Winter 2004

Collection Development for New Librarians: Advice from the Trenches

J. Cory Tucker
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, cory.tucker@unlv.edu

Matt Torrence

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from graduate school to a professional academic library position is a challenging one, especially when facing the initial journey into collection development. Many librarians experience the stress of this move because in most instances recent graduates do not have the necessary skills, simply due to lack of applied experience and education. For many graduates, this lack of education is due to the fact that a majority of MLS programs offer only one collection development class. These classes cannot possibly prepare the student for all of the tasks involved in collection development. There isn't enough time to discuss all of the elements related to collection development activities in detail. Additionally, it's quite rare for graduate students to have garnered any practical collection development experience from working in a library. It is our experience that some graduates have not worked in a library and that those who do tend to working in public services or clerical positions.

This article reviews the literature related to graduate school preparation for collection development and presents relevant experiences of recent graduates and their collection development experiences. This article provides practical advice to new librarians based upon relevant experiences at the University of South Florida, Tampa (USF) and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Topics include acclimation to a new environment, collection development policies and procedures, liaison work, resource selection, and time management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When reviewing the literature for this topic, three areas must be discussed. The areas include the existing body of literature about collection development courses in library and information science graduate programs, an assessment of the skills collection development officers expect new graduates to possess and finally, the types of assistance or training that is available to new graduates upon hire.

Although much has been written about collection development and the skills required to succeed, there has not been much discourse about collection development and classes offered by many graduate schools. In her 2001 article, Barbara Moran states that "positions are hardening in the growing rift between the educators and the practitioners in the library field. Many practitioners are convinced that the library and information science (LIS) schools have either abandoned educating librarians or that they are not educating them well (or both)[1]." One of the areas of concern in the article is collection development. The concern of being prepared for collection development duties by new graduates is not uncommon. Paul Metz discussed this in his 1994 article, "when collection development officers gather and conferences and institutes or through electronic discussion groups, one of the recurring topics is the ideal composition of a course on collection development. They lament what was missing when they went to library school and the gaps in knowledge, both practical and theoretical, they see in new graduates [2]." In concurrence with the piece by Moran, another article written by two recent graduates acknowledge the fact that graduate school does not always prepare the student for the collection development process. In their 2001 article, Locknar and Vine state that "because you will probably get very little hands-on experience with collection

development in library school, this area is often a challenge for the new librarian [3]."

Still, the problems associated with a graduate collection development class cannot be blamed entirely on the library and information science curriculum. The collection development class strives to teach basic elements of knowledge, which are important pieces of the puzzle. Unfortunately, the class cannot possibly discuss every aspect of collection development and all the minute details. Collection development classes cover the major areas, but areas of practical knowledge cannot be discussed or practice to any great extent. Katz (1994) agrees "no library should have to teach a recent graduate the difference between a firm order and a blanket order…No library should have to inform recent graduates about the standard tools selectors use in evaluating materials. There are ways to resolve the tension between macro-level intellectual understanding and practical knowledge and skills, both of which library and information science education must convey to future collection development librarians [4]." Katz states the "key approach is to make sure the content of the core courses in which all students participate includes the larger questions that all librarians must think about, but that are especially relevant in collection development [5]." Although many library schools do not necessarily have an additional collection development class for its students, Futas (1994) believes having a practicum will supplement the knowledge learned from the collection development course [6]. The author further states "this analysis suggests that collection development practicums should focus on areas in which student contributions can be made within the time frame available and should exclude those areas in which it is not possible to provide a meaningful experience in the context of a library school course [7]."

Depending on the type of collection development model adopted by a library, the

skills new librarians will be expected to have will vary. At the ALCTS CMDS Collection

Development Librarians of Academic Subject Group, Linda Phillips, Head, Collection

Development & management at the University of Tennessee, outlined seven skills she

looked for in new librarians: commitment to service, analytical perspective,

communication skills, mathematical/financial skills, managerial skills and ethical values,

continuous learner and vision [8]. Other skills or competencies for collection

development have been discussed. In her 1998 article, Pastine lists other important skills

like knowledge of scholarly communication, emerging technologies, site licensing,

intellectual property, copyright issues and assessment [9].

In relation to a specific skill set, there have been publications which have

discussed creating a document outlining competencies for bibliographers and librarians.

One example of this type of document was discussed in an article from a group of

librarians at Iowa State University (ISU). ISU Library created a document describing

competencies for each librarian. The competencies include time management and skill

development, updated subject knowledge, and an understanding of the budgetary process,

just to name a few [10].

It has been established that specific skills are required for collection development

and library and information science schools have structured their curriculum to develop

these "core" proficiencies. However, what function do libraries play in the development

of new librarians and their collection development skills? Some libraries have training

programs for new professionals. In his 1994 article, Soete outlines the relationship

between the library and the new librarian. He writes that "bringing in a new

bibliographer onto the staff is both a wonderful opportunity and a daunting challenge for

the academic research library [11]." Soete further transcribes that "the first six months or so are the best time in the newcomer's tenure to set the direction and establish the context that will lead to success [12]." When discussing training programs, the focus should be on two characteristics. The first is the development of and planning for a training program and then what skills should be addressed in the training program? The training curriculum should be effective and well organized [13]. Soete discusses the development of this type of agenda for new librarians. Soete states that there should be five stages that form a basis for an individual program tailored to each trainee's needs. The five stages include a needs assessment, development of training objectives, identification of training methods and activities, development of performance goals, measures and expectations and finally, evaluation [14]. In addition to outlining the training program, Soete also analyzes the skill areas for collection development to be addressed through a training program. He organizes the skill areas in to three groups. Group I consists of command of basic functional principles and subject knowledge. Group II includes knowledge of local policy and procedure, understanding of work expectations and understanding the environment. Group III includes awareness of organizational culture and management skills [15].

Although most libraries have documented the basic competencies and tasks required of their collection development personnel, these materials do not always stress the importance of continual update and improvement of related aptitudes. Not only has the academic climate changed, but also the medium of library collections. As argued by many, including Blake and Suprenant, collection development is still bound by the rules and processes of a print collection that is "owned" by the library [16]. Their work goes

on to address a number of concerns related to the changing environment fostered by the increase(s) in electronic resources, but there are several elements of the research that are especially helpful to new librarians in the field of collection development.

In this 2000 work, Blake and Suprenant further stress "To recruit computer literate faculty and be fiscally contributing to the college/university are also obligations that will be placed on the library and information science education faculty. If this ideal is being executed, new librarians should be armed with increasingly advanced skills related to what is now a largely electronic collection development process. This does not replace, but compliments the training that will be formally and informally offered by the library itself [17]." The authors also impress upon the reader, and certainly the new librarian, that "the collection is now a far larger entity [18]". This article dies not speak to all facets of this statement, but this is of particular relevance to the rookie selector. The playing field has changed considerably with the advent of electronic resources that, as the authors say, "do not exist as physical entities [19]." Libraries and library educators have started to address this change in our environment, but they, too, have had to alter their opinions and methods in accordance with this new reality. All of this makes training and relationships with colleagues and the departments that much more critical. A great example of a training program in collection development was written by librarians at the University of California at Santa Barbara [20]. The article discussed a training program in collection development for new librarians. The training program addresses several issues including ordering, communication with faculty, collection assessment and budgeting.

In addition to acquiring basic collection development skills, a new librarian needs to determine the roles he/she plays within the organization. The title and role of "bibliographer" is still around, too, and this has created more than one confusing moment for someone new to professional collection development responsibilities. Job titles and activities have always been the source of fun and confusion, but as Lee asserts his 2003 article, many are upset at the "deprofessionalization of bibliography and the downgrading of bibliographers within the system [21]." Not only does the new librarian need to determine their role in the grand scheme of the library's collection development process, but also how this role is viewed and appreciated by other library and academic faculty [22].

Lee's work goes on to raise further issues related to this topic and to what defines a subject bibliographer or specialist and their responsibilities. Using the example of a women's studies collection, the author discusses the appointment of these tasks and how they are sometimes defined as scholastic activities, but other times as administrative functions. If, as is often the case, a librarian assigned to a particular discipline does not have an academic background in this area, it can be much more complicated for the newly initiated [23].

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR NEW LIBRARIANS

As recent graduates from library and information science, we have compiled a list of topics that offers practical advice for other new librarians. The areas of collection development have been selected after a year of experience in librarianship. These areas include budget allocation, identifying user needs, selection of resources and collection evaluation. Other areas related to collection development will be discussed including

acclimating to the new environment, time management and liaison work. Based on our experience, we conclude that to "on the job training" is the best means to effectively learn collection development and it takes time to become comfortable with the entire process.

As stated previously, libraries utilize many different models of collection development. This paper focuses on a distributed model in which librarians are assigned specific disciplines, and where collection development is just one component of their job. However, the items discussed will also be useful for librarians who act as a bibliographer for a specific discipline and collection development is the only aspect of their job. Furthermore, the paper is geared towards librarians who are responsible for selecting resources including monographs, journals and electronic databases. This process is one that utilizes the analytical and decision-making abilities of subject-based librarians and communication with students, faculty and department liaisons to make sound collection-based decisions to develop a collection of resources that best meets user needs.

<u>What is Collection Development?</u>

For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on four specific areas including budget allocation, identifying user needs, selection of resources and collection evaluation. Other areas related to collection development will be discussed including acclimating to the new environment, time management and liaison work

After having worked in a library over a year, the author's perception of collection development has changed. Collection Development can be over analyzed and academic for students that are being taught philosophies and theories about this process and its basic elements. Once out of school, however these concepts are not necessarily useful in the real world of librarianship. In Library and Information Science programs, collection

development generally is described in terms of a physical or electronic collection. Practically speaking, collection development is no longer just about creating the physical Collection. More important is the notion of providing access to information. As a librarian, you are providing patrons access to information. The end result of the collection development process is providing access to information regardless of format or location. This concept, along with the building the physical collection is critical to collection development.

Collection Development Process

The phrase collection development process needs further definition to establish a focus for this paper. When referring to the collection development process, the paper is concerned with policies and procedures established to develop the library's collections. Learning the collection development process can be one of the most daunting tasks for the new librarian. In some instances, the policies may not be documented or this information may not be part of your new job orientation.

As a new librarian, you need to understand your library's collection development policy and discover as much as you can about how the process works. For example, how does the library buy monographs? What is the process for recommending or purchasing journals and electronic databases? How is the budget tracked? What is the preferred format for resources? Determining, all of these issues can be time consuming and the faster you understand the process, the easier your life will be at your new job. The best-case scenario is for the library to have an existing training program which deals with these issues and allows you to become acclimated to the process. If a training program is not available, check the *Guide for Training Collection Development Librarians* from the

Association for Library Collections and Technical Services Division of the American

Library Association. Although this publication is a guide for establishing a training

program, there is some useful information regarding competencies. Another good idea is

to ask for a collection development mentor to support you through the system for the first

six months or so.

Acclimating to Your Library

As a new librarian, starting a job can be stressful and overwhelming. The first

step in starting the your collection development duties is to become acclimated with your

new environment. Here are some things to do to become more familiar to your

surroundings:

- Check the Website of the college and departments to which you are responsible. The

Website usually contains information about classes offered, programs offered

(undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate) and faculty information. Looking over the

current collection may not mean much unless one knows what the user needs are.

- Get to know your collection by browsing the bookstacks, journals and the reference

section. Also, review the library's website for list of database, ejournals and other

resources. Looking at the existing resources in the collection allows you to analyze what

type of collection has been created. This type of assessment will provide information

about the format, age, quality, scope, age and physical condition of the collection. This

will also help in your selection process by showing gaps in the collection.

- It is also important to understand the library organization. This includes budgeting,

purchasing, fiscal cycle and structure of the library.

- Depending on the library's structure, set-up meeting with the person in charge of

collection development and other departments like acquisitions or budgeting. Learn the budget process. Gain knowledge on collection development policies and procedures. Meet with other people involved in the collection development process, like acquisitions.

Liaison Activities

Liaison work is an extremely important part of collection development. These activities involve communicating with your patrons and building relationships to assist with your collection development duties. As a subject librarian, you are the main link between the library and academic departments. Liaison activities involve establishing a line of communication with faculty and students through email, telephone or meetings.

Liaison work with your assigned department is vital for many reasons. First, you may have been assigned to a subject area for which you have not trained or are not al that familiar. If this is the case, the faculty of your academic departments can be extremely helpful in providing background for your discipline. Liaison work can also be beneficial in regards to selection of materials. Faculty may be able to recommend books, journals and other materials. Establishing an effective line of communication is vital to gaining effective collaboration for the purchase of more expensive and extensive resources.

Liaison work can be a very time consuming process because of all of the time spent meeting and talking with people outside of the library, but the benefits reaped from the relationships you build are invaluable. Before contacting your academic department, visit the department's Website and gather as much information as possible. Departmental sites have a great deal of information on classes taught and faculty research interests [24]. It is recommended that you contact the department and set-up a meeting with the department head. For the initial meeting, develop a list of questions so you are able to

obtain as much information as possible. Next, ask to attend the next departmental staff meeting for your assigned area. Also, visit with individual faculty to discuss their research interests and students needs. It is also helpful to use liaison work to contact nonacademic departments such as the university's foundation, alumni association and budget department. Use liaison work to network and meet as many people as possible, especially those that may have an indirect impact with collection development. For example, the university's foundation may be able to establish an endowment for a discipline.

The bottom line is to network and meet as many people as possible early on, especially if you think they may have an indirect impact with collection development. To learn more information about liaison work, the authors suggest reading the *Reference and User Services Association Guidelines for Liaison Work in Managing Collections and Services*.

Developing Subject Expertise

As stated previously, the likelihood of a person being familiar with the particular subject for collection development is slim. In many cases, the person stepping in does not have in-depth knowledge of the subject area. Below are some tips for acclimating to the subject area:

- Liaison work is very important in obtaining more knowledge about the subject. Use liaison work to contact faculty in colleges and departments. The faculty are obviously the experts in their field and can provide a great deal of information on the discipline.
- Interview faculty to see what types or formats of materials are important for the discipline.

- Find the level of students that are in your assigned departments. Undergraduate, graduate and/or doctorate? This is important because depending on the level, students have different needs.

- Locate the type of degrees offered by the colleges and departments?

- Check to see if your discipline has an accrediting agency or organization. Does the agency require library standards?

- Contact other librarians in similar subjects. Email or telephone other librarians in your disciplines. Check to see if there is a listserv in your discipline. Listservs are invaluable tools for librarians. Also, find out if there are other libraries on campus or in town that may have collections or resources in your assigned areas.

- Hold a meeting with your instruction department. Instructors who teach bibliographic instruction sessions can provide information on the types of classes being taught in your area.

- Meet with librarians and library staff who participate in the reference service pool. Reference staff can inform you about the types of questions asked at the reference desk by students in your discipline.

- Check with your professional organizations to see if there is a section devoted to your discipline. The American Library Association and Special Libraries Association have sections for many disciplines.

Budget Allocation

Budget allocation is a new concept for librarians entering the field. Each library has there own method of allocating funds to purchase library materials. As a librarian with collection development responsibilities, you will be given certain amount of funds to

purchase library materials. These funds may be divided by different subjects and
material formats (journals, books, etc). You will have to constantly monitor funds to
make certain you are not overspending. Also keep in mind that in most cases, you will
have to spend your money by a specified date. Another aspect of budget allocation is
format of resources. For example, a book is a "one-time" use of funds, whereas a journal
is an ongoing commitment of funds.

Identifying User Needs

- Interview faculty to see what types or formats of materials are important for the
discipline.

- Find the level of students that are in your assigned departments. Undergraduate,
graduate and/or doctorate? This is important because depending on the level, students
have different needs.

- Locate the type of degrees offered by the colleges and departments?

- Check the Website of the college and departments to which you are responsible. The
Website usually contains information about classes offered, programs offered
(undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate) and faculty information. Looking over the
current collection may not mean much unless one can identify user needs.

- Hold a meeting with your instruction department. Instructors who teach bibliographic
instruction sessions can provide information on the types of classes being taught in your
area.

- Meet with librarians and library staff who participate in the reference service pool.
Reference staff can inform you about the types of questions asked at the reference desk
by students in your discipline.

Selecting Materials

Selection of materials is a very important component of the collection development process. Selecting materials is the most vital portion of your job. Matching the appropriate resources to your patron needs cannot be overemphasized. When analyzing the selection of materials, each type of resource needs to be discussed. This includes books, journals and electronic databases.

Books

There are several things to be aware of in the selection of books including:

- Who are the major publishers in your discipline? Some publishers produce higher quality content than others.

- Inflation – books, like most resources are affected by the rate of inflation. Prices of books increase each year.

- Format – electronic publishing of books is increasing. For example, are e-books more cost-effective than printed books in your assigned area?

- Approval plan – for books, the library may have a contract with a company to send books on approval, using a profile for each discipline. If this is the case, review the profile for your disciplines.

- Use statistics from circulation and interlibrary loan can be very helpful. These statistics will help provide a trend of use and indicate demand.

Journals

Journals are a very challenging area in collection development because they are an ongoing commitment of funds:

- Who are the major publishers in your discipline? Some publishers have more

research oriented material compared to others

- Inflation – Inflation is a potential problem when considering your budget. Journals prices are affected by inflation each year. The amount of inflation depends on the subject.

- Format – electronic versus print subscriptions. Electronic subscriptions may encounter embargos. There are also archival issues and content implications.

- Journal rankings can be important. For each discipline, there are certain journals that are considered "core" or important. Use liaison work to get a list of journals rankings. The JCR (journals citation index) can also help with journal ratings.

- Publisher alternatives – in addition to "major" publishers, be aware of SPARC initiatives. SPARC is the Scholarly & Publishing Academic Resources Coalition focuses on enhancing broad and cost-effective access to peer-reviewed scholarship. SPARC resources can be a great, cost-effective alternative.

- Use statistics from Interlibrary loan, mediated document delivery services and Circulation statistics for internal and check-out use can be very useful.

- Consortias – does the library belong to a consortia? Consortias may offer discounts for large journal collections.

- Licensing – become more familiar with reviewing licenses for e-journals.

Databases

Below are some issues to take into consideration when selecting databases:

- Inflation – the cost of databases are influenced by inflation and publisher pricing models.

- Test the database. Set up a trial to see how the database is delivered (IP address or password) and test the usability of the database.

- Statistics – does the vendor provide monthly, yearly use statistics?

- Consortias – does the library belong to a consortia? Consortias may provide discounts for databases.

- Licensing – become more familiar with reviewing licenses for databases.

In addition to discussing materials and resources, there are other items to be aware of in the selection process:

- Evaluation materials – can be very helpful when selecting materials. Many library magazines and journals provide reviews on products. An example is *CHOICE*. These can be very useful to you as a selector, but, keep in mind that these reviews are published well after the book is and may not be as useful especially if you are on an approval plan and have books that haven't been reviewed.

- Another good idea is to speak with faculty and identify other universities that may be viewed as "peer institutions." Look at the holdings of the "peer institutions" and see what types of materials they are buying. You may also use *WorldCat* for this process.

- Liaison work is important in selection. Faculty can be very helpful in material selection. Ask faculty to recommend books. Faculty involvement is essential for effective collection development [25].

- Check college and department websites to look at what classes are offered. Review available course descriptions and syllabi.

- Interview faculty to obtain research interests.

- Establish relationships with librarians within your library. There may be an overlap between subjects.

- Use statistics to analyze where patrons are obtaining their information. If you don't know how your users locate information, how can you select for them? For example, use circulation and reshelving statistics to see if more books are used than journals. Also, review database use statistics provided by vendors, if available.

Collection Evaluation

This part of collection development relates to assessment of the collection and is an ongoing process. To get a better idea of how patrons use and access information, take a closer and more fine-tuned look at your collection. Be aware that there are many methods available to help conduct a needs assessment for the collection. These methods are both qualitative and quantitative in manner. Some qualitative methods include the use of surveys and focus groups to gather information In addition, quantitative methods using statistical input from Circulation, Interlibrary Loan (ILL), and vendor data may also be beneficial. Performing these types of research will help you further understand the collection and the user. Collection evaluation can also be performed through comparison. If your subject area has an accrediting agency or organization, look to see if there are library standards. In addition, compare your collection with a peer institution. Look at their holdings and see what differences or gaps may exist.

Time Management

Collection development is usually only one of the many duties assigned to a

librarian, so it is important to have good organizational skills and practices. Being able to multi-task is imperative for librarians. The authors suggest devoting a specific amount of time for each of your assigned duties. Using time management you can either define a number of regularly scheduled hours each week or day or devote specific blocks of uninterrupted time for collection development..

Other Issues

There are other collection development issues that new librarians should be aware of specifically related to electronic resources. These issues include the trend towards electronic publishing, information packaging and the technology used to deliver it, archiving including perpetual archives, access to last print, potential loss of content; electronic claiming and check-in, and copyright

Conclusion

Collection development is a challenging arena for new graduates not yet well versed with practical knowledge and, by definition, experience. In addition, the field of collection development is changing at a rapid pace and keeping up with these changes requires the use and awareness of many new and evolving types of resources. Continuing enhancement of the skills required to identify, evaluate, and select new materials in a wide variety of formats is a primary element for the advancement of both career and collection. Only with practice and research can one hope to make the best decisions for a library and its users.

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