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A Crossroads for Collection Development and Assessment, Its Fallout, and Unknowns: Where Do We Go From Here?

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Abstract

Where do we go from here? Achieving goals of sustainable resource collections through a thorough collection assessment is evermore challenged by fallout and unknowns lurking ubiquitously. There is an ever-increasing competition for both physical space and economic space. We're at an important crossroads for collection development, collection assessment, and libraries themselves. Change and assessment must be sustainable. To be effective, change must create its own momentum. Three years into our collection assessment project, momentum has been steady and efforts continue. However, we've encountered fallout and unknowns which we hadn't planned on, and these are of an institutional and political nature.

At the 2013 Charleston Conference I presented my paper: "Less Is More: The University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point Collection Assessment Program." For the first time in decades, the UWSP Albertson Library had started a weeding and collection assessment of our entire stacks print holdings. In 2012–2013, our seven-floor learning resource center faced a pending renovation project slated for 2017. Dutifully, we vetted and adopted a thorough collection assessment plan through our collection development committee. Weeding of the collection was initiated so collections occupied "less" space, while at the same time we set out to enhance the collection so that it provided "more" up-to-date core densities, addressing academic core resources and campus-wide curricula changes.

Collection assessment was to result in better use of physical space and "more!" Areas within the University Library once devoted to stacks were aggressively cleared of library resources, as a result of plans not totally associated with "weeding" or collection assessment, instead by plans for a reconfiguration of an institutional nature. Entering into our collection assessment project we knew to expect a variety of unknowns and even "fallout." In some ways we planned for the human and technical elements of collection assessment, and but not for unknown institutional elements. We had heard stories from other academic libraries that purposely did not make weeding lists public. Thereby, we expected fallout would occur from faculty resisting weeding. Yet,

we felt by initiating a project that paired assessment (weeding) with enhancement (adding core titles) would effectively counter such concerns. In the large part, we were right: open communication with all academic departments did insure continued momentum. We made sure our assessment project included focus groups and an "open door" policy. We invited all campus faculty to review potential discard lists, posted by LC ranges. We developed a LibGuide that is vital for campus input and momentum in our project: <http://libraryguides.uwsp.edu/ca>.

Unfortunately, the past 3 years have been soured by state politics and an outright budgetary attack by the Wisconsin legislature, and governor, on publically funded higher education. Political and legislative mandates initiated huge budget cuts to the University of Wisconsin system, and even removed tenure protections from the state statutes, promising increased "flexibilities" as rewards for compliance. Political powers even worked to erase the "Wisconsin Idea" from state statutes—that measure ultimately failed when faced with a huge public outcry.

Twice in the last 3 years, the UW system budget faced 20% reductions in state funding, complicated by tuition freezes. All in all, each campus has looked to its units for budget paybacks and program prioritization. Most campuses have reduced the number of employees, through early retirement measures, selected incentive buyouts, not filling vacancies,

and layoffs. Campuses across the University of Wisconsin system continue to slash programs as they cope with a second round of fiscal cuts—a \$250 million state budget cut. Although methods have varied, each of the system’s 13 comprehensive campuses, 11 two-year UW colleges, and the University Extension, have eliminated positions and programs. Our campus entered an era of program prioritization and pleas for differential tuition. In 2015–2016, 76.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions were or will be eliminated at UW–Stevens Point as a result of reductions in state support. Work on Fiscal Year 2017 continues. It’s too soon to know if any additional FTE reductions will be required.

UW Libraries have taken more than their share of cuts in positions, programs, and base budgets. In March of 2015, the UW–Stevens Point University Library FY 2015 acquisitions budget took a huge hit, with 60% of its purchasing funds being “swept” by our division director for payback to campus Academic Affairs. In August, 2015, a move was made by the chancellor and provost to reinvest in strategically significant areas— instruction and student services and the library— restoring \$120,000 to provide materials (books, journals, electronic databases) to support the instructional program. However, by mid-semester, it was announced that the library acquisitions budget would be frozen again on March 31, 2016, and likely swept clean by June, as any end of the fiscal year monies would be needed elsewhere. Where do we go from here?

Like all academic libraries, the Albertson Learning Resource Center continues to undergo changes in collections, services, and an ever-increasing emphasis on reorganization of services, both complicated and facilitated by new discovery tools, changes to our integrated library system, and changing workflows. The initial charge for our collection assessment project was one of collection enhancement and retooling of spaces for more user friendly areas, including individual study areas, group presentation rooms, hands-on teaching labs, additional emerging technologies, possibly a learning commons, and more. Instead, reconfigured space is needed for academic service units that are part of a rushed proposal to form a

“University College.” The image of any construction zones, alone, strikes a vein of contrasting hypocrisy amidst a climate shouldered with budget shortfalls.

When initiating our collection assessment project we knew that surprises are to be expected. Yet, unknown to us at the time, administrative space studies and institutional redesign plans were operating behind the scenes, unknowns that would have a direct impact on library holdings and resources. In 2013, administratively, without any departmental or faculty discussion, the University Library had merged with other academic service units (career services, academic advising, tutoring, disability services, and assistive technology) to form a newly bequeathed Division of Academic Success. Shortly thereafter, the UW–Stevens Point chancellor and provost charged a task force, led by the new division head (our library director), to explore the creation of a University College “designed to aid students in transitioning to university study and support and retain them throughout their academic careers.” The goal was to create a unit that would have student success (retention) as their primary function. Questions became numerous, and continue to this day, about developing a new college, which will be headquartered in the Albertson Learning Resource Center.

Initially, local budget reductions delayed the effort to move forward with the creation of a University College. However, this fall semester the proposal suddenly moved forward, with little discussion. The renewed call outlined the University College as the central home for all major academic support services and retention programs, including the University’s general education program and first year seminar. Also, a new center for inclusive teaching and learning would be created so that the University’s professional development related to teaching, learning, advising, undergraduate research, and diversity would be appropriately aligned with student retention efforts. Eventually, the University College is to become the home for the university’s diversity-related activities for students, faculty, and staff to ensure that diversity is integrated into all academic support services and retention

programs. These moves are touted to ensure that the learning outcomes of the core curriculum can be effectively integrated across both curricular and co-curricular activities.

The provost announced that in recognition of budget reductions, the structure will involve no new positions or funding. A dean's position will be retitled from the existing director of academic success. A .5 FTE assistant dean/director of the library will be created from an existing library faculty position, similar to a chair's release in the colleges; noting that this would have to be done with or without the University College effort, due to a pending retirement in summer of 2016. However, not noted was the fact that in addition to the switch of the library director faculty position to division head, the Library has lost three FTE positions, with two faculty resigning (taking jobs outside the UW System) and one staff retirement (that was not replaced.) Campus administrators determined that none of those FTE would be filled, resulting in increased workloads and stresses for others. Also, it was revealed that funding for a teaching center director will be redirected "from existing professional development uses in order to serve a broader audience." To that effect, a moratorium was placed on tuition reimbursement for faculty/staff, which is a significant downside to professional development.

The updated proposal went to shared governance, Common Council, as an information item. Library faculty and staff, while not necessarily opposed to the idea of the forming of a new college, felt they had not been part of the discussions or the task force efforts as this model was generated. At Common Council concerns were raised on a number of fronts, including: costs, resources, positions, mission, and structure. The Provost apologized to those who felt left out of the process, explaining that the task force was created to explore the idea and to look at redundancies in certain areas; further explaining that there is no new money associated with the proposed University College, but current budget lines and some vacant positions will be repurposed. The one new hire is anticipated to be the director of the teaching center. A question was raised: where

are the resources coming from for remodeling that is being done? Others asked regarding the creation of a new college on campus: who or what is the authority for this? Why the push to have this University College put in place by January 2016 when it has not been vetted or discussed through faculty governance channels? The provost noted, according to state statute, only the creation of a new college that holds and offers academic programs needs to go through a different vetting process. Since this college will not offer academic programs, the vetting process is different.

Where do we go from here?" Work continues; some unknowns may soon become known, even as I post this paper. The University of Wisconsin system regents are scheduled in the second week of December to rule on the creation of the University College, and differential tuition for UW–Stevens Point.

A side note of importance on global literacy: Withdrawals, transfers, replacements, and gifts are all key factors in collection maintenance and development. At the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point Albertson Library we have found that weeded collections and unneeded gifts can open new horizons, which impact global literacy and contribute to the quality of life for people of lesser developed regions. Literacy partnerships are two-way relationships involving mutual planning and conduct of programs and projects. We believe that education and access to books are basic human rights. Working together, with our literacy partners, we cycle many of our withdrawn titles to help fund high-impact literacy projects. By finding old books new homes, we have created a sustainable solution for diverting books from landfills. The Better World Books (BWB) donations and discards program helps us manage and ease our workflows related to withdrawn books and unneeded gifts. We've partnered with BWB (<http://www.betterworldbooks.com/>) and our nonprofit foundation, the Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of the Americas, Inc. (<http://www.wisnic.org/>). In addition, we have a yearlong library book sale that includes selected gift books and older withdrawn titles of higher value. A percentage of proceeds

from BWB and the library book sale are shared with the Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of the Americas (W/NP). The Library's share of BWB proceeds is used to support the purchase of CORE (resources for the college library) items for our library collections, thus enhancing key needs of our collections. Proceeds from the book sale are used to support the purchase of current paperbacks and audiobooks for the leisure reading collection, to encourage reading for the fun of it!

The mission of W/NP is simple and effective: helping people improve their quality of life in practical, sustainable ways through a network of citizen and institutional involvement throughout the state of Wisconsin and the republic of Nicaragua. People-to-people programs promote cultural awareness and community development. Over the past 50 years, the W/NP "Sewing Centers" transitioned into "Learning Centers" as more skills became increasingly necessary and useful. Each of the Learning Centers maintains the common goal of providing opportunities for skill enrichment and development, yet each self-governed Learning Center is unique and special in its own way. By working together identifying needs and desired goals, the support from Wisconsin has been tremendous through the

gathering of supplies for the Learning Center (LC) classes. Each LC is autonomous with organization and management by the women of their communities. Class subjects are in response to requests from community members. All classes are designed to include skill-building, personal dignity, and self-sufficiency, with a focus on employment for (rural) women. The program is focused on the care of families and communities and the encouragement of members to assume leadership responsibilities, and strives for international understanding and friendship. The Opening Doors project is intended to give business training plus a small amount of funds to enable men and women to start business enterprises, thus learning while actually running their businesses. Many of the participants in the Learning Centers learn skills that they would like to use to start a business, but do not have the necessary funds or business knowledge. In 2013 and 2014 eighteen learning centers from different parts of Nicaragua participated, benefiting about 100 people and their families. Promoting education at all levels continues to be a primary goal for individual book donations, Better World Book funds assist to build collections at the Learning Center libraries, which help make significant improvements for a student's educational experience.