Collection Development:
Necessarily A Shared Enterprise

Sheila S. Intner

A discussion of collection development and the collection development officer naturally begins with a review of the evolution of the issue of technical vs. public services in librarianship. In the heyday of the profession's growth—the last quarter of the nineteenth century—the concept of a librarian included responsibility for choosing books, hiring staff, deciding how to catalog books, classifying them for the shelves, compiling bibliographies, and, occasionally, assisting readers. Dewey, Cutter, Jewett, Panizzi, and others, famous librarians all, were not identified as technical service librarians or public service librarians. They were just librarians.

Somewhere along the way, librarians began to specialize, so that one hundred years later, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, practitioners are known as administrative, technical service, or public service librarians. Administrators bear the closest resemblance to the librarians of the past, while technical service librarians eschew contact with the public and public service librarians eschew contact with behind-the-scenes bibliographic systems that enable them to do their jobs.

This tripartite split in the organization of libraries and librarians probably was a natural reaction to increasing size and complexity of library collections and services—increases of which we are proud. The larger, more complex library is our tradition. Since 1970, however, as computing has become ubiquitous in libraries, observers have noticed that these hallowed distinctions tend to fragment the value to librarians of online bibliographic systems. Many of us are aware of movements toward unifying the services, with the University of Illinois model leading the

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way and Michael Gorman's vision of the *compleat librarian* using special knowledge both for cataloging and reference services.[1]

In 1982, when I was at Columbia University, there were several librarians with special subject expertise who had duties as bibliographers and as catalogers for their subject literatures. Every now and then I find an article that discusses service integration, with one in last April's *Library Quarterly* stating that motivating factors are to enhance job satisfaction for librarians and increase their awareness of what patrons need and ways they use data.[2]

Lest you think librarians are all dashing off to revise their organization charts, however, you should know that Janet Swan Hill's survey of 1987 descriptive cataloging literature found it devoid of accounts of integration with public service activities—something she mentioned in passing.[3] Lask week, I received a Letter to the Editor from Michael Gorman that will run in the January issue of *LRTS* decrying her statement along with Hill's reply.[4] So the jury is still out on service integration. Some years from now we may have a better perspective on its success or failure. (That's the hindsight perspective.) That said, let's go on to collection development.

Defining Collection Development

Collection development is a new name for an old game. Librarians have always been concerned with accumulating materials and transforming them into useful collections. In a simpler world, it was called acquisitions. Look at David Melcher's classic work *On Acquisitions* and you'll see he was concerned with identifying, selecting, ordering, and—being himself a publisher—paying for books and all manner of other informational materials.[5] In 1988, we call these processes and several more now subsumed under the same rubric, *collection development.* It is an apt description because the word *collection* is, somehow, grander in scale than acquisitions, and the information explosion has forced libraries to become collectors on a grand scale; while *devel-*

opment reflects that this is, inherently, a dynamic process.

Collection development is a process that is continually in motion. I think of collection development as a cycle of activities performed in pursuit of relevant and useful materials for the people who use the library. It is comprised of ten steps:

1. Assessing user needs.
2. Formulating objectives and priorities.
3. Measuring current collection performance.
4. Identifying materials available to collect.
5. Selecting desired items/categories of items.
6. Reviewing current holdings for unwanted materials.
7. Allocating and monitoring acquisitions funds.
8. Obtaining desired new materials and removing unwanted older materials.
9. Evaluating progress toward objectives.
10. Reassessing user needs, and beginning again.

Clearly, the scope of these activities is beyond assignment to any one unit of the library; yet, if responsibility for these activities is fragmented among many departments, a library risks a serious lack of continuity and coordination that could confound the entire process.

Examining the list of activities, you might think that, with few exceptions, they sound like management tasks. If so, you are perceptive. They are management tasks. Real collection development is a high-level management activity. Without the authority to communicate with all groups in the institution—inside and outside of the library, to create plans, make decisions, and implement them, you cannot develop anything.

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What a Collection Development Officer Is Not

I see advertisements for collection development librarians whose job descriptions, required credentials, stated ranks and salaries sound exactly like traditional acquisitions librarians. The job descriptions talk about coordinating and placing orders and supervising order files; the credentials are minimal and demand little experience; the stated ranks are entry level or just above; the salaries are in the high teens or low twenties. The fact is, they are solicitations for acquisitions librarians made by employers who

have adopted the language of collection development but not its substance. Sometimes it is done out of ignorance, thinking that collection development is a modern name for ye olde acquisitions librarian. Sometimes it is done by design, slyly, in hopes that the impressive title will make up for lack of rank, salary, authority, and a challenging leadership position in the library.

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If you are a collection development officer who spends time processing orders and maintaining order files, who merely watches and records the expenditure of funds, who takes home a salary that makes you wonder if getting an MLS was really a good idea, after all, and who looks forward to a job with more meaningful responsibilities, then you are an unfortunate caught in this semantic trap. It really doesn't matter whether you report to the head of technical services or public services. You aren't developing collections. You are performing a respectable and important job in the order department, and, without your efforts, there might be no collection development at all. But, that alone isn't collection development.

Another misuse of the title collection development officer is the assignment of library-wide selection responsibilities, often to some overworked reference librarian, without the accompanying authority to set goals and objectives and revise allocations. Selecting individual titles or even categories of materials for purchase is not collection development, although, like acquisitions, it is an essential step in the process. I submit that it is confusion between *selection* and *development* that makes some librarians think collection development belongs exclusively in the public service domain.

What a Collection Development Officer Is

One of the hallmarks of the true collection development officer is that the responsibilities of the job and the authority it carries transcend individual departments, placing her or him at the highest managerial level: at the directorial level or, in very large institutions, at or just below the directorial level. In small institutions, collection development usually rests with the director. It

isn't necessary to divide authority among several people and there is no need for someone other than the director to carry out the liaison activity, planning, and financial management inherent in the collection development position.

Which brings us to the central themes of this discussion: Where does collection development belong, administratively speaking? How does collection development relate to automation? What orientation should collection development officers have—that of technical or public service librarians?

Collection Development's Administrative Niche

As stated above, collection development includes high level managerial tasks: planning; allocating funds; making decisions; communicating with groups inside and outside the library. One cannot do these things without authority. Where does authority usually lie? In most libraries, authority rests primarily with the chief executive officer and, if the size of the library warrants, it may be shared with the executives on the second level as well. The chief executive officer may have any of several titles: director, chief librarian, university librarian and so on. The second level officers are often titled deputy, associate, or assistant director/librarian, accordingly.

A certain amount of authority is given over to department heads, who often represent the third executive level. In fact, department heads might be responsible for their budgets and make major decisions such as whether to hire more staff or purchase costly equipment. But, with few exceptions, department heads only perform these managerial tasks for their own departments. They haven't the authority to take action for other departments.

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Department heads also might represent the second executive level instead of deputy, associate, or assistant directors/librarians. In this instance, collection development responsibility might rest with them. Collection development authority can reside in officers with different titles at somewhat different levels in the bureaucratic hierarchy, depending on the size of the library, the administrative units into which it is divided, and the titles assigned to those at the top executive levels.

I maintain that collection development can only occur at the first or second executive level and the moment one moves to the third level, sufficient authority doesn't exist to do the kind of planning that should be done, communicate with groups outside of the library itself, and make decisions that have far-reaching effects upon all library departments as well as the library's community. Where does collection development belong, administratively speaking? It belongs at the highest levels of administration.

Does Automation Affect This Role?

In a sense, collection development, as contrasted with old-fashioned acquisitions, arose with automation (defining automation as the implementation of computer systems). One of the spinoff benefits to libraries of automation is the application of the systems method to solving library problems. Computer people use this method to design computer-based answers to problems, but it can be used to analyze and solve problems even without computing (although some experts disagree about this). The systems method—analyzing a problem into its component parts, quantifying the elements, formulating goals and objectives that achieve a solution, proposing strategies to reach the goals, and choosing the most efficient of these—is what collection development officers use to solve collection "problems." Collection problems are gaps between what a collection officer sees as the sum of user needs and the best possible performance one might expect from the existing collection and collecting patterns.

Like automation, collection development inevitably results in change. Each development cycle requires evaluation of current holdings, assessment of current and future user needs, and comparison of the two. Each new set of goals and objectives drives a new allocation of funds designed to bring holdings closer to current and future needs. The collection development officer is supposed to know how to evaluate current holdings properly as well as how to determine current and future needs accurately and precisely. Formulating goals and objectives from this knowledge is an exciting creative process, but it is also a very risky one if estimates are wrong and the results prove detrimental to the institution and its community.

There are other parallels between collection development and automation. The changes wrought by collection development decisions are viewed just as suspiciously by those who remain uncommitted to the goals and objectives as are

the changes wrought by automation. That is why one of the collection officer's tasks is to negotiate wide support for collection objectives. The changes caused by the collection development process are just as disruptive as those caused by the introduction of computers. That is why the collection officer must be sensitive to all ramifications of decisions.

The most important relation between collection development and automation lies in the data generated and processed by computerized systems that feeds and nourishes collection decision-making. I have heard it said that without computer-generated and -processed data, there could be no collection development. I'm not certain that this is absolute, but I believe it is very close to the truth for large collections, at any rate. Initial needs assessments and collection evaluations—especially the quantitative techniques—rely on computing to digest and organize statistics, make forecasts, and derive allocations. Control of numerous fund accounts is made easy with computing. Simulating probable future conditions (such as increases or decreases in user populations, increases or decreases in price indexes, shifts to alternative informational media) isn't easy on a computer, but it becomes extremely difficult to do by hand. Computing is an essential tool for collection development.

Technical or Public Service Orientation?

The notion that collection development is a technical service derives from its link with acquisitions, while the notion that collection development is a public service derives from its link with selection. The truth is that collection development includes both of these functions as well as several more; therefore, it has both a technical and a public service orientation, but it is more than either one. Collection development must be an umbrella responsibility that coordinates aspects of technical service *and* public service activities.

The collection development officer must develop strong ties with the acquisitions staff, because these are the people who control purchasing operations. Reports from those who monitor orders and maintain fund accounts are basic data for ongoing supervision of collection development. Without the cooperation of acquisitions librarians, indeed, without their understanding and commitment to collection objectives, orders for high priority materials might languish on

desks or be sent to vendors with poor track records. Lack of communication between collection development and acquisitions officers might result in a high rate of duplicate orders, failure to report unfilled orders promptly, or failure to report changes in discount rates and other vendor policies. All of these situations impact negatively on the development cycle. All require immediate attention to minimize their deleterious effects.

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Technical service systems other than acquisitions generate data essential to the construction of future plans, such as circulation statistics, collection overlap profiles, preservation assessments, and interlibrary loan reports. Speedy cataloging and processing enable new materials to be used when they are in greatest demand; cataloging backlogs can and do confound everyone.

The collection development officer must have strong ties with the reference staff, for these are the people who interact daily with the library's public. It is the reference librarian at the desk who hears patron requests, guides clients toward desired materials, and helps them when the collections fail to provide answers to users' needs. It is usually the reference department that hires subject specialists whose expertise is needed to select titles in subject literatures, to offer advice and direction for those fields, and to understand and communicate the unique needs of those fields to the collection development officer.

Reference tools—catalogs, bibliographies, review journals, directories, indexes—are essential for the collection developer as well as the reference librarian answering a question. Reference functions might include serials control, interlibrary loan and circulation services, too, since libraries are not bound by any codes or contracts to make these technical services.

Conclusion

Collection development officers must understand and appreciate the objectives and operations of both technical and public services in their institutions. The objectives and operations of each of these departments must harmonize with and support collecting objectives. They are inextricably linked. Collecting objectives cannot be accomplished except through the efforts of people in both departments. Perhaps that is one of the reasons that Elizabeth Futas,[6] among others,

claims that collection development officers must be consummate politicians. (Clearly, the tasks of making, defending, and shepherding budgets are other reasons this talent is necessary.)

The collection development officer's ultimate orientation must go beyond any department to the library in general, to its user community as a whole, to the institution and the contribution that the library's collection makes toward accomplishing its mission. This describes neither a technical service nor public service orientation. It is oriented to the general management of the library in its efforts to provide a collection of materials worthy of the library's position as an institution's chief information resource center.

References

1. Michael Gorman's compleat librarian.
2. See, e.g., Laurie S. Linsley, "The Dual Job Assignment: How It Enhances Job Satisfaction," in *Academic Libraries: Myths and Realities, Proceedings of the Association of College and Research Libraries Conference, Baltimore, Maryland* (Chicago: The Association, 1984).
3. Janet Swan Hill "The Year's Work in Descriptive Cataloging and ... " *Library Resources & Technical Services* 32 (July 1988):203-216.
4. These letters will appear in "Interactions," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 33 (January 1989).
5. Daniel Melcher and Margaret Saul, *Melcher On Acquisiton* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1971).
6. Elizabeth Futas, "Issues in Collection Development: Wanted: Collection Development Officer," *Collection Building* 42 (1982): 55.

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