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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. They are the first point of contact 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 personalized 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...
College Librarians
from page 28

ectors 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 belong-
ing: Lener said there is “less of a barrier be-
tween us and them [librarians and facul-
ty]” while Krupar remarked that she felt
“more like a member of the team of Pampin
[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 estab-
slishing 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 con-
trol, 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 Ser-
vice area, Lener describes the licensing
process for many e-resources as “far from
simple,” often requiring “significant inter-
action” between him and the Acquisitions
Librarian in order to move the process along
quickly and to make sure all interested par-
ties 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 imme-
diate feedback to his requesters.

Conclusion

As a result of the College Librarians’ ac-
quaintance with Technical Services opera-
tions, there is a triangular process in place that
works remarkably efficiently. College Librarian
are “hands-on” partners who bring wel-
come and constructive suggestions for im-
provements to areas where their acquisitions
and serials management are concerned. They
represent the interests of their faculty and stu-
dents to Technical Services personnel and also
represent the processes of the University Li-
braries to their College. This intermediary role
minimizes mistakes and confusion, and maxi-
izes collection building in support of the col-
leges of Virginia Tech. 

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

Eustis, Joanne, and others, “Adapting information services to new realties: the
collegiate librarian/information officer program at Virginia Tech.” Virginia Librarian


Stemmer, John K., and others, “Building a virtual branch.” College & Research

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 Informa-
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