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What Is Keeping You Up At Night? A Discussion of Current Hot Topics in Collection Development.

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Abstract

In this interactive lunch discussion, participants discussed the top issues in collection development that kept them up at night. Unlike the collection development issues included in the ARL "Issue Brief: 21st-Century Collections," released in May 2012, these participants talked about very local and immediate issues as compared to the strategic issues listed in the ARL document. The collection development issues that were discussed can be grouped into several broad categories: budget, discovery tools, collection management, and media collections.

Lively Lunch Discussion

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) recently released an "Issue Brief"¹ on 21st-century collections. Using it as a starting discussion point, the objective of this Lively Lunch was to explore to what extent these strategic issues were being addressed by collection development librarians locally, or whether other issues were of greater concern. Combining responses from the conference session with responses to a follow-up survey collected after the conference, it is evident that for the collection development librarians who participated in this particular Lively Lunch discussion, local issues took precedent over the ARL strategic issues.

The ARL Issue Brief outlined four strategic initiatives as the key issues in 21st century collection development:

Content (Scope, Complexity, and Priorities):

Libraries have to address not only the availability of new products and processes (including those with interactive functionalities), but also how to increase access to unique local assets and expanding access to digital governmental data.

Infrastructure (Access, Preservation, Collection Management):

Libraries are working towards shared storage. This necessitates adoption of workable agreements and discovery services. Preservation encompasses not just print but also digital. Collections are

demand driven and managed through data analysis.

Publishing (Publisher roles, Economic models, Rights management):

Increasingly, there is an aggregation of content and a merger of publishers. This affects usage, value, and market as well as digital preservation, archiving, and open content.

Scholars/Researchers (Behavior, Roles, Communication Vehicles):

Research is becoming more global and interdisciplinary. Researchers rely increasingly on personal collections and data, and they communicate through informal means such as blogs and prepublications.

Among the participants in this session, none were addressing all of the ARL strategic issues at their institutions. Of the four strategic issues, Infrastructure and Content were addressed at some level by most of the participants' institutions; Publishing was addressed at some level by several institutions, but very few were actively discussing or addressing changes in Scholar behavior. There is no doubt that the collection development community will have to address (or at least react to) the ARL strategic issues, but for many collection development librarians these strategic issues may be less immediate than more pressing local issues.

The goal of this participant discussion was to assess to what extent the ARL issues are being

addressed locally, but also what are the immediate issues in collection development that keeps librarians awake. Thus, this discussion focused very much on what collection development librarians considered their most immediate and difficult issues.

The collection development issues that were discussed can be grouped into several broad categories: budget, discovery tools, collection management, and media collections.

Concerns about collection budgets predominated the discussion. Using the language of the then-current national politics, several participants described the continuous process of libraries receiving either flat or decreasing budgets as a looming library budget cliff. Some lamented the untenability of the current publishing model; others felt that unlike previous budget crisis (where libraries were able to slowly recoup lost funding), this time budget losses would never be recouped. As part of dealing with the budget problems, several participants talked about alternatives to traditional collection development: from eliminating acquisition of any print through approval and firm ordering and to only receive print on a demand basis (PDA), to increasing their pay-per-view options, to considering only a rental option for material. Several talked about whether they could continue to serve their users well—especially undergraduates—if only faculty could make library purchase requests and the library no longer provided any core print collections.

Several discussed the need to change the way we use (and pay) for discovery tools. Are there alternative ways of providing access to library content that can reduce the amount of cataloging taking place locally? “We cannot afford to have perfect records and our users do not care,” was one librarian’s comment. Libraries use significant resources (money and staffing) to catalog and/or to provide access to electronic resources through discovery tools. Since this session focused on what worried collection development librarians, the lament that discovery tools rarely discovered everything and that most tools were not interoperable, several indicated that they would be willing to abandon traditional discovery tools (including MARC) and instead work toward some

system that could replace all other discovery systems.

The group also discussed the future of print management, not only how to manage print locally, but also how to manage local collections within a larger, regional print repository system. Several mentioned that half of their print collection is never used and is taking up space that is needed for other library services. Thus, they are currently addressing what to do with little used physical material: from deselection and withdrawal to moving it in to some form of storage. Few participants were intimately involved in a coordinated print depository archiving project, but most were very cognizant of the national discussions taking place on this issue. Several library consortia are working on drafting policies and procedures for future shared collections. Whether engaged in collection review for local storage, deselection and withdrawal, or for a regional initiative, several expressed a fear of removing something unique. One person expressed the opinion that discovery tools such as WorldCat could not provide absolute certainty that something is unique or not. For those participants from special collection or subject special libraries, this issue was especially pertinent.

An interesting discussion focused on whether lost books should be considered successful collection development (it is missing, therefore it is used), whether it is indicative of poor collection management, or something entirely different. This generated a brief discussion on whether to reorder or to ignore. To some, reordering made sense especially for newer material; to others this was not financially feasible. This discussion turned back to the discussion about how to collect, whether to continue the traditional method of librarian selecting just in case, to the patron driven model of just in time. It also brought up a discussion about print versus electronic format. Several did not believe that the library community has adequately investigated whether students indeed do prefer electronic.

Several participants indicated that their nocturnal concerns focused on media collection development and management. Most libraries

have made huge investments in VHS and DVD collections. However, many institutions now have plans to cease providing classroom support for older media formats such as VHS, presuming that all media will be available electronically. One person remarked that even DVDs are transitory, as newer classroom computers may not have DVD playing capabilities. Libraries are rarely consulted when these decisions are made. Supporting electronic media (acquiring, streaming, hosting, and content discovery) is not only costly (referring

back to the earlier budget discussions), but there is no certainty that all needed teaching media will ever be available in digital format.

The following were mentioned as additional worries, but the group did not have time for a broader discussion: course reserves, EAD projects, managing institutional output including datasets, and having to do more with less people. The facilitator thanks all participants for a lively and insightful discussion.

References

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