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People Profile: Jenica Rogers-UrbaneK

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— to reduce their subscriptions further would be damaging to campus research and learning — but they are continuing to face the same financial constraints, user expectations of quick access, and concerns about print versus online access that led to the need to cancel titles. Faculty at many institutions are becoming increasingly embittered by their libraries' need to cancel periodicals, and in some cases library-faculty relationships are suffering. Furthermore, these seemingly endless rounds of cuts have led to print collections created not by forethought and planning, but necessity — only protected titles remain, often with too little attention paid to the balance between print and online information, the uniqueness of each library's collection as it relates to the curriculum, or the emerging needs of digitally native users.

In light of the changes of the past decade and the new information horizon racing toward us, we felt that the time had come to change the SUNY Potsdam campus conversation about periodicals — and in doing so, change our perception about library periodical collections. The time had come to try something new.

The Old Way

Many libraries have shared a similar approach to reducing their periodicals budget — evaluating and cutting titles. Both anecdotal and published evidence support this assertion; the literature is full of interesting and useful articles describing how University X methodically approached their periodicals cutting exercise, and the conversation of serials or collection management librarians, gathered at a conference or workshop, will inevitably turn to “how we cut our subscriptions this year”. The prevailing strategy, one we employed at Potsdam for many consecutive years, has been to provide selectors — be they librarians or faculty — with the list of current periodicals in a subject area, a collection of relevant data concerning use, price, and online availability, and then asking for opinions on which titles should be cancelled. Lists were generated, subscriptions were discussed, and the collection became leaner each year, inevitably favoring retention of high-use, low-cost print titles.

There were several unintended side-effects of this process. First, librarians had fallen out of the habit of considering any new titles — the process had become so focused on reducing expenditures that it was inadvertently blocking conversation about new periodicals, emerging curricular needs, or our changing student body. Second, continued cuts were creating an upwelling of frustration among teaching faculty who were simultaneously being given smaller resources for purchasing monographs (due to the increasing size of the electronic resources budget) and being asked to help us subscribe to fewer periodicals (to offset yearly price increases). They had come to view the periodicals cancellation process as a time when they must protect the traditional resources available in their subject area, rather than a chance to collaborate with the College Libraries. The prob-

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: I was born and raised in northern Illinois, but spent summers with family in Rhode Island and the Adirondacks.


FAMILY: By the time this is published, I will be married!

EDUCATION: BA in English Literature from **Trinity College** in Hartford, CT, and MLIS from the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: I love the challenge of starting a new project from the ground up, and I'm very proud that my colleagues recognize my ability to follow through and my willingness to take the risk.

FIRST JOB: Bindery assistant in a print shop. I've been working with the printed word since I was 15.

FAVORITE BOOKS: I recently read and loved **Naomi Novik's *His Majesty's Dragon***.

PHILOSOPHY: To borrow from **Ursula K. LeGuin**, “When action grows unprofitable, gather information; when information grows unprofitable, sleep.” And to borrow from **Cameron Crowe**, “Optimism is a revolutionary act.” 



lem was clear: the libraries were approaching the faculty with a yearly request for negative feedback about our collections, and they were providing us with exactly what we asked for.

The New Way

Several campus departments have had extensive faculty turnover due to retirements, and we chose two to approach as pilot participants. Because of their many new faculty members — with new curricular foci and new approaches to their field — these departments were eager to discuss our holdings in their areas of expertise. We were aware that we were stacking the deck in our favor by approaching eager new faculty with our changed approach, but felt that the benefit to the departments and the momentum gained by the libraries if the pilot proved successful justified our choices.

To get the project started, our Collection Development Coordinator explained the project in overview to the chair of each participating department, knowing that without engaged buy-in from departmental leadership, any project is likely to struggle. The Coordinator and chairs agreed that a librarian would conduct meetings with each department member (or, in larger departments, with one representative of each major area covered in the curriculum), and interview them about their periodical needs and usage. The librarians would compile a list of periodical recommendations based on their feedback, and then the department chair and librarians would meet to come to an agreement on a course of action. On the surface, that process is not remarkably different from the processes employed in the past — the difference lies in the questions asked during these interviews.

Past periodicals conversations had focused on currently-held titles, usage statistics, and cost, and had been accompanied by lengthy lists and spreadsheets, laden with valuable but complex data. How should a faculty member interpret use of current issues in relation to price? Librarians have productive conversations about such data, but this is not the faculty's area of expertise, and the data was not helping them make recommendations. The new interview process eliminated that portion of the conversation entirely. Hypothesizing that presentation of data and lists regarding the current state of affairs was pre-determining library-faculty communication about the collection, and that the initial statement of “what we have now” was preventing all parties from looking at the broader periodicals context, the new process focused on student learning (a key part of the libraries' collection development policy), and on print versus online access (an issue of ever-increasing relevance to both users and budgets). When librarians met with each faculty member in the target department, they asked a series of straightforward, jargon-free questions:

1. What courses do you teach regularly? Which courses do you teach infrequently? What courses do you have in development?
2. Considering those courses, what assignments do you give your students that require library research?
3. What journals are most appropriate when they do that research?
4. Does it matter to your course's learning objectives if those journals are in print or online?

continued on page 42