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Tom Loughran
Blackwell's Book Services, tom.loughran@blackwell.com

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The Collection Development Role of the Library Liaison: A View from Both Sides of the Fence

by Sean Kinder (Humanities and Social Sciences Librarian, Western Kentucky University) and Jack G. Montgomery (Coordinator of Collection Services, Western Kentucky University, Library Automation and Technical Services, 309 Cravens Library Complex W.K.U. Libraries, One Big Red Way, Bowling Green, KY 42101) <Jack.Montgomery@wk.edu>

This article explores the complementary role of collection development in the library liaison process as exemplified here at WKU and offers the perspective of the library's Collection Development Officer and the viewpoint of a librarian new to the role. Hopefully, this article will provide insights into the role of the library liaison in the collection development process.

Part One: The Role of The Collection Development Librarian

Each librarian in the WKU Department of Public Services has a series of academic departments and/or programs assigned to them for liaison services. Their orientation to this role is given by the Collection Services Coordinator, who works cross departmentally although officially assigned to the Department of Library Automation and Technical Services. The Collection Services Coordinator also coordinates the activities of the library liaisons, administers the Collection Development program, manages the acquisitions process and acts as a program liaison to the Afro-American Studies Program as well. One advantage of this cross-departmental position has been to create enhanced interdepartmental communication and promote better understanding of the integrated nature of our roles, needs and policies. This cross departmental position also provides a seamless link between the entire process of materials acquisition for the library. This position was established almost two years ago and has already been heralded as a positive organizational decision.

The Collection Services Coordinator (hereafter called CSC) establishes the overall materials budget and, in a nutshell, makes certain that the Collection Development policy and liaison program functions as intended. As an example, on a biannual basis, the CSC and the appropriate library liaisons meet with the departmental and program representatives from each college to exchange reports and information, give and receive feedback and plan the future of Collection Development at the University. These meetings establish and maintain that vital communications link so important to effective relations between the academic departments and the library. Another role for the CSC is to assist the liaison in learning to interpret the information on orders and fund expenditures available to each librarian and faculty member on the library’s TOPCAT integrated library system employing the Endeavor Voyager acquisitions/serials subsystem. The role of the CSC has a large educational component as he must communicate with all parties involved in the Collection Development process. Part of that communication process is to orient new WKU liaisons to their role in collection development. As an example, here is a list of the basic definitions and instructions given to each liaison at the time of their initial orientation to their role as liaison in the WKU system.

Definition of a WKU Library Liaison:
The WKU Library Liaison’s collection development role is a relational one established either formally or informally by the liaison for the specific purpose of seeking input and guidance and input on the selection of library materials. Liaisons at WKU Libraries are assigned and coordinate their roles through their supervisor and the Collection Services Coordinator. It should be added that the departmental or program liaison also provides reference services, bibliographic instruction and assists the teaching faculty with their research as requested. Continued on page 78