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Michelle Flinchbaugh

University of Maryland Baltimore County, flinchba@umbc.edu

Tonia Graves

Old Dominion University, tgraves@odu.edu

Rob Tench

Old Dominion University, ftench@odu.edu

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Biz of Acq — Setting the Stage: Scenario Planning for Acquisitions

by **Tonia Graves** (Electronic Resources & Serials Services Librarian, Old Dominion University, 4427 Hampton Blvd., Norfolk, VA 23529; Phone: 757-683-4188) <tgraves@odu.edu>

and **Rob Tench** (Acquisitions & Preservation Services Librarian, Old Dominion University, 4427 Hampton Blvd., Norfolk, VA 23529; Phone: 757-683-4144) <rtench@odu.edu>

Column Editor: **Michelle Flinchbaugh** (Acquisitions and Digital Scholarship Services Librarian, Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250; Phone: 410-455-6754; Fax: 410-455-1598) <flinchba@umbc.edu>

The current business of acquisitions units involves not only the daily responsibilities of ordering and paying for resources in real time. It also involves the need for long-range planning. For the acquisitions unit of the future to succeed, the acquisitions unit of the present must be engaged and visionary. In other words, “A shining new era is tiptoeing nearer...be prepared!”¹ To that end, the Monographic and Serials Acquisitions staffs at **Old Dominion University** are currently immersed in a dual role — functioning in a 2015 world while preparing for a 2030 one!

Future Planning at ODU

University officials started developing a new comprehensive campus five-year plan in early 2014. Shortly thereafter, University Libraries began working on their own long-range future planning process consisting of seven phases. In phase four of our future planning process, library staff used the *ARL 2030 Scenarios*² as a reference point to project how an academic library might look and might function in 2030. Using the *ARL 2030 Scenarios* as prompts, library staff members were asked to identify key values and to imagine a “likely” library future.

Published in 2010, the *ARL 2030 Scenarios* describe research and higher educational environments in which academic libraries should be equipped to serve and to thrive. Scenario one focuses on research entrepreneurs, scenario two focuses on reusing and recycling (doing more with less as we currently know it), scenario three creates a future where disciplines and their big data are in charge, and in scenario four the research enterprise has shifted in dominance from North America to the Middle East and Asia. Although phase four of our library wide planning process has ended, the acquisitions staff continues to imagine how to conduct the business of acquisitions if aspects of the *ARL scenarios* come to fruition.

Current Scenario Realities

Located in Norfolk, VA, **Old Dominion University (ODU)** was founded in 1930 and currently serves 20,000 undergraduate and 5,000 graduate students. **ODU** offers 70 bachelor's degrees, 54 master's degrees, 42 doctoral degrees, and 2 educational specialist degrees. More than 70 degree programs are available through Distance Learning.

ODU's University Libraries' collections total approximately 3.2 million items, including over 1 million monographic volumes, over 20,000 journals and other serial publications, over 2 million microform units, and over 68,000 maps, computer data files, audiovisual, audio, film, and cartographic materials.

Current acquisitions activities at **ODU** are fairly traditional. Staff use approval plans, place firm orders, accept gifts, create standing orders, set up subscriptions, negotiate licenses, engage in document delivery and inter-library loan, and strive to establish effective vendor relationships. Likewise, the tools to complete assignments are pretty standardized. Acquisitions personnel incorporate vendor knowledge bases like **GOBI**, utilities such as **OCLC**, and subscription agents for order placement and fulfillment. However, things are changing at **ODU**. In FY2013, the monographic acquisitions unit was “repurposed” to address the anticipated increase of eBook purchases and the expected decline of print requests. In addition, an **EBL** PDA program was successfully implemented in FY2013 and was fully funded in FY2014. Moreover, initiatives on establishing a digital repository, creating a scholarly communication model, pursuing open access opportunities,

and establishing a collection policy of access rather than ownership began to be seriously debated.

2030 Scenario Assumptions

In **ODU's** 2030 scenario, libraries are less collection-focused and more access-centric. Other assumptions about collections in **ODU's** 2030 scenario are that:

- Researchers will be working for information-providing companies and will have access to all the collections they need
- Research collections will be needed much less than they are now
- Higher rates of sharing will exist between institutions
- Digital repositories will support the collections needs of an institution's researchers
- Institutions will build meaning from their niche/special collections
- Research culture, formerly based in North America, will be centralized in China, India, and the Middle East.

In the anticipated 2030 scenario, acquisitions workers will be perceived as facilitators, promoters, and providers of services rather than purchasers of materials. They will continue to order and to buy items for collections but on a much smaller scale. Moreover, they will be perceived as partners with researchers, faculty, and students in tune to the needs of their end users. To this end, the 2030 acquisitions worker will acquire the tools that researchers, faculty, and students need for their work.

Possible models and ways that 2030 acquisitions staff members may acquire, deliver, and provide access include using:

- New access models resembling Red Box and Netflix,
- Tiered access models that rely on voice recognition or fingerprints instead of IP recognition or user names and passwords
- Discipline-specific purchase models
- Fee-based models that cater to different types of students, researchers, and research projects
- Retail giants instead of traditional vendors

It is expected that Acquisitions workers will continue as stewards of their institution's financial resources. At the same time, they will be operating in scenarios where buying power is compromised and efficiency in completing their tasks is at a premium. Much faster procurement processes with less bureaucracy and red tape will be necessary.

Acquisitions work environments in 2030 are assumed to be different. The acquisitions librarian might be physically located in a research park with a team of international researchers from a spectrum of disciplines. The acquisitions librarian might assist with research grants and proposal writing by projecting costs associated with providing access to the resources and data they need for the duration of the project. The acquisitions librarian might create promotional materials about their researchers and their research projects that are used in formal reports, progress reports, social media, and trade publications. The acquisitions librarian might travel with their research team when they go into the field. The acquisitions librarian might be independently employed and work by contract for libraries, corporations, think tanks, or wealthy individuals.

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Fictional researcher **Hannah Chen**, the main character in each scenario, is a representation of future patrons and the types of environments in which the business of acquisitions might be conducted. In scenario one, where individual researchers are akin to rock stars or action heroes, **Hannah** expresses how it feels “strange” to be on a university campus because she usually works remotely. **Hannah** achieves success as a researcher in scenario two because of her networking skills and talent in “following the money.” In scenario three, **Hannah**, who had never planned to work for a university, is employed by a private research co-op where she excels in project management and logistics support. In scenario four, **Hannah** thrives because she is mobile and able to shift from a research culture formerly based in North America to one that is based in China, India, and the Middle East.

The metamorphic change of the acquisitions department between 2015 and 2030 will be remarkable in a variety of ways. First, current dependence on cost-per-use (CPU) as a primary assessment tool will give way to an emphasis on a rate on investment approach (ROI). In other words, purchases and renewals will be measured more by what a researcher gets out of the product than by how much a product is used — quality over quantity. Second, the big deal will be replaced by big data. Digital repositories, shrinking grant funding, and open access will put a premium on data that requires laser-beam-type acquisition practices. Third, a new philosophy of service from one of isolation, control, and limited flexibility to one of cooperation, fluidity, and mobility will emerge as the cornerstone of acquisitions service. Fourth, all acquisitions professionals will need to think globally to address the transfer of information knowledge from West to East as Pacific Rim countries develop their knowledge bases and Web services like Baidu Scholar, the Chinese search engine for Websites, audio files, and images. In short, by 2030 acquisitions librarians will be living in a professional world that operates vastly differently than their 2015 environment.

Conclusion

Recent July 2014 headlines in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*³ including “Around Retail Giant Amazon, University Presses Tiptoe and Whisper” and “Did Amazon Just Change the World? Unlimited Kindle Books is a Game Changer” seem to forecast the 2030 scenarios.

The Changing Face of Acquisitions

2015	2030
Purchaser	Provider
Selecting	Sharing
Library Pays	End-User Pays
Static	Mobile
Catalogs/Discovery Services	Search Engines
Record Keepers	IT Specialists
Approval Plan	Purchase on Demand
CPU	ROI
Retire	Retool
Isolation	Cooperation
Control	Conduit
Big Deal	Big Data

Regardless of where we conduct business, on a corporate complex or an academic campus, the business of acquisitions will still exist. The acquisitions librarian will bring to the table a network that might include memberships to collections that support a research team. Memberships and access to research collections, in any format, for any period of time, are part of the acquisitions librarian’s contribution to the research team. Procurement skills, negotiation skills, project management, and flexibility will contribute to the acquisitions librarian’s success in this highly entrepreneurial and mobile environment. 🌐

Endnotes

1. Be Prepared, The Lion King Soundtrack, 1994.
2. ARL 2030 Scenarios, 2010, <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/arl-2030-scenarios-users-guide.pdf>.
3. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

The Scholarly Publishing Scene from page 87

information, some of it reliable, some not, of course. I’m not writing with the benefit of market research into the matter, but it wouldn’t surprise me if it were the case that practicing engineers use whatever properties data they find on a site that looks legitimate and don’t bother much with investigating the data’s provenance. That said, there’s plenty of reliable data available and current computer-based calculations using good data look and feel a whole lot more reliable than the pencil and paper scratches that I and my masters had to make do with back in the day. Let’s check out a couple of examples.

To start with, there’s **ASM International’s** Website, which has a ton of information about materials and the processes used in manufacturing. (In days of yore, **ASM** used to deal only with metals, but for some time it has provided information on plastics, composites and ceramics, as well.) Whatever information **ASM** provides, it becomes the gold standard. Or engineers can go to MatWeb for materials

properties data. How reliable are such data? Let’s hear from MatWeb: “Most of the data in MatWeb has been supplied to us directly by companies in the supply chain — the manufacturers, or, less commonly, distributors or fabricators. Other data has been taken from standards organizations or from similar materials/known relationships by the MatWeb staff.” I found this statement when I looked at the properties of silver, MatWeb also listed three books as data sources, all from the 1990s. But never mind that, I’d guess that the data are good enough for many design purposes.

Over the last several years, publishers have told me that they’re interested in materials and chemical properties data. I tell them that my handbook contributors sometimes provide such data, but by no means can I promise that I could provide a handbook with comprehensive data. I’ve seen my handbooks open on desks where engineers were making calculations or designing something. I try to make my handbooks very useful for such purposes. But I would expect my handbook users to have to consult additional sources for materials properties data in some instances. I simply can’t include all of it.

I tell publishers that if they want to provide comprehensive data, then relying on outside handbook editors and chapter contributors won’t achieve that end. To get there, a publisher would have to employ a team of experts to put together such databases. They would have to compensate the experts, not an enticing prospect these days, when publishers tend to rely more on outside contractors than in-house employees. In addition, merely applying a publisher’s logo to data won’t guarantee that the engineering public would blithely accept such data as the equivalent of **ASM’s** gold standard data. But handbook editors and contributors can provide accurate and useful information about how materials are mined and made, how their properties can be improved, how materials can be used and in what situations — and how they degrade in certain conditions. In other words, how materials properties change over time as a result of how the materials are used. But it does take a village to produce comprehensive materials properties data and it doesn’t come cheap, nor does it fit a typical publisher’s current business model. 🌐