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College Librarians: Partners In Acquisitions And Serials Management

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Introduction

Library services at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, are physically centralized. However, Tech's College Librarian program allows for a level of decentralized service that is unusual and inventive, and that distributes services to locations where they can best be utilized by faculty and students: in Virginia Tech's eight colleges.

Virginia Tech (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) is the largest university in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There are nearly 26,000 students enrolled in on- and off-campus programs, 80% of whom are undergraduates. There are approximately 1,500 full-time instructional faculty at the University whose research and teaching is supported by the University Libraries.

There is one large library, Carol M. Newman Library, and three significantly smaller branch libraries scattered around campus. Two of the branches — a Veterinary Medicine and an Art and Architecture library — support two of the colleges. The third branch, a Geological Sciences facility, provides discipline-specific support. An additional service center is in Northern Virginia and provides support to the extensive off-campus courses offered in the Washington, D.C., suburbs.

More importantly, however, librarians at Virginia Tech have come up with a creative means for offering decentralized services through the innovative College Librarian program. The College Librarian program was begun in 1994 with four librarians placed in three colleges. Currently, there are eleven librarians placed in all eight of the University's colleges. (The College of Arts and Sciences has four college librarians and the College of Human Resources and Education has two.) Their charge is to provide an initial point of contact for all of the faculty and students of the college to which they are assigned. Included in this charge is research, instructional, and reference support.

The College Librarians offer students and faculty in their colleges on-site discipline-related consulting to expand awareness and use of information resources. They are responsible for college-specific instruction for both undergraduate and graduate students and work collaboratively with the faculty in their colleges to determine instructional needs. They also support distance learners as the first point of contact for library services for students enrolled at Virginia Tech's remote sites or through its extensive distance learning offerings.

In addition, the College Librarians promote to the faculty in their colleges the use of information and computing resources for both research and teaching. They assist faculty and students with the use of Internet technologies and provide individualized reference and research support.

The College Librarian program fosters a degree of user-centered service that is noteworthy. The College Librarians are on-site in the colleges and are part of the daily lives of the colleges. They often serve on committees within the college and develop collegial relationships with their faculty and students.

The College Librarians are expected to have technical competencies as well as a discipline-related knowledge base. They are responsible for building and managing the library collection, in all media and formats, to support their college. Thus they serve as the subject bibliographer of that college, acting as spokespersons for their faculty and students, striving to represent the diverse interests of all of their constituencies.

College Librarians as Subject Specialists

College Librarians also interact in a variety of ways with Technical Services staff. Working with serials-receiving staff, College Librarians evaluate issues of unsolicited serial subscriptions. As part of this procedure, an issue and an accompanying decision slip are routed to the appropriate College Librarian. The College Librarian decides whether to catalog the pieces for the collection, discard them, or keep them to be used for personal professional development. These decisions are entered into a database, referred to as the discards database. This database is routinely searched when a serial title is not found in the local catalog for information

concerning previous retention decisions.

Serials staff also consult with College Librarians about ephemeral or peripheral titles, like newsletters, which often come packaged with other serial titles. These titles, and decisions regarding them, are also entered into the discards database.

College Librarians act as subject specialists when a serial title changes format or the subscription changes in a significant way. For instance, when a title changes format from print to CD-ROM the College Librarian is asked whether he or she wants to continue the subscription in its new format. When a title ceases and the publisher fulfills the subscription with an alternative title, the College Librarian is asked whether the Serials Coordinator should accept the substitution or seek a refund from the publisher or subscription agent.

College Librarians also determine the disposition of incomplete runs for binding. At Virginia Tech, when materials are gathered for binding, any titles with issues missing from the binding bundle go through a review process. As part of this process, based on the call number of the title, the binding supervisor sends an e-mail notice to the College Librarian listing the title, call number and the issues missing. The College Librarian decides whether to bind the title incomplete or to order the missing issues. Due to the cost, and the amount of time needed to do an effective back-order search, College Librarians are asked only to order those issues that are critical to the collection.

In addition, working with the acquisitions staff, College Librarians evaluate gift materials based on their subject expertise. When books are given to the library they are placed on a review shelf. As part of the evaluation process, the College Librarians look at the titles in their discipline and make retention decisions.

The College Librarians Talk About Their Role

The authors interviewed two College Librarians, Edward Lener, College Librarian for the Sciences, and Ellen Krupar, College Librarian for Business, about their roles in general and in working with Technical Services in particular.

Both emphasized that the principal difference between themselves and other se-

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lectors was that proximity to their faculty gave them more opportunities to interact, to receive and discuss requests in person, and to develop a fuller understanding of how the faculty sees the collection supporting their particular teaching and research interests.

They both expressed a feeling of belonging: Lener said there is "less of a barrier between 'us' and 'them' [librarians and faculty]" while Krupar remarked that she felt "more like a member of the team of Pamplin [College of Business], included in faculty meetings and parties." Lener added that such a trust relationship was also beneficial when "difficult decisions have to be made," one example being serials cancellations.


Along with their proximity to the faculty, the College Librarians work at establishing a close relationship with Technical Services. Since faculty requests are generally given "rush" status, this makes all stages of the acquisition process crucial.

In following up on her College Librarian material orders, Krupar says she has come to know the staff involved in all of the stages: pre-ordering, receiving, serials control, and cataloging. She praises the efforts of the Technical Services staff members who have quickly helped her solve a few tricky problems, thus optimizing her relationship with her faculty. Krupar also keeps a weekly

appointment with the pre-order unit staff to review and sign orders and to track spending in the College Librarian funds she monitors.

A frequent visitor to the Technical Services area, Lener describes the licensing process for many e-resources as "far from simple," often requiring "significant interaction" between him and the Acquisitions Librarian in order to move the process along quickly and to make sure all interested parties are kept informed of the status. Lener has long understood the sometimes-lengthy acquisitions process, even for "rush" orders, and, as College Librarian, can give immediate feedback to his requesters.

Conclusion

As a result of the College Librarians' acquaintance with Technical Services operations, there is a triangular process in place that works remarkably efficiently. College Librarians are "hands-on" partners who bring welcome and constructive suggestions for improvements to areas where their acquisitions and serials management are concerned. They represent the interests of their faculty and students to Technical Services personnel and also represent the processes of the University Libraries to their College. This intermediary role minimizes mistakes and confusion, and maximizes collection building in support of the colleges of Virginia Tech. 

For More Information About Virginia Tech's College Librarian Program:

Eustis, Joanne, and others, "Adapting information services to new realities: the collegiate librarian/information officer program at Virginia Tech." *Virginia Librarian 41* (July/Aug./Sept. 1995): 13-16.

Maddux, Linda, "The CLIO experience." *Virginia Librarian 41* (July/Aug./Sept. 1995): 14-15.

Stemmer, John K., and others, "Building a virtual branch." *College & Research Libraries News* no. 4 (Apr. 1997): 244.

Walter, Scott, and Susan Ariew, Sarah Beasley, Mike Tillman, and Jennie Ver Steeg, "Case studies in collaboration: Lessons from five exemplary programs," in *The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe*, edited by Dick Raspa and Dane Ward, Chicago, *American Library Association*, 2000: 39-78.