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Positioning Acquisitions in the Library Organization: Issues, Questions, Decisions

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Part I: Introduction and Discussion

Acquisitions departments are often located in technical services, but sometimes other models prevail. Acquisitions can be part of a single technical services unit or an independent unit side by side with other units in technical services; part of a collection development unit that is also under technical services; part of a collection development unit that is part of public services; part of an administrative unit in the library that is responsible for all purchases for collections, operations, etc.; or paired with an administrative unit handling ordering and/or finances for the central organization. What factors contribute to the evolution of acquisitions' place in a library organization and what are the pros and cons of these various arrangements?

To begin, there are some assumptions inherent in this article. The first is that the acquisitions function encompasses the processes of ordering, receiving, and paying for library information in multiple formats. The second is that when an organization chart is created, that organization chart represents a decision regarding where acquisitions best fits within the formal structure of the organization. That, in turn, implies a single relationship; however, while that relationship reflects a decision regarding the primary or the most important relationship in that organization, it is not exclusive. Secondary relationships and synergies are possible and can be reflected through "dotted" lines on the chart or may be understood tacitly, with no physical line on the formal chart. The third assumption is that the library has a strategic plan for the organization before a formal organization chart is structured. Part of that plan involves acquisitions and current decisions regard-

ing the future of the functions represented in the acquisitions process. The fourth assumption is that this article will lay out issues and ways of thinking about the organization and not supply answers. Those issues are best resolved by the individual organization. The questions and chart at the end of this discussion can aid library staff in determining where acquisitions is best suited within the organization in order to achieve the library's goals.

There are some long-standing factors that affect how acquisitions fits into the library's organizational structure. One is size. If an organization is small enough, one person may be handling acquisitions among other duties, e.g., other types of purchasing (equipment, supplies), cataloging, etc., although in most cases, this person is likely to be at a paraprofessional or clerical level and not making collection development decisions. In a larger organization, however, where each person becomes more of a specialist, the question of placing acquisitions in a structure is more of an issue.

Geography is a similar factor. In a smaller library, everyone tends to be closer together physically, facilitating communication between acquisitions and other areas, such as collection development, cataloging, or processing. In larger libraries, however, these functions may be on different floors or even in different buildings, especially if branches are involved. There can be a central purchasing unit that handles all or some aspects of the acquisitions function (of-

ten invoicing and payment), or a state-wide system or consortium that even places these functions in different cities or states.

Technology has enabled some of the above scenarios to come into existence, but technology has also driven changes. Regardless of the

ideal that technology is a tool and not a driver, this is not always the case.

There are times when the incorporation of technology leads to natural and logical changes that affect the optimum organizational model, but there are times when technology drives changes. Some can be less desirable, resulting from the limits of current technology, and some can reflect the use of technology for political reasons. These also affect the

organizational model.

Library automation systems, for example, have tended to drive certain activities to the "front end" of the technical services process, such as downloading records from a bibliographic utility. This used to be the responsibility of catalogers, who chose the correct record or at least the record they thought most fit the library's circumstances. Now, that decision falls to acquisitions and the cataloging function merely makes decisions about overlaying when the record chosen by acquisitions is determined to be less desirable than another one that is now available. This was one of the early effects of integrated library systems, which made it more

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4. The preferred ratio of serials vs. monographs in each area, depending on where each discipline's cutting-edge research tends to be published:

For example, in the physical sciences a high percentage would go to serials subscriptions and a low percentage to monographs, whereas in literature and history, serials and monographs are often split 50/50 or even tilted in favor of monographs

5. Statistical evidence of use for e-journals, databases, and eBooks.

Acquisitions and collection development need to consult each other in pursuit of fair budget allocations. Acquisitions brings the knowledge of ordering patterns and their numerical breakdown while collection development knows the direction of the library's intellectual environment. Both should monitor marketplace trends and developments in information-delivery technologies and access models.

V. Long-term Success and Career Growth

While training is oriented toward starting out and familiarizing the new librarians with specifics about their new organization, it is useful to

share with them how acquisitions and collection development interrelate — both administratively and philosophically. In time, the new librarians will gain a larger-scale perspective and their grasp of the technical and philosophical elements will become second nature.

Long-term growth can be encouraged in a variety of ways. Whether there is a formal mentoring arrangement or simply informal exchanges between "junior" and "senior" colleagues, exposing the new librarian to the organizational community, pointing them toward publishing, scholarship, and service opportunities, and encouraging their lifelong learning will inspire the new librarian to set goals for long-term knowledge enhancement and overall growth.

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us for UNC-Greensboro. Anyway, Bill didn't make it to the dedication even though he had hoped to. Instead, he hopes to make it to the Charleston Conference in November.

Congratulations to Charlene Kellsey, assistant professor and acting head of the Original Monographic Cataloging Unit at the University of Colorado the winner of the 2005 Coutts Nijhoff International Western European Specialist Studies Grant. Kellsey's proposal was en-

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logical that the records be downloaded at the point of ordering. In addition, in some cases, processes have been "unified," which can drive even more of the bibliographic function to the acquisitions area. For example, with copy cataloging, it may be decided to structure acquisitions to complete the entire process of receiving the material and completing the cataloging record by adding local information at the same time. In the case of periodicals, even bindery may end up in the acquisitions function because the periodical issues are received and claimed and generally dealt with entirely in that area once the first issue has been cataloged. As the bulk of binding is likely to relate to periodicals, acquisitions becomes the primary contact with the binder and assumes a processing function traditionally handled by cataloging or processing units.

In a different direction and as an example of technology driving change rather than change evolving from technology as a tool, the advent of university-wide systems for administrative operations, e.g., PeopleSoft, has often affected acquisitions in ways that are less evolutionary and more regulatory. Sometimes, double-entering is required if there is insufficient library business to warrant the effort and expense of creating an automated link between the systems (immediate or batch). Another issue involves possible limitations to the interchange of data between the library automation system and the central system. That can create a stronger need for a relationship with a central financial administrative unit. A lot depends on how much control is retained centrally and how much is devolved to the local level. In system-wide or consortial scenarios, there is sometimes a combination of these elements, with some acquisitions being centralized entirely, some acquisitions being left local, and some acquisitions falling somewhere in between.

Another element of this technology evolution is the underlying or unspoken element of politics. When systems are introduced, particularly far-reaching systems across organizations or larger consortia, decisions are sometimes made at an executive level and can stem from the orientation of these personnel towards centralization vs. distribution of tasks, organizational politics that determine who or which unit will be in charge of what functions, and so on. These are frequently outside the control of the library, but need to be factored into the decision-making process.

Credit cards are another example of how technology creates change within acquisitions departments and affects the relationship between the library and its parent organization. In some institutions, control of credit cards results in a decision to limit the numbers of individuals authorized to use such cards. This affects the level of staff members able to complete various ordering tasks. In other institutions, many individuals are encouraged to get institutional credit cards to facilitate purchasing and reduce bureaucracy. It is hoped that at least one per-

son in acquisitions is permitted a card, but that is not always the case. The credit card is actually more important than ever because university-wide systems, e.g., PeopleSoft, are often not oriented towards non-purchase-order type orders, which is the nature of library ordering for books, serials, media, etc. and avoiding that aspect of the central system is useful and important. Credit cards are also coming more into play with the advent of the Internet, both for first- and second-hand purchasing (**Amazon**, **Alibris**, etc.). All of this can affect workflow and subsequently, the optimum location of acquisitions in the organization chart. Whether acquisitions should draw closer to the central institution or whether it should develop a closer collaboration with the administrative unit within the library is a question that calls for resolution through a dialogue between the library and the parent organization.

The proliferation of electronic resources is another factor that can affect the decision about organizational placement. In this case, acquisitions is drawn ever closer to collection development. Much, too, depends on the decision as to who will deal with the complex areas of electronic resources that follow a purchase decision: negotiating the contract, coordinating with systems to resolve access issues, working with cataloging on whether a MARC record will be downloaded for that particular resource at the ordering stage or whether cataloging will assign some other form of bibliographic or intellectual access control. This represents not only a close connection with collection development and a "middleman" role between collection development and cataloging, but also a coordinating role as part of the workflow that evolves, often on an ad hoc basis, from resource to resource. Now, there are emerging modules for electronic resources management that require implementation and management. The management of these modules involves both collection development and acquisitions.

In addition to these new modules, there are emerging positions that intersect with acquisitions along with the traditional collection development coordinator. Evolving now are electronic resources librarians, who may manage these modules, along with contracts and other aspects of these complex electronic packages. Quick looks at job advertisements reveal new titles of all sorts and configurations as libraries re-cast their organizations to meet new needs. Portions of some of these positions intersect to a greater or lesser extent with acquisitions and include such titles as electronic resources librarian, digital initiatives librarian, or at the subject specialist level, social sciences/humanities/science data services librarian.

Further, are these personnel affiliated with technical or public services, or both, and in your organization, does that affiliation matter? If the collection development librarian is in technical services and the electronic resources librarian is in systems, and the liaisons for collections are in public services, there is certainly an increasing complexity in the building of working relationships. This can also relate to the earlier geographical question and the relative placement of these individuals, regardless

of their organizational affiliation with a particular library unit. Another possibility, particularly for more complex libraries, library systems, or consortia is the formation of standing committees to address the multiple issues raised by electronic resources. Ideally, someone from acquisitions is a member of appropriate committees, but if those committees are comprised entirely of librarians and the acquisitions department consists of library staff, but no librarian, this is not always the case. In those situations, additional care must be taken to establish the right organizational structure, create the right physical proximities, and facilitate the right working relationships.

The increasing variations in each library as to who does what and where activities reside often depend on the personnel in those positions. This raises an age-old quandary when it comes to the organization chart. Should the organizational structure be created solely on the logic of how work should be organized or should it emerge from an examination of the talents and abilities of the personnel in the organization? It is likely that most organizations evolve from a combination of these elements and as a result, when new needs arise or personnel change, the organization is restructured. Before an open position is filled, the organization will likely use the opportunity to re-think its structure and what roles current individuals fill or want to fill, which can result in some re-assignment of tasks as a first step. After that, the organization considers its most pressing needs and crafts a job description to seek someone who can fill them.

There are a number of organizational structures that allow the acquisitions department to function cooperatively and proactively with collection development, technical services, other areas and individuals within the library, and the parent organization. Part II provides a list of questions or points to consider when examining the relationship of acquisitions within the library and its larger organizational structure. Part III provides a suggested chart to help layout the factors and the answers for the decision-making process. This process can help library staff determine the appropriate placement of acquisitions to help the library achieve its organizational goals.

Part II: Questions

Looking at acquisitions, therefore, what are the possible questions to consider when carving out its place in the library organization? Here is a suggested list:

- What is the organization's strategic plan and goals for acquisitions functions?
- What is the primary relationship the library needs for acquisitions to function optimally? Is this relationship likely to be long-term or immediate, thereby determining the weight to be given to this factor?
- What are the most pressing relationship needs within acquisitions? Are those needs likely to be long-term or just immediate, thereby determining the weight to be given to this factor?

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- What is the effect of the size of the organization on this decision? Is the acquisitions function already coupled with other areas of library operations? Are these optimal or do they also require consideration?
- Where are these various functions located geographically in the building(s)? Is it possible to structure the library more effectively physically by creating proximity among key areas so that the resulting structure can facilitate synergies among acquisitions and areas less connected formally on the organization chart?
- How do these library and acquisitions relationships correlate with other functions in the library? Consider:
 - collection development functions as part of technical services,
 - collection development functions as part of public services,
 - technical services functions of cataloging, processing, bindery;
 - electronic data handling for databases and other information, particularly in relationship to providing access via systems or other library roles;
 - administrative functions, particularly financial; and
 - other areas that are unique to the particular library.

(Note: This question will also affect secondary and tertiary relationships.)

- What is the relationship to central administration, particularly as regards the financial operation?
- Where has technology created new and logical changes in the organization and what effect do these changes have on acquisitions' role and place in the organization?
- Where has technology driven changes? Which work and which do not? Do these technology-driven changes reflect a political agenda for the library or the larger organization? How do these changes affect the organization structure?
- What role do credit cards play in the organization? Has ordering shifted as a result? If so, have tasks changed within acquisitions (as in levels of staff performing the functions) or have those changes moved tasks to other areas of the library or the larger organization?
- How have electronic resources evolved in the library? Who is engaging in tasks such as:
 - negotiating contracts,
 - coordinating access issues (with systems or other library roles), and
 - providing bibliographic access (a MARC record, access directly via a Website, a federated search tool, or another form of bibliographic or intellectual access)?

- Has the library purchased an electronic resources management tool? If so, how is this being integrated into acquisitions

or other library units? Are there now library staff with new roles and new titles in the mix?

Part III: Laying Out the Issues for Decision-Making

Below is the suggested chart to help layout the factors and answers for the decision-making process.

Factor	Weight	Comments
Organizations plans and goals for acquisitions		
Organizations primary relationship need for acquisitions (external)		
Acquisitions primary relationship need (internal)		
Correlation of acquisitions to: a) collection development functions in technical services b) collection development functions in public services c) technical services functions d) electronic data handling, particularly systems or library staff in new roles e) administrative functions f) other		
Size of organization and its effect on acquisitions		
Geographic location of functions and the potential need to move some functions to create physical proximities		
Relationship to central administration		
Changes evolving naturally from incorporating technology		
Changes driven by technology: a) logical changes b) changes forced by limitations of technology c) politically-driven changes		
Changes due to role of credit cards		
Evolution of electronic resources: a) contract negotiation b) access issues c) bibliographic and intellectual access		
Incorporation of electronic resources management modules		
Decisions		
1. Primary relationship (solid line on organization chart): _____		
2. Secondary relationship(s) [dotted line(s) on organization chart]: _____ _____		
3. Tertiary, or tacit, relationships (not reflected on organization chart): _____		

Endnotes

1. Aline Soules is Associate University Librarian at California State University, East Bay. She also manages technical services and currently coordinates systems for the library.