ORGANIZING ACQUISITIONS: THE YALE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

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The acquisition of materials for large research library collections is a complex process requiring large numbers of staff and highly developed management skills. Even in the best of times it is easy for this complicated process to be less than effective. When faced with budget cuts, staff layoffs, or currency fluctuations, the organization of acquisitions functions must be adaptable, flexible, and quick to respond. Organizations must be designed to maximize the library's staff, its automated system, and its network of publishers and vendors.

This article will discuss the changes that have occurred in the organization of acquisitions activities at Yale University in the past five years. This case is indicative of the climate of challenge that has prevailed in recent times over the role of acquisitions departments and acquisitions librarians in libraries. Perhaps it will serve to enlighten others who are reevaluating their acquisitions services.

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A HISTORY OF ACQUISITIONS FUNCTIONS AT YALE

The organizational structure and reporting lines for the various acquisitions functions occurring within Sterling Memorial Library at Yale have changed considerably during the past five years. Prior to 1989 Technical Services had an acquisitions department for acquiring monographic and serial material for the main library. Cataloging was performed in a separate department within Technical Services, and Collection Development was administered as a separate function parallel to Technical Services. All were clearly separated by function. The main library also employed a system of curators who managed most of their own acquisitions, and in some cases, cataloging work. In addition, many of the school and department libraries managed their own acquisitions operations.

In 1987 the Yale libraries decided to purchase an integrated automated system to control library functions. NOTIS was the system selected, and the Library formed 12 groups formally charged to coordinate and plan implementation. The impending implementation of NOTIS prompted Technical Services to review its organization to maximize the advantages of an integrated system.

In 1989, after much deliberation and discussion of alternative organizations, a new organization was implemented for Technical Services.[1] The acquisitions functions were reassigned to Collection Development and the Processing Services Department in Technical Services, following a prereceipt/postreceipt model. Collection Development became responsible for all acquisitions activities up to and including the placement of orders and claiming outstanding orders (prereceipt activities); Processing Services retained

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responsibility for check-in of materials, processing of approval plans, invoice processing, and claiming related to receipt (postreceipt activities). The curatorial system and the technical services activities of the school and department libraries remained as they were. The reorganization in Technical Services was based on the self-management, team concept, while Collection Development maintained a collegial structure.

Under this plan, acquisitions as an organizational entity in the main library no longer existed. The position of Chief Acquisitions Librarian, which reported to the Associate University Librarian for Technical Services, remained. The position served as a resource on acquisitions of all types and formats of materials, and coordinated vendor assignments, vendor evaluation, and development of approval plans. The fiscal operations were also centralized under the Chief position. The Chief was also to coordinate the development of all acquisitions policies throughout the library system.

After the initial the reorganization in 1989, additional refinements were made to the organization. The gifts, exchange, and duplicates/discards programs were moved to Collection Development. Following the retirement of the Chief Acquisitions Librarian in 1989, the position line was divided. Collection Development received one-half to help create the Collection Development Support Librarian position in 1990, which was charged, among other duties, to coordinate acquisitions problem solving and vendor relations. The half remaining in Technical Services was eliminated in subsequent budget cuts.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 1989 REORGANIZATION

In order to understand the reasons for a later reorganization of acquisitions activities, one must look at the general characteristics of the organization established in 1989.

First and foremost, the reorganization was driven by the implementation of the acquisitions component of NOTIS in 1989. The prereceipt/postreceipt split was designed to streamline work flow in an automated environment. The reallocation of acquisitions responsibilities was to increase the interconnections of preorder searching with ordering and receiving with cataloging. The impetus to reorganize to prepare for automation was accompanied by a desire in Technical Services to implement the self-management model for its processing.

Second, the division of responsibilities deemphasized acquisitions as a distinct library function and downplayed the interrelations of pre-receipt processes and post-receipt processes. However, these interrelationships did exist, and communication was necessary across multiple levels of staff, including: bibliographer with subject team; curator with area team; team with team; searching staff with team; and Associate University Librarian with Associate University Librarian. Thus the division of responsibilities and processing required extensive interdepartmental communication, trust, support, and consultation; it was also highly dependent on achieving and maintaining both good working relations and a common understanding of how acquisitions functions would operate in a distributed environment.

The prereceipt/postreceipt organization of functions increased the sensitivity of staff in Collection Development and Technical Services to the close relations among functions in

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a shared database environment. The reorganization also accomplished the following:

- established closer ties between the bibliographers and the suppliers of research materials;
- simplified work flow by combining preorder searching with order creation;
- improved acquisitions records and bibliographic control because there was strong bibliographic expertise at the point of receipt;
- improved the cataloging process because of better bibliographic control of acquisitions records.

REVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION

Despite the perceived benefits of the reorganization, over time it became apparent that a cohesive acquisitions program had not developed. The hiring of the Collection Development Support Librarian position in late 1990 was in part a response to the need for more acquisitions expertise in coordinating and advising on acquisitions processing and policy setting. There had been no one to perform this role since the retirement of the Chief Acquisitions Librarian in 1989. However, the function of the Collection Development Support Librarian would prove to be a stopgap measure.

A review of the functionality of the acquisitions process began in the Spring of 1991. Examination of acquisitions processes and work flow revealed difficulties in areas related to the nature of the organization. The difficulties identified could be generalized as follows:

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- the adoption of different management styles and approaches to work flow by the two departments impeded communication, cooperation, and general processing; the two departments emphasized different priorities and functions;
- conflicts arose over responsibilities that fell into both prereceipt/postreceipt activities; processing and management problems either were neglected or were dominated by one department or the other;
- the division of acquisitions responsibilities complicated vendor relations;
- acquisitions policy setting had to be shared across departments that had different perspectives.

In short, the organization that dispersed the acquisitions functions among two areas of the library was extremely dependent on reaching common goals and understanding of the acquisitions function. This kind of organization also demanded intensive interaction at all levels of staff. Processing and communication were so intertwined, that a decline in either one was an invitation to an overall deterioration of the acquisitions function.

In fact, acquisitions operations were fraught with unresolved problems with invoices and shipments, backlogs in searching and in the processing of receipts, and lack of decision making. Relations with vendors were strained. Basic acquisitions management functions were not being performed or were performed irregularly, such as documenting acquisitions policies or terms of business with suppliers, reconciling fiscal records with statements, evaluating vendor performance, monitoring deposit account balances, claiming, and

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periodically reviewing outstanding orders.

A NEW ORGANIZATION EMERGES

The review of the 1989 reorganization resulted in a recommendation to bring back the acquisitions department. It was reasoned that under one department, acquisitions policy and procedural decisions could be centralized, system-wide leadership regarding acquisitions matters could be exercised, communication lines could be simplified, and progress could be made toward utilizing automated systems and vendor services to their fullest.

In July 1991, the Yale University Librarian announced that the acquisitions program at Sterling Memorial Library would be united under one department administratively under Technical Services. This decision was preceded by lengthy discussions between the University Librarian, the Associate University Librarian for Collection Development, and the Associate University Librarian for Technical Services. Moreover, it was deemed that the position of Chief Acquisitions Librarian would be revived. Following these decisions, the Collection Development Support Librarian position was converted to Head, Acquisitions Department and Chief Acquisitions Librarian.

The first task for the new department head was to determine the size and staffing of the department. One consideration was the composition of the previous acquisitions department. Also considered were where staff had been relocated during the 1989 reorganization and which positions could be recaptured. Consultation with colleagues at Yale helped to determine general work flow models, along with staff classifications and their

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levels of responsibilities. Local statistics on ordering and receiving were analyzed. Advice was sought from acquisitions librarians at other institutions whose scope of responsibilities and budget sizes were similar to those of the Sterling Memorial Library. The department head's experience with reorganization and staffing patterns at a previous institution also proved useful.

During the initial design stage it was agreed that the most effective elements of the 1989 reorganization would be maintained. These elements included: division of work flow primarily by function, not format; combining receiving with copy cataloging; and linking the gifts processing with the bibliographers, who had primary contact with donors.

With these decisions made, a plan evolved to create a department structure that would simplify internal communication lines, consolidate policy making, centralize management both of routine processing and complex, system-wide projects, and would empower staff to resolve problems within their own units. The Chief Acquisitions Librarian position was described as originally envisioned in 1989: to manage system-wide planning for acquisitions initiatives and to coordinate the use of vendors and vendor relations across the library system.

In the fall of 1991 the Acquisitions Department was officially implemented. Acquisitions administers ordering, exchanges, memberships, receipts, payments, binding, and preparations operations. Acquisitions has maintained the self management and team concept, and named its units accordingly.

The Department consists of two professional librarians (who engage in department level planning and projects, and are responsible for all operations) and four teams (each supervised by a managerial position). Details of the responsibilities are as follows:

- The Order Support Team: is responsible for establishing contracts with library suppliers through ordering, exchange, or membership functions; handles both serial and monograph formats.
- The Fiscal Support Team: manages approval of invoices, including prepayments, deposit accounts, and any other special payment programs; creates vouchers; manages vendor file.
- The Monograph Support Team: is responsible for firm order and approval plan receipts, initial invoice processing, continuations, binding, and preparation; performing copy cataloging (locally termed "fastcat") when LC copy is available at the time of receipt.
- The Serials Support Team: handles receipt and check-in of periodicals and serials, initial serials invoice processing, and serials record management; manages Periodical Reading Room check-in and claiming functions.

- Head, Acquisitions Department: manages overall acquisitions program and shares budget management with Collection Development; supervises three team leaders (Order Support, Fiscal Support, and Serials Support); functions as Chief Acquisitions Librarian for the Yale libraries.

- Acquisitions Librarian: focusses primarily on the receiving and copy cataloging functions; assists the Head in overall program management; supervises Monograph Support Team Leader; in the absence of the Head, serves as head of the department.

All staff positions were drawn from Collection Development or Processing Services. The compositions of Fiscal Support and Serial Support had been unaltered by the reorganization and the two teams were incorporated into the new Acquisitions Department upon its formation. One staff member was upgraded to Team Leader for Fiscal Support and the position of Team Leader for Order Support was created for the new organization. The Acquisitions Librarian was reassigned from a team in Processing Services.

To fill other positions, staff in the Processing Services Department were offered reassignment to the new department on a voluntary basis. A few positions had to be filled by appointment, with seniority being a deciding factor. The few vacancies in the department were filled, through the usual process of job posting, interviewing, and hiring.

The majority of the department became operational on October 28, 1991. All reassigned staff were in place by early November. Both fastcat and ordering operations started in January 1992.[2]

By the summer of 1992 it was realized that the Monograph Support Team was too large and too diverse in responsibilities. It was difficult to manage as one team, and, in fact, its staff acted as though they were two different teams. The reporting structure also proved

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to be awkward. In July 1992 the Team was divided into two teams: Monograph Support, for receiving and cataloging of monographs, managed by the Acquisitions Librarian; and Preparation Support, for binding, plating, and labeling, led by the previous team leader of Monograph Support. Both team leaders report directly to the head of the department.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE NEW ORGANIZATION

With the establishment of the acquisitions department, the library has been able to accomplish several initiatives in a very short time. This is not to say that in time this progress could not have been made under the previous organization structure, but instead it demonstrates the effectiveness of the new acquisitions organization.

Long outstanding problems, many of which were unresolved because they were not clearly part of either the pre- or postreceipt responsibilities were tackled and resolved. Several projects on hold were completed, including the implementation of electronic voucher transfer between the Library and the Disbursements Office and the development of a serials RFP for consolidating domestic publications received in the main library. Electronic transfer of vouchers has reduced the time it took to pay vendors from two or three months to one week. This advancement has improved vendors relations (as have the simplification of vendor contact and the resolution of outstanding problems). The consolidation of serial subscriptions will reduce the number of suppliers of subscriptions, improve the management of serials information, and also offer more access to information about serial publications to the Yale library system.

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AFTERWORD

It must be said that the reorganization was traumatic for staff in Processing Services and the new Acquisitions Department. Unlike the reorganization of 1989, which occurred after a large measure of staff input and consultation, the decision to re-form an Acquisitions Department was an administrative decision made by a relatively small number of people. The head of the department was appointed without an open search process. Some staff were alienated by this method of decision making. After the initial plan was announced, great pains were taken to include staff in discussions about the implications of the new department. Documents were distributed and open sessions held to educate the staff on the reasons for the new department. Staff participated in planning the full scope of the department and were invited to meet with their prospective supervisors in Acquisitions.

Overall the transition to a new department was remarkably smooth, although there were the expected frustrations of getting adequate equipment and space, setting up routines, training, and the like. Minor adjustments have been made to some job assignment, and an additional position has been upgraded. Morale among the staff is fairly high and production has increased. This may be attributed to the fact that the staff know that what they are doing is valued and appreciated in a new way. Long anticipated planning and implementation of both major and minor projects have come to fruition, and the staff have benefitted. All acquisitions teams have recently begun goal-setting exercises to ensure that all staff have input into their working conditions and their future.

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The experience at Yale may demonstrate that, although acquisitions operations can be performed in a variety of organizations, the prereceipt and postreceipt functions of the acquisitions process are highly interdependent and that management of these functions is less than effective when dissipated among various groups. It can also be argued that an organization that splits the prereceipt/postreceipt responsibilities will undercut the special relationship that a major research library should develop with suppliers and others who share a stake in the effectiveness of a fully coordinated acquisitions program. Moreover, in a large complex organization, with many libraries operating acquisitions units, overall coordination of acquisitions policy and projects is imperative. Only time will tell how long the current organization will stand, but the immediate success of the reorganization should bode well for its longevity.

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NOTES

1. For more details on the 1989 reorganization of Technical Services and the introduction of self-managing teams, consult Gerald R. Lowell and Maureen Sullivan, "Self-Management in Technical Services: the Yale Experience." *Library Administration and Management* 4: 20-23 (1990) and Crooker, Cynthia, Robert Killheffer, and Cecile Mandour (1991) "The Reorganization of Technical Services at Yale." *Technical Services Quarterly* 9: 27-41.

2. After the formation of the Acquisitions Department, the next priority of Technical Services was to rebuild the Processing Services Department, since some of its staff were transferred to Acquisitions. Acquisitions staff performing cataloging functions kept statistics by LC classification to help determine the impact of the new organization on the subject-based cataloging teams so that the size of these teams could be readjusted accordingly. The Teams still maintain their subject orientation, and at this writing, the process of reorganization is being completed.