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# From Collection Development to Content Development: Organization and Staffing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

The University of Kansas (KU) Libraries has a new organizational structure that resulted in the creation of the Content Development Department, with fewer librarians dedicated to stewardship of the Libraries' collections. The impending retirement of three long-standing and knowledgeable librarians prompted a review of the responsibilities of the new department and identification of the human resources needed to meet the collection demands of a user-centered library. In an effort to determine how the Libraries can proceed, we completed an environmental scan of current activities and identified, through the literature and contacts with academic colleagues, how collecting practices and formats will develop. Based on evidence gained through a survey of faculty and graduates students at KU, there is a strong sentiment that library resources need to be carefully managed to support the teaching and research needs of the university. This paper will discuss efforts to make a case to continue to support deep subject expertise for collection development, particularly in the arts and humanities. By clearly identifying collection development responsibilities (it's not just buying books!), KU librarians were successful in transitioning into the new organizational structure with the staffing needed to make knowledgeable collection development decisions.

## KU Campus Environment

Analyzing existing structures and making adjustments to make KU a stronger institution of higher learning have become the new normal. In 2009, a new chancellor arrived on campus, replacing her predecessor, who had served in this capacity for fourteen years. The next year, a new provost joined the leadership team. Together, these new administrators established lofty goals to raise KU's research output and reputation and streamline operations to improve stewardship of KU's precious dollars. The two most consequential of these efforts were "Changing for Excellence" and "Bold Aspirations." In the summer of 2010 "Changing for Excellence" began evaluating business practices to increase institutional efficiencies and decreasing expenditures (University of Kansas, 2013). KU's strategic planning efforts, which started in the fall of 2010 resulted in the plan "Bold Aspirations" which framed KU's short-term goals into six areas (University of Kansas, 2012):

- Energizing the educational environment.
- Elevating doctoral education.
- Driving discovery and innovation.

- Engaging scholarship for public impact.
- Developing infrastructure and resources.
- Developing infrastructure and resources.

Since KU adopted these two programs, they have become the foundation for decisions of all types on campus, and the KU transformation began with the Libraries leading the way.

## KU Libraries' Strategic Planning

The campus strategic plan, "Bold Aspirations," was released in October 2011. By November, the KU Libraries had not only pledged to be the first campus unit to undergo a strategic planning process based on KU's plan, but had already established a steering committee for strategic planning. This group of appointed individuals worked quickly to identify and determine the goals for the strategic plan. By the spring various working groups were establishing outcomes and strategies for each goal. When the final plan was released, the libraries "Strategic Directions" put forth the following goals (University of Kansas Libraries, 2012):

- Integrate information literacy, research skills, and information resources into the curriculum to enhance critical thinking, academic success, and lifelong learning.
- Advance scholarship through proactive engagement in research and scholarly communication.
- Strengthen KU Libraries' position as an agile responsive organization capable of continual improvement and change.
- Stabilize and grow existing funding sources, secure new funding opportunities, and enhance public accountability.

Shortly after the release of the KU Libraries' strategic plan, the dean of libraries created the Organizational Review Team (ORT). The dean charged ORT to review all aspects of the organization and to make recommendations for a library structure that embraced the objectives put forth in "Bold Aspirations" and "Strategic Directions." ORT's report went directly to the dean of libraries who utilized their findings, along with her own knowledge of trends in research libraries, to create the new structure. She proclaimed the new organization a "User-Focused Organizational Structure."

## Reorganization

KU Libraries' new organizational structure began in May 2013. Most of the library staff now report within one of five divisions (University of Kansas Libraries, 2013):

- The Division of Innovation and Strategy, comprised of Assessment Services.
- The Division of Information Technology and Discovery Services, comprised of Metadata and Data Discovery Services and Cataloging, Archival Processing, and Digitization Services.
- The Division of Distinctive Collections, comprised of Special Collections, University Archives, Kansas Collection, International Area Studies, Conservation Services, and Digital Collections.

- The Research and Learning Division, comprised of the Center for Faculty and Staff Initiatives and Engagement, the Center for Graduate Initiatives and Engagement, the Center for Undergraduate Initiatives and Engagement, and the Center for Community and Affiliates Initiatives and Engagement.
- The Content and Access Services Division, comprised of Access and Reference Services, Acquisitions, Resource Sharing, the Annex (collections storage facility), and Content Development. Collection development's name changed to "content" to reflect the idea that research libraries had moved away from developing warehouses of owned materials.

The new Content Development Department has six content development librarians and one departmental head. Before the reorganization, more than thirty subject librarians participated in collection development activities. Many of these individuals are now part of the Research and Learning Division and no longer help with collections decisions. With the announcement of the new library structure, the Content Development Department scrambled to distribute the stewardship of the collections among the much smaller department. Along with the added collections responsibilities, the department had to contend with the impending retirements of three experienced and knowledgeable librarians who are scheduled to retire within two years of the creation of the new department. These librarians specialize in the visual arts, the performing arts, and the humanities, three areas that demand strong subject expertise. It soon became evident that a thorough review of content development job responsibilities and succession planning was in order.

## Job Responsibilities of the New Content Development Department

In order to begin succession planning, the librarians within the department identified common responsibilities. These included:

- Monitoring the changing nature of collections, including:
  - The changing practice of scholarly communication in all disciplines.
  - The changing nature of higher education and programs at KU.
  - Trends within the field of collection development: purchasing models, changes in publishing options.
  - New formats of scholarly products (e.g., journal articles linked to data sets, video).
- Collection Decisions:
  - Maintain awareness of curricular programs and research.
  - Monitor new faculty and research hires.
  - Manage approval plans.
  - Manage firm orders.
  - Select resources in all formats and platforms: monographs, serials, databases, data sets, streaming video, maps, scores, records, scripts, CDs and DVDs.
  - Consider scholarly communication patterns, including open access and local collections.
- Collection maintenance, including retention decisions.
- Collaborate with other library units and centers.
- Manage gifts by working with patrons to accept and review.
- Provide specialized instruction when extensive knowledge of collections is required.
- Provide consultation for in-depth subject questions.
- Participate in cooperative collection development projects with other

universities and the Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST).

## Survey of the Environment

To truly understand how the KU Content Development Department would function in this new model required understanding the changing nature not only of KU, but also research libraries and higher education in general. “Bold Aspirations” and activities on campus indicated that research from freshman to highly recruited “Foundational Professors” would become a cornerstone of activities at KU. As such, the Libraries’ content would become even more important and it would become imperative for those working in Content Development to understand the teaching and research activities on campus. A survey administered to graduate students and faculty at KU, as part of the Libraries’ strategic plan, indicated that collections remained what they valued the most from the Libraries. This was not unlike the conclusions of the U.S. Faculty Survey 2012 administered by Ithaka (Schonfeld & Housewright, 2013). The other key finding from the KU survey was the increased desire for electronic resources, particularly serial back files and acquiring e-books. These key components of the KU survey provided us with important evidence that collections mattered.

Looking beyond KU, we focused on two main things: changes to collection acquisitions models and the research activities of different disciplines. Although KU Libraries’ strategic plan indicated that we would continue to provide materials, the name change from collection to content indicated a sea change. While KU Libraries had implemented demand-driven acquisition (DDA) a few years prior to the reorganization, the new structure reinforced the abandonment of building collections for use in twenty years. The literature reinforced this concept. ARL’s (2013) *Issue Brief: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Collections: Calibration of Investment and Collaborative Action* concisely states the problems faced by research libraries during this shift from institution-centered collections to those of a model focused on users—users who might be connected to the university or half-way around the world. This reinforced that KU needed to transition to a more streamlined selection process

that was more agile and adaptable to new methods of providing information. Reports such as Lorcan Dempsey's (2013) *The Emergence of the Collective Collection: Analyzing Aggregate Print Library Holdings* gave us pause to think about how the collections at KU fit within the larger library community. As much as the responsibility of providing new sources to KU's scholars fell to this new department, so too did being stewards of what we had already collected. It was essential that staff in the new department and the administration understood that responsibilities included activities such as participating in WEST, reviewing collections for long-term storage and building other collaborative retention programs.

For over thirty years, KU had operated with a system of subject bibliographers. The new model abandoned this idea by assuming that generalists could answer reference questions and that the majority of collection decisions did not require expertise. Although true for areas that are dependent on journal packages and a monograph approval plan that results in automatic shipments of materials, this is not true for all areas, particularly the humanities. Interviews with librarians at other ARL libraries indicated that they recognize that subject knowledge in the arts and humanities remains key. As an institution, KU has long supported fields within the humanities. Hiring in these fields remains steady, classes in these fields generate the most profit, and KU remains committed to supporting these areas. The library has always collected extensively in the humanities. For example, interlibrary loan statistics indicates that the majority of KU's lending (particularly within the state) comes from the humanities. Numerous studies of specific disciplines' research habits and the services they need from the library reinforced that a blanket collection development approach, which might work for the social sciences, did not work for all members of the academy (Harley, Acord, Earl-Novell, Lawrence & King, 2010; Schonfeld & Rutner, 2012; Long & Schonfeld, 2013; Long & Schonfeld, 2014). These studies point to the fact that some areas simply require knowledge that a generalist cannot provide. The types of materials used in the humanities cannot be supplied by a general approval plan. Due to the variety of

formats used (i.e., scores, primary sources, museum publications) and the lack of electronic resources, significant sleuthing is necessary to adequately collect in these areas.

## Subject Expertise

Through our review of the literature and consulting with colleagues at other schools, we concluded that to effectively provide our patrons with the information they needed, Content Development needed to retain these areas of expertise:

- History (currently divided between an American and world history).
- Art (visual art and history of art) and architecture.
- Music (performing arts).
- English literature.
- Language proficiency (specifically French, German, Italian).

This realization was particularly alarming, because, with the exception the American history content development librarian, all of this subject knowledge was contained in individuals who were either retiring or had temporary appointments. Consequently, the members of Content Development initiated an evaluation of why these areas needed to be filled once the individuals left KU.

*World History*—with one of the largest firm order funds, this discipline requires a knowledge of publishers worldwide and a variety of formats. To support this discipline requires selecting books in western European languages. The range of history researchers at KU requires knowledge of resources in ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and modern history.

*Visual Art and Architecture*—the visual arts require a deep knowledge of numerous vendors who supply resources in European art, Asian art, architecture, exhibition catalogues, and catalog raisonnés. Out-of-print dealers are also routinely checked. Resources are selected in multiple western European languages.

*Performing Arts, with an emphasis on music*—the librarian in this area must be familiar with a variety of vendors who supply books, serials, DVDs, CDs, scores, streaming video and music, monumental sets, and play scripts. A strong knowledge of older and contemporary composers is needed along with musicology, music theory, performance, and history.

*English Literature*—requires a deep knowledge of comparative literature, literature in translation, literary criticism, poetry, and works of fiction. An awareness of small presses and publishers worldwide is needed to cover the vast amount of literature published.

*Language Proficiencies*—To purchase literature in the humanities, librarians with proficiency in French, Italian, and German is instrumental to support these degreed programs.

These findings were summarized in the report “Environmental Assessment and Recommendations for Staffing the Content Development Department.” Initially, it was shared with the assistant deans who were working on the establishment of the KU Libraries’ new model for providing instruction and reference support. These library leaders agreed with the findings of the document and recognized these areas of specific knowledge in the larger library plan for assisting researchers at KU. The document was then forward to the Dean and Associate Deans. The timing was perfect because the library administration, during the summer of 2014, created a three year hiring plan.

## **Outcomes and the Future**

There have been many positive outcomes to report. First, the Provost approved the hiring of a new Visual Arts Librarian and a new Performing Arts Librarian and searches for these positions should be launched early during the 2015 spring semester. Due to the possibility of a period of vacancy in these positions, the Head of Content Development has been training with the two librarians in the visual arts and performing arts. Both librarians say this is the first time their supervisor has known the specifics of what they do and the Head has picked up new knowledge of

vendors, publishers, and providers of resources in these subjects.

The Content Development Department is still trying to determine how they will provide collection development in areas that will have voids in the near future. Currently, a staff member in the Undergraduate Center, who is a Ph.D. candidate in English at KU, is responsible for collection development in English literature, but she is a temporary employee and her contract may not be renewed next year. We are also grappling with covering World History. Due to significant other responsibilities the American history librarian will not be able to devote significant time to this area of a collection. As a solution, we are changing established approval plans with European vendors to increase the parameters in order to decrease the time necessary for firm order selection. We are hopeful that the individuals hired for either the visual arts or performing arts positions will have language skills and will be able to incorporate these areas in their responsibilities.

In the fall of 2014, a search for a new African Studies librarian that will report to International and Area Studies began. The Head of Content Development was consulted so that preferred requirements in the position description would address other subject expertise needed by the Content Development Department. We hope to find candidates that have subject expertise in some of the disciplines mentioned above or language proficiencies in some of the Western European languages that are needed.

Overall, collection development at KU has become more focused in all of the disciplines. Because those now responsible for this important task truly believe in its importance, there is a better distribution of attention and time to the various subject areas. While four of the librarians in the department continue to provide instruction, two others do not. This has made it possible, at least for a portion of the team, to focus just on content development. This is critical as KU is dealing with budgetary woes. Today our main focal point is not on building collections, but making important decisions on what materials KU will retain.

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