

## Collection Development from a College Perspective

*University-centered theories of collection development are inappropriate for the college library; yet they still constitute much of the theoretical basis for college collection development. While some librarians have begun to think of the college library as a unique entity, too many others continue to treat the college collection as a miniature version of a university library. This article contends that the college library is primarily an illustrative collection of materials designed to support undergraduate teaching, and it suggests advisable directions for college collection development in the light of this conception of the college library.*

**C**OLLECTION DEVELOPMENT today is certainly a most inexact science. As Michael Moran demonstrated in his recent article "The Concept of Adequacy in University Libraries,"<sup>1</sup> there is really no way, at present, for any of us to determine whether a collection is or is not adequate. Formulas exist, but these are arbitrary constructions rather than validated criteria. This inexactness need not concern university collection development officers very much, for they have the comfort of aiming for total coverage in many, or perhaps even in every field; they might even have the funds to acquire near total coverage. For small college collection development officers, however, the situation is quite different. They have neither the funds, nor the space, nor the staff to attempt total coverage. Unfortunately, also, they have little in the way of theory as a guide in their quest for enlightened selectivity.

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Where can college library collection development officers look for guidance? The *locus classicus* would presumably be Guy R. Lyle's *Administration of the College Li-*

*brary.*<sup>2</sup> Lyle provides common sense advice about considering the nature of the curriculum, the composition of the faculty, the amount of funds available, the initial size of the collection, and geographical location, among other factors. For instance, a college surrounded by institutions with significant collections can engage in cooperative acquisitions and could afford not to acquire certain items (expensive sets of legal materials or science abstracts, for example). Isolated college libraries, on the other hand, might wish to acquire such items, not only for students and faculty, but also as a service to the surrounding community.

Lyle's recommendations are good advice and have yet to be superseded. However, there is no special guidance here for the college collection development officer. These factors are precisely those that university development officers would also have to consider, were they trying to spend their resources according to a formula. Indeed, one might even say that the factors which Lyle suggests for consideration are misleading for college collection development officers, because they are generally applicable principles and are not especially relevant to their special needs.

This problem was illustrated well by the pioneering citation analysis that Gross and Gross, two small college chemists, did in 1927 for their department.<sup>3</sup> They were in-

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terested in reducing its periodicals budget and hit upon analyzing footnotes in journal articles to eliminate subscriptions to journals that were little used. What Gross and Gross ignored, however, was that they were analyzing the use patterns of researchers and publishing scholars, not of the college undergraduates. They had unwittingly done a study which was perhaps relevant for the college faculty members, or for university-use patterns, but irrelevant for their primary college audience.<sup>4</sup>

Their study was archetypically off-base. It is only recently that librarians have conceived of the college library as an institution at all distinct from the university library. Newton McKeon's 1954 article "The Nature of the College-Library Book Collection"<sup>5</sup> illustrates this lack of awareness well. McKeon, more interested in faculty than in student needs, stated that the college library had the responsibility to supply the faculty with "working materials for scholarship in their fields."<sup>6</sup> These "working materials" included journals, proceedings, official documents, reprints of manuscripts, and original source materials of all kinds, most of which would in practice undoubtedly have proved irrelevant to student needs. McKeon contended, however, that such a collection would serve students as well as faculty, because a "rewarding educational experience"<sup>7</sup> required the very best available resources.

Clearly, McKeon's intention was to create a university library in miniature at every college. How colleges could afford to do this was left unsaid, and whether or not such attempts at universality are desirable was left unquestioned. As for the execution of his development plans, it was all art and intuition, a "spirit of team play" between librarians and faculty members, chance conversations, informed suggestions, and inquiries about unfulfilled needs. Nevertheless, this is probably still the state of the art at many institutions.

By 1963, Stuart Stiffler, in "A Philosophy of Book Selection for Smaller Academic Libraries,"<sup>8</sup> had realized some of the inherent differences between college and university libraries and was stressing the need for college libraries to select materials, not only for their intrinsic merit, but also for their

ability to complement the existing collection and the college's educational philosophy and program. Stiffler correctly noted that a book collection "consists of ideas, or themes, events, and interpretations"<sup>9</sup> that combine to form a distinctive entity. Stiffler did not eschew subjective criteria for collection completely, but he subordinated them to criteria based upon a conception of the existing collection, perceived as an ideationally and structurally coherent whole. Obviously, Stiffler's article was quite abstract, and he never grappled specifically with how we might define a collection in order to build upon it. Yet, his inherent recognition of college collection building as different from university collection building remains valuable.

#### RECENT THEORY

Recent college library collection development theory is best represented by Evan Farber's work. Many people now realize intuitively that college libraries cannot be small versions of university libraries, because they cannot afford to be, financially. But to rest there is to define college libraries in the negative; Farber takes a more positive approach. He has worked actively to create an alternative to the "university-library syndrome" that affects so many college librarians.

According to Farber, college libraries differ from university libraries "not only in quantitative terms but in their educational roles."<sup>10</sup> The college librarian must build a collection that directly fulfills student needs, which means, most importantly, "a collection of cultural and recreational materials that can expand students' horizons."<sup>11</sup> Farber's ideal college collection must be a cultural center and do more than serve basic curricular needs. It must also have a "good reference collection that will serve as a key to the immediate library and to resources elsewhere."<sup>12</sup>

The reference collection is the link that puts users in touch with the universe of resources their library does not, because it cannot, and perhaps should not, have. The reference collection, along with a strong program of bibliographic instruction, is also the key to making full use of the collection the library *does* have, and justifying the

library's material and processing expenditures.

As a supporter of the no-growth library, Farber believes that the present financial difficulties of colleges are not necessarily bad, because as librarians have to curtail expenditures, they will have to pay more attention "to what a college library should be doing."<sup>13</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE LITERATURE

As we analyze the trend in collection philosophy from McKeon to Farber, one point stands out: the trend is toward emphasizing the differences between college and university libraries. One can no longer pretend that collection development for the college library is simply a lilliputian version of university collection development; more attention is now being paid to the goals of the small college and to the library's role in the fulfillment of those goals.

Instead of bridling at the restrictions forced upon the college librarian by financial exigency, Farber and his followers now glory in the singular nature of the small academic library. They want us to emphasize our differences and to turn our limitations into creative assets. Thus the attitudinal change in twenty-five years has been great.

Corresponding to the change in thinking concerning the purpose of the small college library, there has also been a change in the view of the selector's position. McKeon advocated selection by intuition. Stiffler called for "hard analysis of the individual title in its relation to some conceptualization of the book collection."<sup>14</sup> This was an advance, abstract concept though it is.

Farber would endorse Stiffler's analysis of the individual title but would do it even more critically. By committing himself to a no-growth library, he has increased the need for discipline in selection. The librarian in a fixed-sized library must continually evaluate the collection and, for every book added, must weed a book out. This places greater responsibility on the selector, both as acquirer and as weeder, because it magnifies the impact of mistaken decisions.

In this post-university-library syndrome era, we wish we could offer college collection development officers validated, scien-

tific guidelines with which they could confidently make the hard decisions they face daily. However, we cannot offer such guidelines; as Michael Moran's article suggests, we doubt that such guidelines can ever be formulated. Therefore, all college collection development officers will continue to use *Choice*, use standard lists, involve faculty in collection decisions, give special attention to the existing strengths of their library, consider the holdings of other area institutions and the willingness of such institutions to extend their resources to others, make interlibrary loan arrangements, and try to anticipate the changing nature of the college curriculum. We hold these practices to be self-evident. Yet, we think that something more emerges out of a consideration of college collection development theory in recent decades.

#### STUDENT-CENTERED LIBRARIES

First, we must now recognize very frankly that our *primary* client is the student and not the faculty member and collect with that fact in mind. This is radical doctrine, which many faculty members would undoubtedly find unpalatable, but it is the inevitable conclusion we draw from Farber's work. As undergraduate *teaching* institutions, colleges cannot afford to devote much of their resources to highly specialized research materials, even when these would facilitate faculty dissertations and publication.

The reference collection can and should be the link, for faculty, between their needs and the universe of resources available at research institutions, resources that their own college library very properly does not have. Their research, important as it may be, is secondary to the primary mission of the college, and the faculty member's needs are secondary, for the library, to those of the students.

The reality of our college curricula today is that at most institutions, a basic work (such as, for instance, the Twayne series on standard authors) is more valuable to an undergraduate than a more sophisticated work that concentrates on minute details of an author's writing.

We do not mean here to demean scholarship, and we would not like to be accused

of pandering to student taste or taking students' perceptions as the ultimate measure of what is valuable. However, as working librarians, we cannot ignore the obvious disparities between what faculty too often request and what students actually find useful.

The college library needs to have a written collection development policy that specifically names its primary clients and attempts to delineate as far as is practical the kinds of books that *are* and that *are not* appropriate for its primary collection goal. With this policy in hand, the librarians can contend with the faculty member who wants to spend the English department's remaining thousand dollars on first editions of Arnold Bennett, or the biologist who has a list of specialized journals considered essential for his or her research.

College faculty members at first view this attempt to rationalize acquisitions as a usurpation of prerogative, or an abridgment of academic freedom, but they *can* usually be made to understand and admit the difference between college education as a *process* and university training as a specialized inculcation of particular facts and information. Once they accept this distinction, they are likely to become partners in the endeavor to collect a useful working collection, on a fixed budget, for undergraduates.

#### PERIODICALS COLLECTIONS

A second principle becomes evident as a corollary to the proposition that the college library exists primarily for the benefit of the student. It is that the periodicals collection should not be apportioned by department. The result of departmental apportionment is a haphazard collection of journals designed for no particular purpose. If periodical collections in colleges are to be as useful as the book collection, they should, for the most part, reflect the titles covered in the major indexing tools that the library receives and that students are most likely to use.

There should probably be a core collection of indexing tools that are most appropriate for undergraduate work and that are essentially surrogates for the periodicals collection. Such a core collection concept, presently being employed at Alma College, has been defined by the Alma College library staff to include *Readers' Guide*,

*Humanities Index*, *Social Sciences Index*, *Essay and General Literature Index*, and the new *General Science Index*. Copies of these indexes are prominently shelved as a group and are given special treatment in bibliographic instruction.

Of course, the library will also have indexes and abstracts that refer users to resources to which they would *not* have immediate access. Thus the core indexes are essentially analogous to the card catalog and signal clearly to the user that "this is what you can have, immediately, in our library."

The other indexes and abstracts would be analogous to specialized bibliographies, about both of which library instructors could say, in effect, "these tools are for the more scholarly, sustained, or adventuresome projects. Be forewarned: we do *not* have all, and perhaps not even many, of the items included here, so you may have to use interlibrary loan, or go elsewhere, to obtain your materials."

University librarians need not worry very much about the rationale for their periodicals collections and can confidently expect a collection of thirty to fifty thousand periodical titles to satisfy any average student user from any department.

College librarians, however, may be expending half of the materials budget on only seven hundred, one thousand, or at most two thousand periodical titles. If they accept the proposition that all periodicals, and the indexes and abstracts, are created equal, they are accepting a formula for perpetual student frustration and dissatisfaction.

It is folly for college libraries to attempt to satisfy research needs on a hit-or-miss basis; it would be much more sensible to conceive of periodical acquisition primarily in terms of a core of indexes, which students could easily be instructed to use and which would lead the student, with confidence, to the articles themselves.

Of course, the library should also have indexes and abstracts which refer the users to resources that they do not have immediate access to, but the personality and the tenacity of undergraduates is such that they need quite a bit of positive reinforcement in their searching for periodicals. We have never seen this consideration built into calculations of what percentage of user

needs a library should be expected to satisfy, but clearly the college undergraduate demands more immediate gratification than do university graduate students and faculty.

The typical first contacts of college students with the library occur when they are under immediate time pressure to produce a paper. If they learn that the indexes and abstracts exist only to point out material that is, for their practical purposes, unobtainable, they will not soon return.

We suggest, therefore, that the college librarian's first periodicals priority is to subscribe to journals whose articles the students will surely be directed to when they use the standard periodical indexes. Even if another library exists in close proximity, and holds these same journals, their purchase is still justifiable. The time to wean students from excessive dependence on the *Readers' Guide* is *after* they have mastered its use, and after they know that they can always fall back upon it for quick references if *PAIS* or the other indexes point them to too many unobtainable items.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDERGRADUATES

In talking about student frustration and about the disparity between their needs and faculty needs, a third principle becomes evident for college librarians, a principle which McKeon would have rejected but which Farber would probably endorse: Just as we should not consider college libraries to be miniature university libraries, so we should not assume that college students are all scholar-adventurers. We should not ignore the *personalities* of our primary user group any more than we should ignore their need for materials.

Perhaps the major difference between the library use of the average college student and the average graduate student or faculty member is that college students rarely *need* to use the library as anything more than a study hall or a reserve room. Human nature being what it is, they will not generally use the library one whit more, or more intelligently, than they have to.

This is a consideration university collection policies need not concern themselves with, at least where their graduate students and faculty are concerned. These people

will *have* to learn how to use the library, and they will need to discover where the important materials are. Therefore, collection development can proceed in an abstract intellectual vacuum. Subject specialists can procure abstruse materials, secure in the knowledge that the appropriate people will appreciate the acquisition and make proper use of it.

College librarians can assume nothing of the sort. Therefore, they cannot conduct collection development in a vacuum. It must, first and most importantly, be tied to library instruction at introductory and advanced levels. One might even end up purchasing more expensive materials for departments that will encourage students to use them, or for courses whose faculty members will be cooperating in the library's instructional program.

To a great extent, the college library can generate whatever level of bibliographic expertise its students acquire, and it can control (and justify the cost of) expensive items by instructing students in their use.

This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of the merits of bibliographic instruction, but it is clearly here that the library discharges a good bit of its instructional responsibility, and collection development must focus on areas of heavy instruction. Here again, a written policy, coupled with a check on how often expensive materials are used, may defuse resentment and even result in more sober assessments of the library's place in the instructional life of the campus. Departments that have resisted bibliographic instruction should very properly have their book budgets cut, and if they complain, it should be easy to explain and defend the move.

If there is a place in the college library for specialized materials, or computerized versions of them, it is in the reference collection. Here the faculty and more sophisticated students can become aware of those resources their library does not stock. Here, also, the interlibrary loan and cooperative lending processes are facilitated. As more indexes and abstracts become available online, departmental and reference materials budgets should probably be channeled away from traditional, expensive, and little-used hard-copy bibliographies and indexes and

toward the computerized versions of them.

We doubt that on-line reference work will become an integral part of college library activity very soon, especially because college budgets will not permit extensive on-line searching. Undergraduates will not usually be willing to bear the cost (and should not be made to bear the cost) of searches which would be just as valuable, at their level of inquiry, if done manually.

However, some of the more specialized indexes could conceivably be eliminated in favor of on-line work, if they were readily available. There is a danger here of limiting access and of frightening away timid potential student users. But we judge this hazard to be more theoretical than real, especially if such services are advertised as a regular part of reference service and are underwritten as a normal part of departmental and reference budget expenditure.

Average undergraduates are unlikely to care to go beyond *Readers' Guide* and the other core-searching tools, but if they do, a readily available computer search may stimulate as much sophisticated research as it stifles.

#### MICROFORMS

Should the curriculum warrant a small college's attempt to acquire research-strength holdings in a particular field, the preselected microform collection might be an acceptable alternative. As subjects such as black studies, women's studies, and popular culture enter the curriculum, librarians often discover that their collection lacks the resources to support work in these areas.

Retrospective collecting is time-consuming and expensive under the best of circumstances, and, lacking subject bibliographers, most college libraries are not set up for it. Thus a microform collection on a discrete subject can save staff time, ensure reasonable coverage of a subject, save expensive space, and make material quickly available, with minimal processing, for student use.

One must expect undergraduate resistance to microform use, especially among the minimally motivated, and for that reason we would not recommend acquiring the more popular, or heavily used, periodical titles in

this format. Microform presents a number of barriers that will too easily frustrate the students who will not persevere. However, the ability to use microform is a skill that college libraries should probably be teaching, and one should not shy away from acquiring microform when it represents desirable material, including replacements of missing periodical volumes, which could not otherwise be conveniently acquired.

#### CURRICULUM-CENTERED COLLECTING

In order to discharge their collection development responsibilities adequately, college librarians must, to a much greater extent than university librarians, know the curriculum, the existing collection, and the students and faculty at their particular institutions. Though it may sound harsh and elitist, the truth is that the level of academic sophistication varies considerably from college to college. A collection that would support the curriculum and serve the students well at one college might prove entirely inadequate, for any number of reasons, at another.

Thus librarians must collect for their individual schools, not for some ideal abstract institution. They should be cautious in approaching standard lists or in using selection aids such as *Choice*; they should also try to anticipate academic developments and curricular change, so that the library can evolve along with the college. Finally, they should secure control of the acquisitions budget, if they do not already have it.

In too many colleges, academic departments control and expend their budgets according to no discernible criteria. While the faculty may know their subjects, they probably know little about how students use the library, and their judgment as book selectors is questionable.

As Massman and Olson point out, faculty members are too often either "overburdened with other duties," lacking in their knowledge of books, disinterested in books, unconvinced that library materials are really of value in instruction, prone to selecting only narrow research works on the one hand or textbooks on the other, or simply too lazy to care what happens to their book budget, even though believing that "only they are capable of selecting."<sup>16</sup> It is probably only

the librarian who can see the collection as a whole, as Stiffler suggested, and select material that is relevant to the students, the curriculum, and the existing collection.

#### SUMMARY

Working from the proposition that college libraries are not simply small versions of university libraries, four guidelines that college collection development officers should follow become evident.

First, college librarians should recognize their primary obligation to collect for undergraduate students.

Second, in the same way that book acquisitions should reflect student needs, periodical acquisitions should be based primar-

ily upon major periodical indexes that students would see as analogous to the card catalog.

Third, college librarians need to take account of the nature of the undergraduate personality, for instance avoiding microform material where it would tend to be most discouraging to the weakly motivated student.

Finally, college librarians, to a much greater extent than university librarians, should know their institution's curriculum and exercise maximum control over their materials budget. Extensive faculty selection, too common at colleges, is liable to result in haphazard collections.

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