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Developing a Training Program for Collection Managers

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Introduction

Managing a subject collection at an academic library requires a broad array of skills. There are relatively straightforward aspects, such as knowing how to place orders for various types of materials, keeping up with what's being published, and understanding book vendors and approval plans. But collection managers also need skills which may better be defined as arts: communicating with diverse faculty, assessing a collection, and balancing needs and wants with the reality of a budget (this last often requires more than art: it requires magic!).

Recent years have seen the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) Libraries add a number of new collection managers (subject bibliographers), which naturally begs the question of how best to train them. Coordinated training is all the more important considering the multi-faceted structure of the UCSB libraries' collection activities. A primary administrator for collections, the Associate University Librarian (AUL) for Collections, oversees four 'Collection Groups:' Sciences and Engineering, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Ethnic, Gender, and Area Studies. Each collection group is led by a Collection Coordinator, and individual Collection Managers report to the appropriate Collection Coordinator. It should also be noted that UCSB librarians are never simply bibliographers; each librarian also participates in reference and instruction related to their collection. Additionally, many librarians manage several collections, which may fall into different Collection Groups. While this broad organization proves effective, especially in regard to coordination, communication, and steadily increasing interdisciplinary collection efforts, consistent and effective training has been difficult to achieve.

The Task Force on Orientation for New Collection Managers

In September 2000, under the direction of the AUL for Collections, a Task Force on Orientation for New Collection Managers was created with the goals of developing a program to orientate and train collection managers, and creating a Collection Manager's Manual-- a guide to everything the UCSB collection manager may need to know, from basic how-to's to tips for networking with faculty. The Task Force consisted of relatively new collection managers, a few veteran collection managers, and a Collection Coordinator.

Preliminaries

Inspired by the literature on collection development, especially ALA's *Guide to Training Collection Development Librarians*, the task force compiled a checklist of major topics relating to managing a collection at UCSB. The checklist, in broad outline, follows:

- Overview: Collection Development
- Collections Budget
- Acquisitions and Cataloging
- Approval Plans
- Serials and Preservation
- University of California Shared, System-Wide Collection Development
- Public Services Aspects of Collection Development
- Developing Subject Expertise

This checklist became our working document, from which we derived a comprehensive orientation program. For each item in the checklist, we organized a one to two hour session in which local experts would present, and answer questions relating to the topic. The sessions were spread out over a period of six months, with one or two taking place each month.

The sessions themselves were a classic exercise in program planning. We identified speakers, worked together to steer the content, secured physical space and equipment, and advertised. We planned one session for each topic on the checklist. The session on Public Services Aspects of Collection Development was postponed pending an automated library system transition. An announcement of the entire orientation program went out in advance of the first session, with reminders before subsequent sessions.

To prepare sessions, we developed a list of questions related to each session's topic. These questions would 1) be given to the presenter to form the outline of the relevant session, and 2) along with the answers, provide a written record of the proceedings, which would later serve as the basis for the Collection Manager's Manual. To insure complete coverage, we solicited and recorded answers to our questions in *advance* of each session. The Task Force member responsible for developing the questions for a particular session worked with the speaker(s) and other relevant staff to clarify the questions and document the answers.

The questions addressed each topic comprehensively and clearly, so that taken alone, they provide information sufficient for a new collection manager to adequately understand and perform collection tasks relevant to the topic. Although targeted to new collection managers, we quickly found (through the number of times a veteran collection manager was heard to utter, “I didn’t know that!”) that the answers would be helpful to all collection managers. Copies of all questions and answers were available and reviewed at each session.

The Sessions

As the title of the first session, *Overview: Collection Development*, suggests, the speakers introduced the fundamental aspects of collection development, such as collection manager responsibilities, collection development policies, and the UCSB collection development structure and organization. The AUL for Collections, representing the library administration, and a long time Collection Coordinator, representing the library’s institutional memory, provided a contextual framework for collection development practices, focusing on practical applications at UCSB and the larger network of University of California libraries.

The second session was a panel presentation on *Collections Budget*. Panelists explained the historical background behind the development of the library collection budget for UC Libraries, allocation of money on each campus, and allocation for specific subjects at UCSB libraries -- in essence, a crash course on how the University and its libraries receive and allocate money, from the state government down to the specific subject collections budgets at UCSB. Speakers then addressed specific points involved in the management of individual subject-based funds, such as the timeline for spending money, sources of supplemental funding, and balancing spending between material types and competing faculty needs.

Acquisitions and Cataloging, the third session, covered procedures for purchasing and cataloging monographs. The head of Acquisitions and Cataloging, with various staff, explained relevant procedures, and shared inside tips for managing rush orders, gifts, and items requiring special treatments. By following an item from order placement to the shelf, we learned who was in charge of processes along the way, and whom to contact with various questions and problems related to getting an item in the library, in the catalog, and on the shelf.

Like most large research libraries, UCSB uses a number of vendor approval plans, and a significant portion of our collection budgets are allocated to these purchases. To this end, our fourth session featured discussion of our book vendors and their *Approval Plans*. The AUL for Collections discussed the role of approval plans, and two members of the Task Force – armed with the results of our questions and answers gathered from several staff involved in approval plans—

presented the nuts and bolts of working with our particular plans. Highlights of the program were informative guides and algorithmic charts describing our various approval plans, with advice for best utilizing them. This session was especially useful to all, considering the relative newness of some of the plans.

Similar to the session on Cataloging, *Serials and Preservation* explained policies and procedures for serial acquisitions and management. The Serials department head and her staff discussed procedures for procuring, cataloging, and managing serials, including electronic journals and databases. The session was combined with one on preservation issues, such as treating damaged items, binding, and funds available for preservation projects.

Our next session covered *University of California System-wide Shared Collection Development*. Though individual universities, UC libraries work together extensively, especially in collections. Our AUL for Collections, together with a representative from the UC System's Joint Committee on Shared Collections, summarized the collections activities of the UC system, highlighted by discussion of the California Digital Library (CDL), a library of electronic resources considered the "tenth" library of the University of California – and the primary organizational body behind UC consortial purchases. We learned how cooperative purchases are identified, prioritized, and negotiated, and how collection managers can take advantage of the CDL's support for shared collecting.

A different format was employed for the final session, *Developing Subject Expertise*. Several speakers gave brief presentations, followed by discussion, on several topics: developing subject expertise when one lacks a background in the discipline; faculty outreach; using national and regional organizations to network with other bibliographers; quantitative data for collection management; and collection assessment strategies. We also distributed our internally compiled "Helpful Hints for Developing Subject Expertise," a compendium of advice gathered from all UCSB collection managers. Our festive finale also featured refreshments and door prizes (copies of the previously mentioned *ALA Guide to Training Collection Development Librarians*).

The Collection Manager's Manual

Regardless of whether or not libraries conduct similar programs to train and refresh collection management skills, appropriate documentation -- what we call a "collection manager's manual" -- should exist so that collection managers can stay abreast of procedures, skills, tasks, and nuances involved in building and maintaining a successful collection.

When the Task Force began, members had vastly disparate ideas about how various tasks should be performed. Even some relatively simple procedures were unclear. Moreover, the questions and answers documented at the sessions

revealed information that many veteran librarians didn't know. For these reasons, a collection manager's manual became imperative.

The manual contains a range of information and reflects the roles associated with collection development librarians working in the current academic environment. The arrangement of the new, web-based Collection Manager's Manual resembles the orientation program sessions, and features information on thirteen major topics:

- First Day Kit For New Collection Managers
- Collection Manager Responsibilities
- Collection Development Policies
- Collection Groups: Organization and Structure
- UC System-wide Collection Development Resources and Planning
- Ordering and Order Records Management
- Approval Plans
- Collection Assessment and Management
- Cataloging
- Gifts
- Storage
- Tools
- Preservation

The questions and answers from the orientation programs are integrated into the manual where appropriate. They also have a separate access point, and librarians can chronologically review each session. Clearly, for the manual to be effective, it must be kept current. It is available at <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/collman/>.

Evaluation and Future Recommendations

Evaluation forms were distributed at each session. Evaluations affirmed the program's usefulness, and drew considerable praise from new and veteran librarians alike. This latter outcome, although not completely expected, revealed that the sessions served not only to teach, but also to review and reinvigorate. Sessions provided wonderful opportunities to discuss new approaches to collection development.

Early opinion on the Collection Manager's Manual is likewise favorable, but the Manual requires a commitment to currency to remain valuable.

With the completion of the charges, the Task Force made the following recommendations:

- 1) Create a standing committee to coordinate training of new collection managers, and to maintain and update the Collection Manager's Manual.
- 2) Repeat the orientation program for *all* collection managers on a recurring schedule, perhaps every two years.
- 3) Create a First Day Kit for Collection Managers.

The standing committee will eliminate the need to convene another Task Force, and should serve to provide consistent training even in our diversely organized collections environment. While the committee's makeup should be determined by the AUL for Collections, much of the credit for the task force's success can be attributed to its mixture of new and experienced collection managers. The committee should also insure that the Collection Manager's Manual is kept current.

The success of the orientation program convinced us of the value of repeating it regularly. If conducted every two years, collection managers should keep current.

The primary purpose of the First Day Kit is to provide new library selectors with an overview of collection-related policies and practices specific to their new assignment. The Kit includes:

- List of serial subscriptions
- List of monographic series
- Allocation report (budget details for the subject)
- Collection Development Policy
- Approval plan descriptions, with copies of relevant plans
- Our document "Helpful Hints for New Collection Managers"
- Copy of ALA's *Guide to Training Collection Development Librarians*.
- Information on relevant UC System-wide Bibliographers/Consortia Groups
- Information and data on the relevant academic departments
- Organizational chart/contact list of personnel involved in processes related to collection management

Conclusion

Essentially, the Task Force has reassessed and reorganized our training program and materials. Creating a standing committee to supervise training, organize programs, and maintain the Collection Manager's Manual will be vital

in sustaining the information network for collection managers. Yet we should remind ourselves that getting organized is only the start; *staying* organized and keeping current is the enduring challenge.

About the authors

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