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Collection Development and Acquisitions Policies and Procedures: Do They Meet the Needs of Today's Academic Library Environment?

Jeff Bailey
Arkansas State University - Main Campus, jbailey@astate.edu

Linda Creibaum
Arkansas State University - Main Campus, lcreibaum@astate.edu

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Jeff Bailey, Library Director, Dean B. Ellis Library, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro

Linda Creibaum, Acquisitions Librarian, Dean B. Ellis Library, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro

Abstract

With recent vast changes in formats, purchase/subscription options, and funding sources, many librarians are wondering if their existing policies, procedures, and processes are meeting their library's needs in the current environment.

The presenters hope to create a survey of current practices in library collection development in order to aid librarians seeking different/improved means of doing these duties. Bailey and Creibaum began by providing information on past and present collection development methods of the Dean B. Ellis Library of Arkansas State University, including a brief overview of their allocation formula which is used to determine distribution of funds to departments. Following that, presenters led a lively discussion of current methods used by the attendees who also provided input as to what they would like to be doing differently in their libraries.

Attendees were exposed to a number of ideas for improving collection development and acquisitions policies and procedures in their libraries and hopefully left the session with a greater understanding of the variety of processes available to and in use at academic libraries.

Introduction

In this presentation and workshop, participants were introduced to the entire allocation, acquisitions, and collection development process at the Dean B. Ellis Library of Arkansas State University. The discussion began with a presentation of the annual collection development calendar utilized by the Ellis Library followed by an overview of the formula-based allocation process utilized there. The materials selection process and overall budgeting principles were also presented. A central theme of the initial presentation was how these processes have changed in recent years due to the changing academic library scene.

Acquisitions and Collection Development– How ASU's Processes Are Set Up

The Dean B. Ellis Library employs 14 FTE (non-tenure track) librarians and 20 FTE support staff. Included in this number are the 1 FT librarian and 2 (soon to be 1 ½) support staff in Acquisitions who use an allocation formula to determine how much each academic department has available for its resources, ordering those resources, and receiving those resources.

The formula is weighted using several factors of varying impacts but distributes funds by department only. That is, funds are made to departments with no distinction or variation based on format: online or print, serial or one-time purchase. The Library does not allocate all available collection development funds—it maintains control over an amount to spend on resources to provide for the good of the whole campus or to improve perceived areas that need to be strengthened. The Library also funds a Student Book Request Program which allows students to request books/media.

The acquisitions librarian works with departmental liaisons on their departmental expenditures such as serials (including database) subscriptions and prices, various deadlines involved in spending allocations, and whether or not the academic department has sufficient funds for materials they want. The acquisitions librarian also negotiates database subscriptions, orders all subscription materials, solves problems, does relevant administrative and professional jobs, etc.

Acquisitions support staff order non-subscription materials with the approval of the acquisitions librarian.

Reference Librarians act as liaisons for other Library-related departmental needs such as scheduling and performing bibliographic instruction.

Collection Development is jointly led by Bailey and Creibaum.

Acquisitions and Collection Development–What ASU Does

Bailey and Creibaum showed examples of their Collection Development calendar, much of which is included in the allocation letter e-mailed to departments early in the Fall semester, and an example of which was also shown to conference participants. Some of the items included on the calendar are deadlines for new journal and database subscriptions and for encumbering half and then all of the funds in departmental allocations. One particular journal publisher has a very early requirement for non-renewal, so it is mentioned separately in the letter. The acquisitions librarian provides each department with a list of its serials (including databases) for review along with their letter.

Library personnel use the fastest way they can to accomplish tasks using the fewest man-hours, as the Library has so few personnel for an institution of ASU's size and scope. Currently that includes sending the bulk of firm orders to vendors on an Excel spreadsheet. The time savings of submitting orders on spreadsheets has been so notable that departments are now asked to send their requests via Excel where they have more than three to four requests at one time. Library personnel double-check holdings to be sure not to duplicate currently held materials.

Acquisitions notifies departments of arrival of their requested items monthly. However, when departments request items already held by the Library, they are not notified.

Librarians also select monographs and other non-subscription items in departmental subject areas

to balance collections. These go through acquisitions as well.

The ASU Library is fortunate to have the autonomy to implement its allocations and processes with minimal oversight from administration or campus bodies.

Materials Selection and Budgeting Principles

Allocations at Arkansas State University are made to each academic department to use for materials of their choosing. However, unused funds occasionally come back to the Library. Funds that come back after the mid-year deadline are spent by librarians on materials in the subject area of the department that relinquished them. Funds that come back after the final deadline generally go for one-time purchases of materials and resources that benefit the entire campus.

The Library typically overrides departmental purchase or subscription requests which are counter to its longstanding procedures such as the avoidance of multiple copies, currently adopted textbooks, duplicates of items that are already owned (including those in another format), or reprinted out of copyright titles. While acquisitions personnel could technically decline to honor requests for any materials, they rarely do so other than as previously noted.

Although some departments have tried to spend 100% of their allocations on subscriptions, it is not allowed since inflationary increases would almost guarantee a necessity to cut subscriptions the following year. The Library reserves the right to select the format for purchases including subscriptions.

Software and license issues sometimes result in Library refusal to purchase an item or in its return after purchase.

The Dean B. Ellis Library currently does not have a formal patron-driven acquisitions program since essentially its methods incorporate a form of PDA already, although in ASU's version patrons know they are requesting an item to be purchased.

How Processes and Circumstances Have Changed

For some years departments were required to spend first 10% and then 5% of their allocations on books, media, or other one-time expenditures. That requirement was eliminated due to the growing necessity of some programs to acquire increasing numbers of journal and database resources.

In the past Library personnel placed firm orders by selecting individual items from vendor sites. Currently the majority of monograph orders are submitted directly to vendors via Excel spreadsheets, saving many hours of time per year and allowing Acquisitions personnel to do more with the smaller number of people now in the unit. Academic departments are encouraged to submit their requests in Excel.

The ASU Library does not use their ILS acquisitions module; it was too time consuming for all of Technical Services. Item records are not downloaded into the online catalog until ordered items arrive in the Library.

Almost all of the library's new book purchases are now processed by contract cataloging.

Unit personnel are happy with current e-book vendors and the method of ordering individual titles, but recognize that the process for ordering those titles will need to be less time consuming when individual e-books will be purchased in greater numbers.

The Library has had to add a separate publisher-based deadline for subscription changes, with one "Big Deal" publisher's deadline coming inconveniently during the summer.

For many years the Library used only a March 1 deadline for all non-subscription departmental encumbrances. Following an increase in funding from a Student Library Fee, a November deadline was added. Until this new requirement for departments to spend half of their uncommitted funds by an earlier date, Acquisitions received requests for materials amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars during the last week in February—much of it within the last 24 hours of the March 1 deadline. This placed a nearly unbearable burden for the acquisitions unit and the Library to meet their own fiscal year–end deadlines for encumbering/spending funds.

Investigating and ordering increasing numbers of databases has resulted in more and more time being spent on negotiating access, pricing, and licensing issues. Additionally, a number of resources have taken huge jumps in price since ASU's enrollment recently went over 10,000 FTE.

Because of recent campus emphasis for research, growth librarians are expending more time searching for external funding, leaving less time for thoughtful selection and processing receivables.

Possible Changes on ASU's Horizon

There are ongoing discussions that may result in ASU establishing an international campus that would be supported by the main campus library.

The Library has lost several personnel lines in recent years. Library personnel continue to be concerned that there will not be enough people to do the work.

Lively Discussions

Attendees related their own procedures and obligations, identifying a variety of practices utilized by institutions of varying sizes and missions. Discussions among the presenters and other participants included good and bad points of various methods as well as how methods had changed over time.

An unexpected discussion topic was the use of the acquisitions module in integrated library systems. While some attendees mentioned that they were pleased with the functionality of their library's acquisitions module and relied on it heavily, others who were using the module at their institutions expressed a great deal of frustration with the limitations of acquisitions modules from a variety of vendors. Several in attendance stated that they had followed the same path as Arkansas State and elected to use other components of their ILS, but not the acquisitions module. Instead,

they relied upon internally developed processes to track orders and expenditures related to acquisitions.

Procedures for selecting and purchasing e-books was also discussed at some length, with at least two attendees mentioning that their institution now purchases books in electronic format as a default and only purchases print copies when specifically requested or when the title is not available as an e-book.

Additional discussion topics included the presence or lack of institutional administrative support for online invoice payment, different methods for allocating collection development funds, and the prevalence and uses of Patron-Driven/Demand Driven Acquisition.

A Survey

Bailey and Creibaum closed the session by soliciting input toward the development of a survey to identify practices utilized by institutions of varying sizes and missions. They plan to send the survey to individuals in Acquisitions/Collection Development in a variety of institutions with hopes of presenting the results at a future Charleston Conference. They propose asking respondents to identify a variety of practices they utilize. Preconference attendees were asked what they would like to see in such a survey, what information they would like the survey to yield, and whether they would be willing to review the survey before it was sent.