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Building Library Collections in the 21st Century — Writing an Acquisitions Procedure Manual

Column Editor: **Arlene Sievers-Hill** <axs23@case.edu> <arlenesievers7@hotmail.com>

I finally got around to doing this for our Acquisitions department here at **Kelvin Smith Library**. A key acquisitions staff person retired after a long and stellar career. She possessed a great deal of specific information in her head. She did have time to do some cross training, but this occurrence made it clear a procedures manual was needed. I was involved more and more at the macro level over the years, not on the stroke by stroke, field by field on the keyboard level. It is one of those things that every Acquisitions Head knows he should do — some have, but the manuals become dated quickly. Perhaps that is because routine procedures change so rapidly in the age of changing Websites, delivery systems and everything else. In my case it was both a learning experience, and an organizational one. At the same time it was a training tool for the new acquisitions assistant, who replaced the retiring staff member. Someone asked on **ACQNET** if anyone had done such a manual. I answered that I had, and emailed it out. Since then I have had a flurry of requests for it, which I am happy to supply.

On beginning, I did as all librarians do — look on the Web at libraries like mine — large university ARL libraries for examples. No use reinventing the wheel. There really were not too many procedures manuals easily found, and those that I did find weren't as helpful as I had wished, but they did have some structure. I also called some colleagues, and got a little that way. I looked at ancient manuals from our own library and again parts of the structure were useful, not detail, of course.

After gathering what I could, I began with a pretty simple structure. It consisted of a preface, firm ordering and receiving, approval plans, rush ordering, and music, audio visual, foreign orders, vendor negotiation and relations etc. Within each of these sections I went into a lot of specific detail, of fields that must be filled, records that had to be downloaded, etc. We transmit orders in several ways, **EDIFACT**

with **Eastern Book Company**, from whom we get physical processing of books, and who automatically do out of print searching on books they can't get as new copies. Email and vendor Websites are used with many vendors and publishers such as **Amazon** and **Louis Goldberg**.

Our major domestic approval vendor transmits **PromptCat** records and now invoicing and there is a pretty complicated procedure for downloading those records as well. Some of the methods I used when writing the manual to include extremely specific procedures was to excise them from other documents or include a small document, edited of course, that described the detail I was seeking. These included the step-by-step **PromptCat** record downloading for **Blackwell's**, and the **EDIFACT** procedures for **Eastern Book Company** orders. I consulted other Technical Service department heads, such as **Christopher Thornton** who had been head of Bibliographic Services when **PromptCat** was initiated.

Two of my best sources for work flow detail were my staff members, **Ella Shurr** and **Stephanie Pasadyn**. **Ella** had worked for years with the staff member who had just retired. During the last few months of her tenure, **Mrs. Carolyn Kelly**, my retiring staff member, imparted in depth and with lots of practice the major functions of her job, firm ordering and receiving to **Ella Shurr**. Her

job involved tremendous amounts of detail, many judgment calls, and situations where there was no easy answer. As it happened, **Miss Shurr** applied for and was hired to be the firm order assistant, and the vacant approval plan assistant was filled by **Miss Pasadyn**, after a thorough and lengthy selection and hiring procedure.

We had a lot of time for preparation before the staff person retired, so an intensive cross training began early. Cross training is one of the most important things in acquisitions, as it is in serials.

We got a good example of the importance of cross training, and work accommodation as well as commonsense division of duties, due to **Mrs. Kelly's** eye surgery and a recovery period outside and inside the library. Acquisitions departments are not overstaffed these days, and one person gone can make a huge effect on workflow. I had been on some sick leave myself and when I returned it was imperative to get some procedures and policies codified on paper for the new person who would be hired in a few months.

Because the approval assistant position was vacant for a few months, I did some of the approval work receiving and invoice approval myself. This helped in refamiliarizing me with these routines. The Websites for the vendors we deal with for firm orders change frequently, usually to the better. I was always aware of these changes, because I kept in touch with our vendors consistently and encouraged **Mrs. Kelly** to contact our vendors and the vendor representatives with her opinions on their Websites and service. She was excellent at pointing out flaws and problems with the sites. Having been a vendor employee, myself, vendors would rather have this kind of feedback than none at all. During her illness we got one of our vendors, **Coutts** to send someone on site to alter her computer settings to allow her to use the computer more easily. This may seem irrelevant to a procedures manual but illustrates the fact that not everything can be codified. It is a good idea, along with updating frequently, to add addenda when things one hasn't thought about happen.

Of course along with all the procedures involved in the two main activities, firm ordering and approval plans, they have sub categories — music scores, DVDs and videos, special collections, out of print, and subject specific ordering. These were each given a separate section in the manual since they often included both firm ordering and approval plan procedures. Since our domestic approval plan is a major component of our acquisitions operation considerable explanation of those procedures were laid out, including the initial profiling, profile tweaking which is an ongoing

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their Texts is by **David Pearson**. (British Library/Oak Knoll, 2008. 208p bibl index; ISBN 9781584562337, \$49.95. Reviewed in April 2009 CHOICE.) What a refreshing book! With all the rush to digital that is taking place, this book looks at the book as history and artifact. **David Pearson** is **Director of the University of London Research Library Services** and is

a respected scholar in the field of eBook history. **Lorcan Dempsey** also gives this book a heads up on his blog. So — I am ordering this book and recommend it to you. We are librarians, aren't we? <http://www.orweblog.oclc.org/archives/001789.html>
<http://www.oakknoll.com>
<http://www.cro2.org>
<http://www.against-the-grain.com/>

The topic of the features in this issue of **ATG** is very timely — **entrepreneurship in libraries**.

At my college, the **College of Charleston**, we have seen our state funding dive from 60% to 14% in the span of twenty years! We are struggling to raise money so we can keep up our fabulous library and buy what we need to buy for our patrons. And we are all exploring options to make this happen. Be sure and study this issue carefully.

Along with everything else, we did not have space for many of the **2008 Charleston Conference reports** lovingly and professionally

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procedure. Our approval plan as well as services from other approval and firm order vendors includes complete book processing and cataloging. Procedures for each of these are different.

In all sections there were decisions to make in description and step-by-step direction. There were some corners cut in all this description, especially when the tasks were very easy and well directed from Websites with very little other description needed. This was a judgment call. Some inclusions such as statistics keeping were given a separate description since they refer to all actions of the department. In all areas we tried to emphasize the necessity for working collegially with other employees and faculty members. This would be especially helpful to a new staff member learning the ropes.

After the manual was done, I realized certain aspects and procedures were omitted. Changes will be made. Also since **Blackwell's**, our approval and firm order vendor is in the process of rolling out and introducing us to a new version of **Collection Manager** that whole section may change. **Eastern Book Company** had just come out with a new version of their Website while the manual was being written so that was complete.

The biggest challenge will be keeping the acquisitions procedures manual up to date. Those manuals I found on library sites or to which I was directed were often a few years old. Instituting periodic review and revision will occur. Updating the manual frequently during the year is better if something changes and we have the time to change the document at that time, but like many of you we are quite busy doing acquisitions most of the year. During the weeks of financial closing in the summer is the ideal time, and it will be done on this schedule. That is not too onerous to make sure it does get done.

Our manual is placed on the **Kelvin Smith Library** private wiki for staff use. However, I would be glad to send you a pdf attachment of it if you wish. 🍷

Rumors
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organized by the efficient and meticulous **Ramune Kubilius** <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu>! But, fear not! The reports will be printed in the next **ATGs** and will also be loaded online beforehand. Watch the **ATG NewsChannel Website!** <http://www.against-the-grain.com>

Speaking of the **ATG NewsChannel**, **Leah Hinds** <leah@katina.info> has been diligently working to redesign the Website and it should be up and running when you are reading this issue. Tell us what you think!

www.against-the-grain.com

You know, way back when, in volume 1 of **ATG**, we had a publisher's profile from the tirelessly energetic **Sara Miller McCune** of **Sage**. **Sara** has always been incredibly supportive of **ATG** and her mentoring suggestions have helped me immensely! Anyway, we are revisiting the **Publisher's Profiles** and are starting with one with this issue — **MPS**, p.62. If anyone wants to become the "Publisher's Profiles" editor, let me know! Or, alternatively, if you want to submit a profile, let me know! I would eventually like to load these profiles on the **ATG NewsChannel!**

And, speaking of way back when, I think I told you that **Jesse Holden** <Jesse.Holden@millersville.edu> wants to look at how acquisitions and collection development has changed over the years. So — we sent him back issues of all of **ATG** which has truly changed. The first issue was just 10 pages! and he is beginning a new column aptly named **Acquisitions Archaeology!** See this issue, p.84.

Speaking of which, **Jesse** has a new baby — **Adelaide**. Cute pic!

And speaking of new — this is new and old. **Jack Montgomery** <jack.montgomery@wku.edu> is taking over **Group Therapy!** Hope to see a new column in the November issue!

More new — **Steve McKinzie** <smckinzi@catawba.edu> has a new column which he is calling **590 local notes!** Hmmmm ... **Steve** tells me that when he was at **Dickinson** the library had a "rotating" director (is that what you call them — when the director's position is shared among the staff every few years) so he had to learn all about cataloging. Thus, the name of his column! **You go, Steve!**

Speaking of pictures, got a fantastic picture of **Cullen** — **Cris Ferguson** <cris.ferguson@furman.edu> and **John Larkin's** son. My! How he has grown! And how time flies. My grandson is 20 months and my daughter-in-law is pregnant again. Hooray! And — my two nieces on my husband's side are both pregnant and my sister-in-law is retiring to take care of the new babies. Gosh! What can I say!

Another baby update! just got an email from **Jim Morrison** <jmorrison11@carolina.rr.com> (once with **Bell & Howell** and **University Microfilms** (remember them?). Their twin grandsons, **Macewen Stewart Morrison** (4lbs. 13oz.) and **Cameron Patterson Morrison** (3lbs. 12oz.) were just born about 10 days ahead of schedule. Did I ever tell y'all that I was premature and just weighed 4 pounds when I was born?! And look at me now!

Bob Holley <aa3805@wayne.edu> has been

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to Baltimore and North Carolina this summer. But still he has written several thought-provoking pieces for this issue of **ATG**. First, his *op ed* about the **Google Book Settlement** which is very much against the grain, so to speak of what we have been reading recently from the **US Copyright office** and other places.

Second, in his random ramblings, **Bob** compares the world of collection development in the past to that of now. See this issue, p.44 and p.65.

And speaking of **Bobs** — **Bob Nardini** <bnardini@couttsinfo.com> has been busy this summer. He recently drove his youngest son to Raleigh, where he (the son, not **Bob**) will be enrolling at **North Carolina State**. Another southerner in the family, **Bob** says. Really? Well, I swan! Meanwhile, **Bob** was writing from **Niagara Falls**, where he was visiting **Coutts** which, he says, has the first integrated book/eBook approval plan. And **OASIS** version 4, the newest version of the **Coutts** database, has the special feature to search of out of print dealer inventories. And, coming up, **Bob** says that his next column will be written by **Ian Colford**, who is head of collection development at **Dalhousie University** in Halifax, Nova Scotia. **Ian** just published his first book, a collection of stories that has already one a prize in Canada and is in the running for some others. Mysterious. Looking forward!

Speaking of mysterious! It's hard to keep up with the enthusiastically energetic **Corrie Marsh** <cmarsh12@gmail.com>! **Corrie** has just finished guest editing Vol 35 #3 of **Serials Review** which is a collection of articles about **IRs**

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