Faculty vs. Staff Selection: Collection Development in the Academic Library

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Several questions come to mind immediately when considering what should be the most productive method of managing the development of an academic library collection (i.e., the process of fund allocation and item selection): "How can this activity, which takes place in a very complex organization, be reduced to a list of acceptable guidelines that will allow for a consistent approach to collection growth?" "Have basic principles governing this process in academic libraries been established and proved valid?" "Since every academic library operates, or should operate, to fulfill the particular needs of its parent institution, could a set of general principles serve the individual library as it works to establish its unique collection development strategy?" "Where should collection development responsibilities reside, with faculty or with librarians?"

Most academic librarians have more than likely considered these and many other relevant questions, and some have developed firm ideas (solutions?) that they feel should guide year-to-year, or decade-to-decade, collection development programs. All have, of course, qualified their answers with what are perhaps the primary variables in all such considerations: size and history of the library; characteristics of the institution that the library serves; and the existence of cooperative arrangements, potential and/or actual, with other libraries. Many would probably agree that, even in these days when the automation of library operations appears to be the foremost topic under consideration in the literature and in operating budget requests, the most important question, considering its implications for library success or failure, still concerns the way a library proceeds to develop the most efficacious *local* collection of materials for the academic community that it serves. Certainly no other question confronting an academic library deserves more professional attention, effort, and (oine hopes) insight. Computer-based operations are no doubt desirable and unquestionably necessary, especially in larger libraries; but it helps to be reminded that the basic measure of a library's

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effectiveness has been, and will be, the quality of its own collection in terms of its stated mission.

In view of the apparent complexities and uncertainties underlying the collection development process, how should a library go about this most vital process? Or, to put the question another way, what should be the basic premise in any policy developed to guide the use of given resources to accomplish the goal of achieving the most effective collection possible—a "balanced" collection that will satisfy adequately the most immediate needs of the academic community? Regardless of the size of an academic library, it appears obvious that effective collection development should be based on a policy that establishes, in concrete terms, a cooperative effort among faculty, librarians, administrative staff, and students. Each of these four components of the academic community should have an explicit procedure for adding titles to the collection easily and with a minimum of bureaucratic delay. With each of these groups participating in title selection, the collection will grow according to the current needs of the community for which the library operates. It is probable that a collection development system based on such a broad community of involved participants will result in a collection that reflects the particular interests and strengths of the institution's research and instructional program.

It is difficult to see how the academic library collection can remain an effective tool in the educational program without systematic title selection by faculty in each discipline that the library must support. It is especially important for faculty to concentrate their selection efforts on the acquisition of current publications. Regardless of the bibliographical expertise of librarians in a given discipline, they cannot always remain aware of current research and instructional directions taken by the individual faculty members working in the discipline. It is true that some academic departments are, at certain points, less interested than others in building the library collection; however, this situation can be countered by a persistently strong library effort to encourage the slower departments to participate effec-

tively. More importantly, it is also true that, given by policy a large share of the responsibility for determining what their library contains, the large majority of faculty will contribute willingly and effectively to the library's collection development program.

Allocation Process

In libraries where funds for new materials are limited, academic departments or schools must receive an annual allocation for new materials; and this allocation process can be one of the most difficult tasks faced by the library director. Perhaps the most effective method—one that allows the library the year-to-year flexibility that it requires—is to have allocations determined by the library director in consultation with the chairperson of the faculty library committee, reviewed by the entire faculty library committee, and with a final review by the chief academic officer of the institution.

Equally important in the collection development process is the contribution of the library's professional staff, especially those who are assigned to the public services areas. Because of their daily interaction with users, public services librarians are in an excellent position to develop an in-depth awareness of the degree to which the collection responds to current needs and requirements. Making sure that the collection is responsive to users' needs should be one of their most important ongoing duties. Given their particular vantage point for a detailed knowledge of the total collection, this group is perhaps in the best position to make the most effective retrospective purchasing decisions. Definite annual allocations should be made available for this group in order to formalize and facilitate their work in the selection process. It is crucial that public services librarians accept responsibility for developing and maintaining an ongoing dialogue with faculty in all matters pertaining to the collection development effort. If librarians are indeed partners with the faculty in the educational process, this cooperative effort in collection development will proceed as an inevitable outcome of their collaboration.

A procedure for acquiring materials required by the administrative staff of the academic community should be established and made readily available. Allocating funds directly to this large, varied group, which is usually outside of the regular library-faculty communications channels, might be impossible; therefore, the library director should plan to have a fund available for this purpose. A large effort should be made to communicate to this group the library's responsibility to serve its needs as well as the needs of the instructional staff and students. Ordering and notification procedures should be explicit, and a persistent effort should be made to encourage administrative staff to contribute to the collection development program.

The academic library should always establish a definite procedure for receiving and acting upon title requests submitted by students. Of course, many student recommendations may prove to be inappropriate for the collection; however, a very large number will be highly desirable titles that were overlooked by faculty and librarians. Very few public relations activities can generate more goodwill toward the library than inviting students to have an active role in the development of the library's collections. This policy can lead more and more students to refer to the library as "our" library rather than "the" library—a development that can only help the library in its effort to remain the center of the intellectual life of the student body that it serves. Student recommendations can be received in a suggestion box located in a heavily-used part of the library or through the public services librarians who work with students on a daily basis. It also helps to have a library director whose office is easily accessible and always open for discussions of new titles with enthusiastic, motivated students.

If it is accepted that effective academic library collections can be best developed through a well-coordinated cooperative effort by faculty, librarians, administrative staff, and students, what kind of collection development policy should govern the process? It would seem advisable to establish a policy that concentrates on facilitating this cooperative effort rather than to emphasize, for example, numbered levels of purchasing activity among the various Library of Congress classification groups. Over the years, given such a cooperative joint effort, the "balanced" collection—that is, a collection that adequately satisfies the general requirements of the total academic community—will begin to take shape. At least the library might be assured that, to a certain extent, the collection is growing in direct response to current user requirements for informational resources. The level of success achieved in fulfilling these requirements is the primary measure of the effectiveness of the academic library's contribution to the educational program of the institution.