Part 1: Collaborations Between Acquisitions and Collection Management

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Collaboration between acquisitions and collection management has a long and symbiotic tradition. If not quite bonded together as closely as love and marriage and horse and carriage, the relationship has been closely intertwined. Yet for decades, especially when print was dominant, the line between the duties of acquisitions and collection management was clear. Collection development librarians and subject bibliographers analyzed their collections, selected materials, and submitted requests. In turn, acquisitions staff placed orders, received materials, and paid invoices. In smaller libraries, one person occasionally wore both hats. But more often than not, the volume of work necessitated some separation into different departments. Yet the workload seemed manageable and fairly straightforward.

However, with the explosion of new formats, assessment tools, and purchase options, those clear lines of demarcation started to blur. The world of collection development and acquisitions quickly evolved into a maze of licensing agreements, e-resources, data sets, purchase accountability, and usage metrics. What had seemed to be a simple and somewhat direct process was now much more complicated and complex. New buzz terms and phrases entered into the vernacular of acquisitions and collection management: the big deal, “just in time” acquisitions, return on investment, patron-driven acquisitions, evidence-based acquisitions, and many others. As a result of these
new demands, acquisitions and collection management librarians have found themselves sharing responsibilities, merging tasks, and overlapping duties.

It is within the context of these evolving elements of change and complexity that the authors in part 1 share their experiences and insights on collaboration between acquisitions and collection management. For example, Jennifer Culley addresses the issue of shared responsibilities in her chapter “Case Study at The University of Southern Mississippi: Merging the Acquisitions and Collection Management Positions.” Culley details how her institution merged acquisitions and collection management duties to create a new job, collection management and acquisitions librarian, several years after a library restructure eliminated the position of associate dean for collections and scholarly communication. It helped that library administration realized how critical acquisitions and collection management functions were to the library’s mission. For library administration, the upside of merging the positions, such as improving communications in the library and across campus, creating a more efficient library operation, and clearly defining acquisitions and collection management roles, far outweighed the challenge of one person having a heavy but manageable workload.

Improving workflows is also a central theme of Del Williams and Christina Mayberry’s chapter, “Acquisitions and Collection Management Collaborations: Weathering the Storm With Stagnant Budgets and Unpredictable Vendor Landscapes.” The authors outline a number of ways their acquisitions and collection development departments collaborated to improve work processes, all the while dealing with reduced purchasing power, higher costs for resources, and limited purchasing options because of fewer vendors in the marketplace. They focus particularly on the challenge of implementing a new streaming video service and the ways their departments successfully collaborated to make it work.

The ever-looming threat and reality of budget cuts and reduced allocations has had a profound influence on acquisitions and collection management collaboration. Quite often, it has led directly to collaboration almost out of necessity. Just as frequently, the results of those collaborations in addressing budget issues have been effective and long-lasting. In “Collaborative Forecasting When the Crystal
Ball Shatters: Using Pilot Programs to Frame Strategic Direction,” Lynn Wiley and George Gottschalk of the University of Illinois detail their library’s push to collaboratively institute a number of pilot initiatives, including new approval plans, e-book and print purchasing programs, and demand-driven models to meet user needs and overcome draconian budget cuts. The takeaways from their efforts have put their library in an excellent place to meet its goals.

Collaboration between acquisitions and collection management often extends into other departments and constituencies across campus. Scott Piepenburg of Brodart Library Services writes about such a multi-departmental collaboration in “Collaborative Collection Development: Leveraging the Skills of Cataloging Staff to Perform Collection Development.” In this chapter he describes how cataloging worked collaboratively with acquisitions and collection development in defining criteria for item selection and processing of a large donation of LPs. Acquisitions, cataloging, collection management, and library liaisons worked together to process the donation. Benefits from the collaboration included authority holdings being updated, stronger bonds being established between acquisitions and cataloging, and teaching faculty developing a new awareness about library resources and services.

By and large, several themes emerge from a reading of these enlightening and thought-provoking chapters. First, the spirit of collaboration runs deep between acquisitions and collection management despite the changing landscape of librarianship. Second, acquisitions and collection development librarians still find ways to effectively serve their patrons no matter the challenge—lack of funds, reduced staff, or oversized workloads. Third, the evolutionary nature of acquisitions and collection development does not deter or impede the ongoing tradition of collaboration. In fact, as these essays so capably demonstrate, their tradition of cooperation and collaboration is growing stronger and is more essential than ever in filling the scholarly demands of faculty, students, and researchers.