and not changing with the times. The nature of the e-mail reminders, with their acquisitions-driven language about free balances, cash balances, and encumbrances spending deadlines and benchmarks, as well as the midyear reallocation of book funds that penalized departments that had not kept up with spending, conveyed an outdated concept of the library as primarily a physical collection of books. This was not only unfortunate but also inaccurate. The library was in constant motion to achieve new levels of service to its users and provide the best resources in every format to support the curriculum of the college. The library's budgetary interaction with faculty did not reflect the library's forward-thinking vision. See figure 1 for an example of the kind of emails that were sent to academic departments each month.

A series of meetings were then held with the college librarian, collection development librarian, content services librarian, and two acquisitions staff to consider a new budget structure for print materials. We began our discussions early in 2016. In early March 2016, an e-mail was sent to faculty containing a single question:

Would you be opposed to the library eliminating individual department/program book budget allocations in favor of establishing a new model?

We then began a series of regular meetings that lasted throughout March. The possibility of changing the budget structure had been raised in the past, but now the desire for change was coming from a new librarian and with a sense of urgency. We had many fascinating discussions, both of a philosophical and practical nature. For example, whose responsibility was it to create the collection? Should the onus be on faculty or on us? Did it matter which departments did most of the ordering? We discussed the lack of feedback from departments; some concerns had been raised but not many. A few faculty wanted to make sure they weren't going to have a lower amount of money to spend. Some were worried that one department could "steal" others' money. We presented the idea to other librarians, the vice provost, and at a faculty meeting in case faculty had not read their e-mail.

As a result of little feedback and a desire to create a more simplified budget structure, we finally decided to make a drastic change. The 76 funds mentioned previously had now been compressed into just 16 fund lines (plus two special grants for new faculty). The departmental funds had been redistributed into three broad categories: Humanities, science, and social science. We weren't quite ready to put everything into one gigantic pot. All librarians now shared one fund instead of nine separate lines. The approval plan funds were retained, but the allocation for *The New York Times Book Review* was eliminated. Those orders would now come from the librarians fund.

Some of us were still concerned about creating and sustaining an equitable and balanced collection, so we decided to continue tracking the spending by departments, but we will do this internally and assess the results at the end of the fiscal year.

Each report will contain:

Your "budgeted" amount, which is your department's current book fund allocation for the 2016 fiscal year and may reflect adjustments from the prior fiscal year.
Your "free" balance, which is the budgeted amount minus amounts spent and encumbered. This is the amount that is currently available for new orders and orders that have been submitted but not yet placed.
Your "encumbered" amount, which includes orders that have been placed and for which money has been encumbered but not yet actually paid, i.e. open orders.
Your "cash" balance, which is the difference between the budgeted amount and the amount paid.

Please note, however, these balances are current as of the date of the report and change daily and do not reflect recent activity. You can always get updated balance information at any time by contacting any of the staff listed below or your librarian liaison.

Here are your balances as of September 1, 2015:

|

Name: Anthropology

Fiscal Cycle:2016

Amounts--

budgeted:	\$	encumbered:	\$
free:	(%)	invoiced:	\$0.00
cash:	(%)	paid:	\$

As we go through the BAY, the Library suggests recommended benchmarks that should result in monthly free balances as follows:

September 1: 65%-75%

October 1: 55%-65%

November 1: 50%-55%

November 23 at 5:00 pm: 50% or less (Mid-year budget allocation review deadline)

December: No monthly report

January 10 (approximately): First report of 2016, which may reflect a reduction in your allocation depending on the budget's free balance as of November 23.

Figure 1. Example of e-mail that was sent to academic departments each month (see comment on pg. 108 for change).

One very important benefit was that the new structure allowed us to change the way we communicated with faculty. Instead of monthly budget reports with encumbrances, free balances, and warnings about spending or losing funds, we were able to simply communicate on a much broader level. The first new e-mail statement was sent out at the end of August, and it reminded the departments about the new budget structure (see Figure 2).

At the end of October, we compared the amount of ordering for the first four months of the fiscal year with the previous year's activity. We weren't too surprised by what we saw. Orders from the Humanities departments had declined from 35% of the total allocation to 19%. The Social Sciences did much better (17% down to 14%), but the Science departments plummeted from 14% to just 8%. It will now fall to the librarian liaisons to those underperforming departments to encourage more orders.

What's Next?

We will continue to monitor the monthly ordering and will analyze the departmental activity at the conclusion of the fiscal year in June 2017. We will also solicit feedback from faculty about their experiences with ordering materials this year. Future plans or modifications might include eliminating the three broad disciplinary funds in favor of one huge fund for books (librarians' orders included). We might develop subject-based approval plans, especially in those areas that habitually underspend. We might place more responsibility on the librarians to supplement faculty ordering.

One thing is for certain we will not be returning to the days of 76 funds.

Greetings and welcome back-

As you can see, this isn't a book budget report, as you may have received in the past. The College Library has simplified its book funds, moving from departmental funds to larger area funds.

What does this mean for you?

- You may continue to request books and media normally using the online request forms found [here](#). You may also continue to utilize CHOICE cards or our paper order slips.
- You can continue to expect the same level of service and order fulfillment you've enjoyed in the past. Because the level of ordering varies widely among departments on campus, we don't foresee any issues, and your purchasing ability will not be reduced from previous years.
- There will no midyear reallocation of funds and no spending benchmarks or deadlines to meet. And no more monthly book budget reports.

What else is new?

- In addition to our online order forms, there is now an online "[E-Resource Request](#)" form. If there is a journal, database or other e-resource you would like the Library to consider adding to its collection, please make that suggestion using the form. Since continuing subscriptions affect the Library's budget differently than the purchase of one-time materials and must be sustained over subsequent years, we cannot provide the means to place a direct order for a journal or other continuing subscription. But we hope the request form will help.
- If you're considering ordering a DVD, please check our new streaming service, [Kanopy](#), first. We have access to over 26,000 titles, all of which come with public performance rights. Films in Kanopy can be easily embedded into Canvas. We also have an online music collection, [DRAM](#).
- We have a new catalog! If you're not familiar with the Library's current collection--both physical and digital--please take some time to explore [Discover](#), which provides a way to find books, journals, articles, media and more using a single search box. You can also perform more specific searches on the [Advanced Search](#) page. If you have any questions, particularly when it comes to determining whether the Library currently holds or has access to a particular title or resource, please contact me or your librarian liaison.

Our collection is but one of many resources the Library has to offer. We will continue to develop and grow it, along with library instruction, services, digital initiatives, our spaces and more.

Looking forward to a successful academic year!

Figure 2. Example of the new e-mail statement reminding the departments about the new budget structure (see comment on pg. 110).