June 2005

Exploring Collection Development for Library Technical Assistants

JoAnn Hrabak

College of DuPage, hrabak@cdnet.cod.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hrabak, JoAnn (2005) "Exploring Collection Development for Library Technical Assistants," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4878>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Exploring Collection Development for Library Technical Assistants

by **JoAnn Hrabak** (Teacher, Acquisitions in Library Technology, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL) <hrabak@cdnet.cod.edu>

For 38 years, the **College of DuPage** in Glen Ellyn, IL has trained a large number of library technical assistants through their Library Technology Program. The idea of **ACQCITY** was introduced a couple of years ago to give Acquisitions students in this program the opportunity to improve their understanding of collection development. **ACQCITY**, as it is shown, is an activity that provides a practical introduction to those with little or no previous experience with collection development. The process of developing a community profile and a policy allows the students to familiarize themselves enough with the concept to feel knowledgeable about it.

In 2001, access to collection development policies, particularly in the local Chicago area were problematic, if not impossible (yes, a student and local taxpayer was denied a copy of her local public library's policy); however, as time has progressed and more libraries became virtually accessible, the collection development policy became a highlight of the local library's Website. At that time, the assignment for the acquisitions class was to bring into class a copy of a collection development policy for discussion. Although this was a productive assignment, the students were, seemingly, uninvolved. One of the tools used for the assignment included viewing **ACQWEB**, <http://www.acqweb.org/>, finding a policy there and reading about collection development from the site as well as from other assigned readings.

After reviewing this process, it became apparent that the **ACQWEB** could be the door to a more interesting method of training. In order to provide a more intimate experience with policy development, the acquisitions class was recreated as a Collection Development Committee. As with most committees, the members held differing, competitive opinions and were placed in a situation that inherently creates interaction. In the classroom it was necessary to break the class into small groups or retain the one group if there were not enough people. One of the core classes at **COD** is a basic class called "Today's Libraries." Since this is a required class, most students were familiar with library terminology prior to taking the acquisitions class. The exercise began in earnest with the introduction of **ACQCITY**, an imaginary town/city whose citizenry is motivated to support the public library and whose policy committee is motivated as well.

In order to get a cross section of ideas and understanding of the policy, the students were initially assigned to either get a copy of a local policy or one from some "wistful" town on the **ACQWEB**. Like most Chicagoans, the south and west were very popular (wonder why??). However, the purpose this time was to have each student bring to class a different reference copy in order to see the depth and breath of various

policies. Some of the representative policies were just two pages and some were twenty-six pages, as was the one from Newark, New Jersey.

In order to have the students invested in the process, the next assignment required each individual group to create a town/city — this town could be as creative as each group could allow within the understanding of a reasonable policy. Some of the towns the students created included Working Stiff, IL — a town of 30,000 people, mostly blue collar workers, who were extremely committed to the public library; Pooka City, Arizona, a retirement community near the Arizona-Mexico border comprised of wealthy retired Americans, Papago Indians, and Hispanics; and finally, Treadwell, IL — whose population was distributed 50/50 between males and females of varying racial backgrounds and whose interests were health and well-being.

Since the students had a copy of an actual policy, they all learned that demographic information played an important part in each policy. At this point the second assignment was made to establish the demographic make-up of the town or city. In many cases the demographic information had already played some part, consciously or unconsciously, from the previous assignment of naming the city. The **ACQCITY** demographic profile was defined to include age/gender breakdown; blue collar/white collar; location — urban, rural, etc; economic basis; size; institutions; or special identity. After a period of time, a representative from each individual group reported the name of the particular **ACQCITY** and the demographics of the town. Yes, there was a Perfectville — everyone was perfect and the town was perfectly sized, with perfect people and, of course, perfect weather. Even though it was perfect it, too, had particular demographics.

Since each group gave a presentation, often someone addressed an issue that was not clear to another group. This provided the other students the opportunity to learn about and review additional information that could be added to their particular demographic study.

At this point the groundwork had prepared the groups to use the policy that each had selected as a reference tool and begin the next aspect of the group assignment to create the actual policy. Policy criteria had been introduced in a lecture given prior to the **ACQCITY** assignment: these include a community profile; community needs assessment; collection goals; selection responsibility; selection criteria; acquisitions; collection evaluation and assessment; deselection (weeding); reconsideration of library materials; intellectual freedom statements; policy review and revision (who is responsible) and other appendices. (Slusar, "Essential elements of collection development policy, Lecture," 1/2005). The decision to in-

clude collection development as part of the acquisitions class allowed the students to see how the policies inform the nature and scope of the collection; determined the collecting priorities; set standards for inclusion and exclusion; and provided guidelines on handling complaints, among other issues.

The class is given a period of time — generally twenty-five minutes to create an outline for a class presentation on different aspects of their policy. Although each town was somewhat idiosyncratic — "Biblioteca, IL," and "Fantasy Island," the policies were substantial as well as entertaining. Biblioteca had a bookmobile as an "assessed need," while Fantasy Island already had a helicopter book drop off. The final product was assigned for delivery a few days later in a written document.

The presentations held in class were generally well thought out and most addressed the purpose with a mission statement. "Pooka City," Arizona's collection goals stated "the purpose of the Pooka City Public Library shall be to select, organize and maintain a quality collection of library materials which will provide a basis for community information, education, and recreation and to adhere to the principles of the Papago Indians...by purchasing appropriate material in the Papago language if available, and to provide for the needs of ESL speakers in the community, according to the size of that group, the demand for material in library and the availability of such material." The "Treadwell," Illinois policy was a little more direct: "Treadwell Public Library provides resources and services to inform, empower, and encourage respect for individuals and ideas to promote health and well-being." The final document usually demonstrates how much and what is learned. As this technique has developed over the last two years, the process has become more formalized, but the spontaneity and the genuine interest in **ACQCITY** has grown.

Comprehension of collection development issues form the backbone of the library and its services — it is the what, why and how of the processes that acquisitions and technical services accomplish in their daily activities. By introducing the collection development exercise at the beginning of the acquisitions class, this fundamental aspect of libraries reflects many of the issues libraries face and, consequently, introduces practical ideas that can be used for activities in and out of the class. Basically, the collection development policy becomes the class outline. In the policy, concepts of selection, sources and resources, management, gifts, weeding and documents for the "**ALA Library**

continued on page 34

Bill of Rights" (www.ala.org) are addressed. Likewise, the class has a selection and ordering assignment that tests student knowledge of selection and verification resources, as well as budget and accounting activities, serial management issues and gifts. The culminating activity encompasses much of the information introduced in the class — weeding (de-selection) and includes a discussion of the "**Library Bill of Rights**."

The class progresses through the various assignments beginning with the selection exercise, which allows each person to be an expert on a particular topic in which they are well read or interested, and then to select a group of titles. This selection process is based on a previous assignment in which various useful and available selection and verification resources were reviewed. Then the students progress through ordering, hands-on verification, and an accounting problem assignment (which is always laden with sighs). The weeding project requires many of the skills introduced already: analysis, selection, judgments, statistics and other analytical tools to complete this assignment. At this point the student usually feels that they have accomplished quite a lot. Most are ready to replace every out of date book in their local library.

In the various student collection development policies, as well as in actual policies — various adherences to "the **ALA Library Bill of Rights**" and the "**Freedom to Read**" are mentioned. These are documents that the students have discussed and find important enough to have included them in their **ACQ CITY** policy. These documents make the student aware of the library's responsibility to each citizen and the role the library plays in citizen's lives, including their own. It is very important that as the quarter ends, the class is drawn back to the community by the necessary perception that maintaining a professional attitude in acquisitions is a service to the community. The goal of **ACQ CITY** is to guide the students toward understanding the nature of collection development, which is based explicitly on the relationship between a particular library with its community and implicitly on the relationship between the staff with the library as its own community. By the end, the class has made a full circle from the community to the community, whether that community is a town, a business, a college, or even just a group of people who share a common interest.

Sources used:

AcqWeb. Directory of collection development policies on the web. [updated November 9, 2003]; viewed April 22, 2005 <http://www.acqweb.org>.

American Library Association. Library bill of rights. [c2005]; viewed April 22, 2005 <http://www.ala.org>.

Slusar, Linda. Lecture given January 24, 2004. Essential elements of collection development policy. College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL.

JoAnn Hrabak's Biography: <http://www.cod.edu/LTA/LTAfaculty.htm#hrabak>.

Making the Invisible Visible: What Collection Development Needs To Know About Acquisitions

by **Linda K. Lewis** (Director, Collection Management and Resource Acquisitions, University of New Mexico) <llewis@unm.edu>

and **Nancy Pistorius** (Associate Director, Resource Acquisitions and Collection Management Coordinator for the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of New Mexico) <pistoriu@unm.edu>

Acquisitions and collection development departments work in unison to obtain materials for library clientele. While sharing the same purpose, these units differ greatly in actual functions and procedures. These differences can lead to confusion about the processes used to acquire materials and to occasional misunderstandings as to the goals of each department. The following will explore aspects of the acquisition processes that may provide collection development librarians a better understanding of the functions and the often invisible extent of activities performed within acquisitions units.

In all libraries, procedures develop over years of accumulated experience in various acquisitions activities. Procedures may vary among libraries, but frequently include techniques for searching titles in both local, national, and vendor catalogs; locating appropriate vendors for a variety of formats and subjects; initiating orders through paper, fax, and electronic venues; receiving material; verifying that the correct materials were received; approving invoices for payment; working with financial systems; and developing or downloading bibliographic information into local systems. The procedures become second nature to acquisitions but frequently remain mysterious to collection development.

Collection development librarians often wonder why it takes acquisitions so long to order materials, why acquisitions wants so much information, why acquisitions sometimes gets the wrong item, what all those cryptic codes in the orders really mean, or why the entire process need to be so complicated. Tarot cards, crystal balls and voodoo dolls aside, collection development librarians need to know that acquisitions personnel are not telepathic and not able to know everything about the items desired without specific information. Unfortunately, nor are acquisitions personnel able to teleport the items to the library from distant warehouses instantaneously.

When items are ordered, acquisitions staff needs to have clear bibliographic information such as a page from a publisher/vendor catalog or the catalog itself. Alternatives could be a printout from **Books in Print** or a printed record from an online source such as **Amazon.com**. Hand written and illegible notes with vague information will most likely end in disappointing results. The basic information needed includes author, title, publisher and date. If more information such as the estimated cost, the edition

(2nd, revised?), the format (paper, cloth, audio, CD, video, DVD, etc.), and the ISBN can be provided, so much the better. For journals, acquisitions needs the title, publisher, ISSN, starting date/volume, estimated cost, and format (print, electronic, microform). The more information that collection development provides, the faster acquisitions can process orders.

Inexperienced collection development librarians may ask why all this information is needed. The author and title should be obvious, but some of the rest might seem redundant. It isn't. Books can have similar titles, and even similar authors; knowing the publisher will help acquisitions identify the correct item. Books often go through multiple editions; when a specific edition is needed, the information about the edition number and date becomes critical. Books are often published in both paper and cloth bound editions and sometimes electronic formats as well. The paper edition is usually considerably cheaper but may not withstand heavy use; selectors need to tell acquisitions which format is preferred. The paper and cloth versions usually have different ISBNs; that information helps get the right version. Many journals and publishers have similar names or abbreviations. Asking for the magazine published by the **MLA** could result in titles related to literature or to medicine, among other things. The specific title, author and publisher are critical if acquisitions is to obtain the desired item. The ISBN makes precise identification more certain. Many vendors will supply items based primarily upon the ISBN; if there is a discrepancy between the ISBN and the title, the vendor will supply the item with the matching ISBN. Collection development needs to provide acquisitions with as much accurate information as possible.

While acquisitions has a number of sources they use to identify publishers, there are always new publishers and societies being formed. When the publisher is a smaller company, the collection development librarian should supply whatever information they have about the address and contact information. Since many local and regional publishers are not listed in the various national databases, providing information about their addresses can be especially helpful and will avoid delays in the ordering process. Many university financial systems require that new companies provide information such as their street address or federal tax ID number in order to process payments. When collection

continued on page 36