50th Anniversary Feature—

Old Forms, New Forms: The Challenge of Collection Development

Ross Atkinson

Collection development is intended primarily to improve the academic library's ability to fulfill competing information responsibilities with chronically inadequate resources. In order to meet this challenge, collection development has sought to create a system out of the processes which are already endemic to selection. If this system is to progress, if it is to adapt to rapidly changing technical and economic conditions, it must have the capacity to exert greater control over scholarly and educational information. Steps toward this increased control should include the categorization of sources and access by function rather than merely by subject, the ongoing definition of a title-specific core, and the development of prescriptive access and collection policies.

It is testimony both to the perceived significance of collection development and to the status of the library in the academy that the primary responsibility for the selection of library materials has passed from faculty users to academic library staff. The transfer of that responsibility, which began in the 1960s, has still not run its course.[1] Most larger academic libraries have by now assumed full responsibility for selection, although even in some of these larger institutions the transfer of authority has occurred quite recently.[2] The development of collections has, to be sure, always been a basic concern of all types of libraries, but what we today understand as academic library collection development is to a great extent the ongoing systematization and professionalization of collection building and management which has evolved both as a product of and as a rationale for this transfer of the selection effort from faculty users to library staff.

The reasons the academic library needed to assume responsibility for selection have been frequently discussed.[3] The most important of these were probably (a) a rapid increase in funding and research, supported mainly by federal subsidies,[4] and (b) the increasing realization, which began at least as far back as the 1936 comparative study by Douglas Waples and Harold Lasswell, that superior research collections could be built by professional bibliographers.[5] From a more general perspective, the transfer of selection responsibilities was intended to create a mechanism to improve the academic library's ability to respond rapidly and rationally to the manifold information needs of its users. How collection development has sought to achieve that objective, and what further actions need to be taken in order to refine that ability, will be the subject of this paper.

THE RECONCILIATION OF LIBRARY FUNCTIONS

The academic library has neither a single mission nor a homogenous constituency,

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but rather is obliged to respond to a multiplicity of academic needs and interest groups. Although there are many schemes which could be used to categorize these responsibilities, let us posit for the purposes of this discussion five essential functions which the academic library attempts and is expected to fulfill.

1. The notification function. The academic library continues to serve as the principal (although never exclusive) means by which scholars communicate the results of their research to each other across space and time.

2. The documentation function. The academic library maintains the essential raw data upon which many disciplines base their research.

3. The historical function. To all libraries, but to the academic library especially, falls the responsibility for maintaining the records of civilization, without which the future will be denied access to the past.

4. The instructional function. The students, whose education is after all the primary purpose of all academic institutions, depend upon the library as a means to supplement and enrich their learning.

5. The bibliographical metafunction. In order to achieve the preceding four functions, the library must promote and facilitate access to information sources.

We must note at once that these functions have very different characteristics. The first four functions are direct responses to user needs, while the bibliographic metafunction drives and regulates the other functions. The historical function exists to ensure that records which one day may be needed will still be available. It is closely connected to, but must be distinguished from the documentation function, which is not a long-range curatorial responsibility; the documentation function is rather intended to provide access to information presently needed, especially for the humanities and social sciences. To respond to the current needs of historians is to fulfill the documentary function. To maintain materials or access to databases for future generations, on the other hand, is to respond to the historical function. Thus while the historical function is intended to serve future scholars (or at least all future scholars concerned in any way with history), the documentation function responds directly to the needs and interests of contemporary clientele.

All academic libraries normally serve all five functions to varying degrees, depending upon available resources. Those resources—funding, staffing, space—are always and have always been limited. The five functions are therefore in a state of perpetual competition for inevitably inadequate resources. The fundamental responsibility of academic library collection development (although it may not always have been viewed in these terms in the course of its evolution) has been and remains the reconciliation of such competing library functions.

The balancing of competing responsibilities is, of course, necessary for all library operations, but collection development has been, as we shall see, especially well designed to achieve such a purpose. This capacity will doubtless become increasingly evident (and, one hopes, effective) as more sources of information become available in electronic format. Although electronic publication is not proceeding nearly as rapidly as was once expected, there can be little doubt that many paper publications will eventually be replaced by sources in electronic form. While this will alter the nature of collections significantly, it is unlikely that it will induce changes in the fundamental purposes of collection development, because the cost of meeting all information needs for instruction and research will very likely continue to exceed available resources. Mediating among those competing needs, reconciling divergent academic library functions with conspicuously inadequate resources, will remain the fundamental responsibility of collection development, regardless of the formats in which scholarly and instructional information is published.[6]

THE FOUR CONTACT GROUPS

In her frequently cited 1973 dissertation, Elaine Sloan characterized collection development as a boundary spanning activity:

> Collection development is viewed as an activity which is at the boundary of the organization and which also engages in extensive intra-organizational transactions. Those who are responsible for developing collections will be required to interact with users of the collections, who are outside of the boundaries of the university. Within the boundaries of the library, those responsible for collection development may interact with public service librarians who are in contact with users and with technical service librarians who are in contact with dealers and publishers. Those responsible for developing collections will therefore be required to coordinate their activities with many other organizational units.[7]

The competing functions which the academic library must fulfill are not only abstractions. Those functions are also powerfully represented by interest groups of varying authority with which collection development librarians maintain routine contact. We can distinguish these primary contact groups according to their relationships with the local institution and/or the library profession (see figure 1). Providing an acceptable but practicable response to the disparate needs, demands, aspirations, and biases of these four groups is the activity in which many collection development librarians are engaged much of the time.

Two initial assumptions relating to this scheme should be noted. First, the most immediately perceivable political influence clearly originates from above the horizontal line, i.e., from local institutional forces. When there is clear competition for resources between institutional and non-institutional contact groups, the former groups will usually prevail. Second, most of the economic power lies outside of the profession, to the right of the vertical line. One reason, for example, that the achievements of cooperative collection development have been relatively modest is that the main proponents or representatives of cooperative activities are often collection development staff at other institutions, and they have neither the political authority nor the economic influence to compete with the demands represented by other contact groups.

We should also note parenthetically that, while boundary spanning is indeed an accurate and insightful description, there are also aspects of collection development which have necessarily been at the same time boundary-defining. A linkage can only be achieved if the linking agent becomes a true third component, distinguished from those elements on either side of the boundary. Collection development, in order to establish its own identity, has been compelled to disengage itself from the two key contact groups at the institutional level, other library staff (usually in the acquisitions department) and faculty users. It is in fact very difficult to establish a collection development program without temporarily weakening the connection between the emerging program and those two institutional groups from which the program is assuming its responsibility and authority. Once the collection development program is in place, however, and its legitimacy is no longer suspect, a primary objective must be to reestablish and to reenforce those local contacts as rapidly as possible.

Let us now consider the relationship of collection development to each of its four main contact groups.

	Professional	*Nonprofessional*
Institutional	Local library staff outside of collection development	Users
Noninstitutional	Collection development librarians elsewhere	Publishers

FIGURE 1
Collection Development Contact Groups

"During periods of austerity, faculty users often lobby to protect acquisitions at the expense of other critical library operations."

Library Staff Outside of Collection Development

Of all the diverse functions for which a library is responsible, it is the key bibliographical metafunction which remains the most obscure to users. This is especially the case with fundamental processing services. Because the main political and economic authority in the academy resides with the users, the bibliographical metafunction can become vulnerable. During periods of austerity, faculty users often lobby to protect acquisitions at the expense of other critical library operations. "Faculty members will accept many radical changes as long as funds are available with which to buy essential material. This is an area where miscalculation can bring disaster; if allowed to grow haphazardly, this budget [i.e., for acquisitions] will devour other funds."[8] Because collection development has become the library's primary link with faculty, and because faculty generally recognize collection development librarians as the representatives of the collections, it becomes an essential responsibility of collection officers to educate faculty as to the dependence of the collection on quality processing and staff. Collection development is therefore in a special position to protect the bibliographical metafunction by translating the values and concerns of the library into those of the faculty users.

Library Users

Local library users are clearly the most prominent and influential contact group for any collection development operation. Much effort has been devoted to the design of surveys and other mechanisms to identify user needs and attitudes.[9] Recently the competing needs of current faculty users have become especially problematic as a result of the escalating prices of materials in the sciences.[10] We have now become very sensitive to the fact that such prices have driven the cost of fulfilling the notification function in the sciences many times higher than the cost of fulfilling that same function in the humanities and social sciences. Selection responsibility has been assumed by the library in order to ensure, among other things, that the basic information (notification, documentation) needs of all faculty users are being met as consistently as possible within the confines of available resources. In a very real sense, therefore, collection development has been created to deal with exactly the kind of crisis we currently face, so that a test of collection development is now under way: if methods can be devised and resources chanelled to meet the competing information needs of different faculty user groups in the face of the rapidly declining purchasing power of library budgets, then collection development will have demonstrated its utility to its parent institutions.

Different constituencies among current faculty represent only one of the competing needs of library users. There are at least two other essential categories of competing user needs which collection development is expected to address. First, there is the competition between undergraduate and faculty needs. Graduate students probably do not form an immediately apparent, separate constituency, because their needs are in many cases identical with those of the faculty, but undergraduates often require very different material from that pursued and used by faculty. For most subjects in most academic libraries, the instructional function will be the highest priority. The academic library must therefore acquire material specifically intended for and used by undergraduates in fulfillment of its instructional function. When the notification and the instructional functions begin to compete vigorously for strained resources, it becomes an urgent responsibility of collection development to ensure that the capacity of the collection to support education is not undermined by the library's obligation to foster communication among scholars.

"Responding to the historical function is difficult, because the constituency to be served has not yet arrived, while the other, competing functions (notification, documentation, instructional) all serve the needs of current users."

In addition to the competing needs of current faculty, and the competition for resources between faculty and undergraduates, there is a third category of competing user needs, which is certainly the most difficult to mediate: it is the conflicting requirements of present and future users. To serve the needs of future scholars is the library's historical function. Materials no longer necessary for notification (or even documentation, such as superseded editions) must be maintained—not everywhere, but somewhere—for future historical research. This consumes space and staff resources which could be applied to the fulfillment of the other library functions. Responding to the historical function is difficult, because the constituency to be served has not yet arrived, while the other, competing functions (notification, documentation, instructional) all serve the needs of current users. The larger the research library, moreover, the more critical becomes the historical function, although academic libraries of all sizes can and must contribute to the effort. The realization of the historical function can in fact only be achieved effectively by the coordination of collection decisions among academic libraries.

The Collection Development Community

The successful development of academic library collections, especially during periods of budgetary distress, depends upon the exchange of information and the coordination of planning and operations among collection development officers at different institutions. One effort to improve coordination has taken the form of standards and guidelines to ensure adequate and equitable service to current and future clientele in all institutions.[11] Such published standards are essential, but also abstract, so that the value of their application is difficult to assess.

The other, more practical method to improve coordination has been cooperative collection development, which has been a goal of academic libraries for many years.[12] The first decade of *College & Research Libraries* contains several calls for improved cooperation in the development of library collections.[13] The arguments and the recommendations presented in those articles are not at all unlike positions still taken today, which is evidence of how modestly we have progressed in this area. There are a variety of cooperative programs now in operation, but few of these seem to be having demonstrable effects. The recent survey by Joe Hewitt and John Shipman on cooperation among ARL libraries revealed that cooperative programs "must, for the most part, still be described as somewhat poorly delineated or even embryonic. The most important finding of the study relates to the level of interest and activity directed toward establishing cooperative collection development *relationships*, rather than specific program activities."[14] While there is great enthusiasm for cooperation, there has been considerable difficulty actually implementing such programs. Why cooperative programs have not worked as well as expected, despite the significant quantities of time, money, and intelligence devoted to them, remains a source of continuous speculation and frustration for the collection development community. Joseph Branin has recently compiled a list of the standard reasons for program inadequacies, and he has also provided some sound suggestions for solutions.[15] The simple fact may be, however, that the historical function, which cooperative collection development is primarily intended to promote, is being given a lower priority in most academic libraries despite our efforts to support it.

The Publishing Community

The contact group that is least under-

stood, most alien, and increasingly distrusted, is the publishing sector. The concerns and motives of publishers remain obscure to libraries, because publishers are normally not directly connected with either the institution or the profession. Publishers are critically important to the fulfillment of library functions, but unlike the other three contact groups, they are not proponents of any particular library function. The commercial publishers especially operate on the basis of a value system which is relatively foreign to those of both the academy and the library profession. It has become clear recently, that the values and aspirations of at least some members of this group are having the most significant impact on the library's ability to accomplish its multifold mission.[16]

THE DRIVE FOR SYSTEM

The professionalization of collection development derives in part from the realization that subject knowledge is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for selection. Another special form of knowledge is needed to ensure the equitable use of resources and the creation of balanced collections which were sometimes jeopardized when selection was done exclusively by faculty. The primary motivation behind the burgeoning literature of collection development has been to create a system—a coherent, self-validating process—which can rationalize collection decision-making. The origination of such a system, we must also acknowledge, has some clear rhetorical benefits, in that it can be used to emphasize the care and professionalism with which the development of collections is now being conducted by library staff.

This systematization of collection development has been achieved, for the most part, by regulating or formalizing features which have always been central to the collection development process. Much of the literature on budget allocation, for example, has been concerned primarily with the use of formulas. But a budget formula is merely the automatic application of predetermined factors relating to such issues as needs and use, which are routinely taken into account in the course of allocation anyway. In a sense, therefore, budget allocation is always based on unwritten formulas, which are merely imperfectly applied. The formula simply ensures that those factors are articulated and invariably considered. The problem is that the demands on the acquisitions budget are so various, the competing needs so diverse, that no "magic formula" can possibly take all such factors into account.[17]

The major attraction of the budgeting formula is rhetorical: it serves "to convince faculty members and departments that their allocations are fair."[18] Most collection development budgeting remains in any case necessarily imprecise, because of the inability of the library to predict publication costs and patterns. (This is perhaps partially a result of the poor relationship and communication between libraries and the publishing community.) Most budget allocation is therefore based upon past spending rather than upon projections.[19]

The creation of a unified collection policy is also intended to articulate and render consistent criteria which are often already being applied by selectors. The purpose of the policy is to raise those criteria to consciousness, to compare and to coordinate them, occasionally as a prelude to adjusting them so that they meet the varied and competing needs of the institution as consistently as possible. But the collection policy, like the formula budget, while certainly a significant step in the direction of systematic decision making, remains defective as a coordinating tool. The reason is that most of our policy statements (including the Conspectus) are primarily descriptive: they merely articulate the current condition ("existing collection strength") and direction ("current collecting intensity") of the collections.

"Collection policies . . . fail to stipulate in detail how future collecting should be adjusted in response to changing economic and technical conditions."

Some policies provide an indication of the direction in which the collection should be moving ("desired collecting intensity"), but even the inclusion of this feature cannot compensate for the policy's lack of prescriptive authority. Collection policies, in other words, fail to stipulate in detail how future collecting should be adjusted in response to changing economic and technical conditions. The collection policy also frequently fails to reflect clearly the broader goals of the library.

The pursuit of system has also been intense in the most fundamental area of collection development literature, selection theory. Publications on selection written in the 1940s and 1950s were for the most part elegantly phrased opinions of learned men who seldom doubted their capacity to distinguish between significant and inferior publications. Their major criticism of academic library collections was that the stacks were being clogged with materials of questionable quality.[20] Once the library assumed responsibility for collection development, however, it quickly found itself beset by precisely the same inability (previously presumed to be a faculty malady) to distinguish important from less essential publications. This prompted Margit Kraft to warn in 1967 that American libraries had "forsaken the responsibility for judging quality," and have thus become "enamored with quantity."[21] A decade later Daniel Gore was still making essentially the same charge.[22] Little progress has, in fact, been made refining and coordinating selection criteria. While academic libraries can no longer afford to collect as broadly as they did in the 1960s, the qualitative basis for their reductions have been poorly articulated and for the most part uncoordinated.

The desire to systematize selection may have reached a kind of apex in the recent work of Robert Losee, who has devised selection formulas, which he urges collection development officers to use in order to render selection "more scientific and thus more productive."[23] Like formula budgeting, such a quantitative approach to selection has great rhetorical value, but whether it is possible or desirable to apply such a system in the real world of competing information needs must remain open to question.

All selection methods, and especially those used for cooperative collection development, must be founded, to be sure, upon some kind of articulated gradation of source qualities. Of the many formulations of utility actually used in libraries and in consortial agreements, the most familiar and most frequently applied is probably the concept of the core. The word "core" certainly has its rhetorical value, too, because most people probably associate the word with the ultimate objective science, nuclear physics. Despite the frequent and confident use the term receives, however, it usually remains not much more than a metaphor for "important material." This is not to say that there is no core, or that there are no core publications. Such a statement would be cynical and counterproductive. Certainly there are core journals, core documents, core editions and texts which anyone familiar with the relevant field could identify. Such items are viewed by consensus as indispensable for research and education.

A real core must have a periphery—some boundary which separates it from the remainder of the universe of publication. Our effort to establish that boundary, to distinguish core from non-core materials, has been so far singularly unsuccessful, except through such retrospective methods as citation analysis or the use of circulation records.[24] For purposes of planning, budgeting, or coordination, the concept of the core, for all its use, is practically useless. Something between the algorithms urged upon us by our colleagues in information science and the currently vague metaphor of the core needs to be established, if our effort to develop a system for collection decision-making is to move forward.

It should be noted, finally, that the drive to create a systematic basis for collection development is also partially a response to and an application of the increasing serialization of scholarly information. Periodicals have long played an essential role in scholarly communication, but recently we have become especially conscious of the

extent to which they have come to dominate our collections and our budgets. Between 1978 and 1987, the number of journals published in the sciences quadrupled.[25] This prevalence of serials will probably continue, so we had best learn as much as we can about their special bibliographic and epistemological qualities.

It is clear that the distinguishing characteristic of the serial, as opposed to the monograph, is its diachronic context: each article can be perceived as a dependent component of a single text which is the entire, ongoing journal. Thus the quality of any article published in a scholarly journal is at least partially anticipated and judged by the reader on the basis of his or her conclusions about articles read previously in the same journal.

Each article is a kind of chapter in an ever expanding treatise. Every selector is well acquainted with the problems this causes when there is a need to undertake cancellations: when a journal is cancelled, its users invariably interpret such action as an amputation. The backfile of the cancelled journal is then perceived as a defective part which is no longer useful, because it has been separated from its whole. To cancel a journal is to interrupt a conversation. This is traumatic not only for the user but also for the library, because it appears as a reduction or even a repudiation of that systematization which collection development strives with such zeal to create and maintain.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Much has been achieved in academic library collection development since the assumption of selection responsibilities by the library began almost thirty years ago. Collection development has created at least a rudimentary system for the balanced fulfillment of competing functions, and that system has been successfully applied. But it remains equally clear, that more must now be done, more responsibility assumed, more control sought, more boundaries spanned, if the success of collection development is to be sustained. The remainder of this paper will focus upon three specific recommendations to improve further the current effectiveness of collection development: categorization by function, core definition, and refinements in policy.

Categorization by Function

Collection policies, materials budgets, and the distribution of selection responsibilities among selectors tend to be divided along subject lines.[26] Collection development's heavy reliance upon subject divisions is at least partially a vestige of the time when selection was primarily a faculty responsibility. Many acquisitions budgets, for example, continue to be divided as if they were being allocated to academic departments.

One disadvantage of the subject division of materials budgets is that it throws into stark relief the competition among subjects for library resources. It is for this reason that the frequent reliance upon subject divisions has been a serious impediment to cooperative collection development. Such cooperative arrangements often entail the agreement by participating institutions that they will collect in certain subject areas to the exclusion or diminution of others. Faculty concerned with the subjects targeted for deemphasis understandably oppose the implementation of such cooperative plans.[27] We need, therefore, a more refined method of collection categorization—not to conceal the competition among subjects, which undeniably exists, but rather to clarify its complexities and to create a basis for more practical collection goals. Such categories should reflect the use of library materials, so that the effects of collection planning upon research and instruction will be more apparent to local clientele.

While it remains impractical to abandon subject categories entirely, we might improve selecting, budgeting and cooperation, by subdividing subjects according to function. For purposes of this discussion let us simply apply the five functions identified earlier as a basis for distinguishing sources (or, more precisely, source access regardless of format). For each subject we might identify the following:

1. Notification sources. These are mainly journal articles and monographs

written by scholars for other scholars in the same or related fields of research.

2. Documentation sources. In this category are all primary materials. Examples of these include data sources for the social sciences, original publications such as diaries or newspapers used by historians, and the original works and authoritative editions of standard authors for the humanities.

3. Instructional sources. This includes summaries of knowledge, such as textbooks or manuals, intended to provide introductions to and exercises in standard subjects taught at the institution.

4. Historical sources. These are sources which are no longer in demand, but which may be needed one day for historical research.

5. Bibliographical sources. These are reference sources which organize and provide access to all other sources.

Notification and bibliographical sources are essential for all disciplines, and respond directly to the needs of scholars at the institution. The extent of the instructional sources required will depend primarily on the size and use of the institution's academic programs. The most divergent needs are met by the documentation sources. Some subjects, notably the sciences, have very little requirement for documentation sources (always depending upon how we define them), while subjects which view the library as their laboratory are heavily dependent upon documentation sources.

The division of sources by function would improve opportunities for establishing priorities among and between subjects. If we are to work with faculty to make the best use of increasingly shrinking resources, we must have the ability to divide sources in a manner clearly related to their actual use. We must be willing to decide when the fulfillment of one function can be reduced in order to maintain or enhance another, and that decision should be reflected in our collection building and management. At the same time, the library must also have the capacity to ascertain when weaker constituencies are not receiving adequate collection support, and to shield weaker constituencies from stronger ones. This can only be achieved systematically and openly by designating and monitoring source functions.

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Cooperative collection development could also benefit from a method that bases cooperative agreements upon functional categories. Certain types of sources, such as most instructional sources and many notification sources, cannot be shared effectively among institutions, but must be owned. Faculty must receive assurances that cooperative agreements will not affect their access to such sources. Specific functional categories, with a direct relationship to use, therefore, should enhance communication among most of collection development's contact groups.

Core Definition

We can conceive of the functional categories as a kind of horizontal division of a subject. This is only a first step toward the kind of specification which will be needed if the library is to assume an even more responsible and active role in the reconciliation of competing demands on inadequate resources. No matter how carefully or creatively we categorize information sources, we are still obliged to devise some vertical or qualitative criteria within each functional category as a basis for selection. While such criteria will be necessarily different at each institution, they must also have some common characteristics among all institutions in order to maintain standards and to foster cooperation. A more exact and applicable definition of core materials is "essential to the rationality of collection development in the future."[28]

It is normally assumed that the core will vary from one institution to another depending upon local needs, but core holdings should overlap significantly. The core

should ideally serve as a kind of common vocabulary for all those engaged in research on the subject—the accepted reference point, to which all work in the field orients itself. The only fair measure of progress in a field is by the relationship of current work to a consensually established core of information. Compatible research depends upon such common points of reference, as does the coordination of education at all levels, which presupposes a well-defined core of information to which all students are exposed.

If the core concept is to become truly useful we must be prepared to work toward the definition of a standard core, which would be consensually accepted as such by scholars and libraries. The most important attribute of such a core should be that it is endorsed in detail by the academic community at large. (From the standpoint of bibliographic administration, what constitutes that core is relatively unimportant; what is important is rather that everyone involved agrees on what constitutes that core.) This can only be achieved by defining specific titles as core items. Defining core titles, at least for notification sources, should be accepted, therefore, as a fundamental, ongoing responsibility of the academic library community.[29]

The consensual designation of core sources would have an immediately beneficial impact on acquisitions budgeting for academic libraries of all sizes. If it were possible to achieve some general agreement among all libraries as to which sources should be included initially in the core, each library could begin its budgeting process by projecting the funding necessary to acquire and maintain such materials. Our ability to compare the purchasing power of acquisitions budgets at different institutions would also be greatly improved by such a unified core definition; comparisons could be based upon what libraries have to spend once the core materials have been budgeted. Moreover, because the items defined as belonging to the core would be scrutinized by all participating libraries, the costs of these materials could be carefully tracked, routinely compared, and widely publicized. If certain items were found to be significantly overpriced, the suitability of those items for the core could be reconsidered.

Finally, a common definition of core materials would improve cooperative collection development. The first step in a cooperative program should not be to try to divide collection responsibilities for low-use materials, because it is so difficult to agree on which materials fall into that category. The first objective of cooperation should be to decide upon which items should be duplicated among all participating libraries. Once that has been achieved, at least for notification sources, then potential areas for cooperative collection development can be much more easily negotiated. Our ability to rate aspects of our collections in relationship to each other would also be significantly enhanced, but only if we dare to define the dividing line between core and specialized materials.

How can a core definition be achieved? How are we to take charge of scholarly information in order to guarantee access to our users, if the utility of that information can only be gauged very imprecisely, and only after the item has already been acquired? One answer lies in the materiality of information. Libraries seldom control information directly. Rather they manipulate the containers the information is moved about in. To define a core is, therefore, to define the containers in which future core information will appear. One possibility is to exploit the contextuality afforded by the serialization of scholary information. At least for notification sources, it should be possible for scholars and experienced subject or area bibliographers to arrive at a consensus as to which journals in each subject field should be categorized as core journals on the basis of the nature of the articles already published in them. The same could be done with databases, on the basis of the quality of information previously retrieved. It may also be possible to designate different types of core lists by level of academic program; a larger core might be defined for libraries with graduate programs in the subject than for libraries that support only undergraduate programs.

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The Collection Management and Development Committee of the Research Libraries Group (RLG) has already taken a decisive step in this direction by working on lists of journals in selected subject areas necessary to build a very strong, research level (4 +) collection. The purpose of the lists will not be to ensure duplication, but to make certain that at least one copy of each journal on the list will be available somewhere in the RLG consortium. These lists are not core lists because they are intended to represent works needed in the aggregate for exceptionally powerful research collections, but this potentially very effective project now being initiated by RLG has demonstrated that lists of essential periodicals can be assembled.

The RLG project has also shown that the construction of such lists requires a high degree of cooperative organization and collaboration. If core lists are to be devised at a national level, improved organization and communication among academic libraries will be required. The links between larger and smaller academic libraries will also need to be strengthened. It is essential that smaller libraries participate in the process, so that their users can be assured access to the same basic core materials in each subject as the users of larger libraries. This should improve the fulfillment of the notification function by smaller libraries. Care would need to be taken to ensure that the cost of the core does not exceed the budgets of smaller libraries. If such a core were defined, of course, all academic libraries, but especially smaller libraries, would be able to communicate their budget needs much more accurately and forcefully to their institutions. Accreditation might also eventually take core holdings into account.

The identification of core sources published in monographic formats is much more problematic. The retrospective circulation method could be used. An alternative for monographic notification sources might be to designate certain carefully selected monographic series in each subject as core series. This would doubtless be even more controversial than designating core periodicals, but it should not be impossible, especially if we are willing to work with editors and scholars in the field. There would also need to be mechanisms to review and update core lists periodically.

By designating core titles in this manner, the competition for publication in such sources should increase substantially, so that we could expect the quality of that material to remain consistently high. But would the definition of core materials constitute a form of censorship? Probably. Like all bibliographic decision making, core definition would necessarily involve the rejection of some materials or sources of information in favor of others. This is unavoidable, and it is a key aspect of the bibliographic function. As increasingly large volumes of data become available online, moreover, the art of bibliographic discrimination will become even more important to scholarly communication than it is now. No matter who makes the bibliographic selection, bibliographer or end user, it remains a collection development responsibility to ensure that the decisions are made consciously and according to consistently defined criteria.

Refinements in Policy

If functional categories could be established within subjects, and if title-specific cores could be defined, then the next step in improving control of and access to scholarly and instructional information would be to work on the design of prescriptive collection and access policies. Each institution must compare and prioritize the primary functions for the library as a whole, and for each subject area. Once access to the core materials in each functional category has been estab-

lished, the remaining funds can be allocated on the basis of those priorities. The political difficulties should be allayed by the definition of core notification sources, because most faculty users at most institutions would thereby be able to depend upon the guaranteed availability of standard sources as nationally defined. Communication among scholars would be protected. The extent to which the library wants to develop its collections beyond those standard sources either individually or cooperatively would be based upon institutional directions and resources.

If each institution works toward a policy which is truly prescriptive, then the amalgamation of those policies should provide a clear indication not only of the current condition of the national collection, but also of the transformation the national collection would undergo in the event of substantial economic or technical changes. Only in this way can we have adequate control of access to scholarly information at the national level, and negotiate policy adjustments among libraries to ensure continued access.

Institutional policies afford opportunities for planning and decision making. If collecting were categorized by function, there can be little doubt that each institution would quickly confirm what we already know, namely that materials budgets are being spent increasingly upon notification sources, especially in the sciences. A prescriptive policy would determine the extent to which such notification sources should be permitted to consume the budget, or the degree to which the collection of other materials should be reduced in order to compensate for the increasing costs of scientific notification. Before this situation gets out of control, our policies must finally set functional limits to ensure that the needs of all constituencies are consistently met within the confines of current economic conditions.

The prescriptive collection policy must have the capacity to serve as a component of a general library policy regulating the use of all library resources. A clear and distinct link should be set between collection policy and all other library operations so that the effects of other operations on collections and access will be clarified for faculty clientele.

CONCLUSION

There are really only two ways to build a collection: on the basis of publication, or on the basis of use. Selection based on publication seeks to acquire a broad share of what has been published on the subject, while the use-based method imports only materials specifically applicable to current user needs. Most college libraries have always applied some form of the use-based method for most subjects, but larger university libraries have managed until recently to build many segments of their collections on the basis of publication. Today, however, even university library collections are becoming increasingly use-driven; they are being tailored to fit the special needs and interests of current users, because the publication-based approach is no longer economically feasible. Financial constraints are forcing a return to a kind of indirect selection by users. But things are now very different from the way they were thirty years ago.

The agency of collection development has begun to assume some control over the information needs of the academy. A system to regulate and focus selection and access, imperfect as it still may be, is now in place. The challenge facing collection development is to calibrate its operation more precisely, to define its rationale more persuasively, and to apply its methods more rigorously in preparation for the unprecedented economic and technical changes which we have only begun to experience.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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4. Charles B. Osburn, *Academic Research and Library Resources: Changing Patterns in America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979), p.3–34.
5. Douglas Waples and Harold D. Lasswell, *National Libraries and Foreign Scholarship* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1936), p.71, showed that the New York Public Library, which relied even then upon bibliographers, held collections of European social sciences materials which were superior to faculty-built collections in large academic libraries.
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14. Joe A. Hewitt and John S. Shipman, "Cooperative Collection Development among Research Libraries in the Age of Networking: Report of a Survey of ARL Libraries," *Advances in Library Automation and Networking* 1:225 (1987).
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16. See the Report of the ARL Serials Prices Project (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1989).
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23. Robert M. Losee, Jr., "Theoretical Adequacy and the Scientific Study of Materials Selection," *Collection Management* 10, no. 3:25; (1988). See also his "A Decision Theoretic Model of Materials Selection for Acquisition," *Library Quarterly* 57:269–83 (July 1987).
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Growth Collection,'' in *Farewell to Alexandria,* p.72–104. In any case, to use circulation as a basis for core definition, one must first buy the document and see how it circulates, before one can determine whether it qualifies as part of the core. This is, of course, the weakness in the argument that a library should make the best use of its resources by acquiring only core materials.

25. *Ulrich's News* 1, no.3:1 (Apr. 1988).
26. The major exception to this rule is for area studies; area selectors are frequently responsible for many subjects from or relating to a single geographical area.
27. Fremont Rider recognized and criticized this same problem nearly fifty years ago in his *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library* (New York: Hadam Press, 1944), p.68–85.
28. Charles B. Osburn, ''Toward a Reconceptualization of Collection Development,'' *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* 2:180 (1983).
29. The definition of the canon or the ''classics'' (i.e., materials belonging to the highest class), was a responsibility of the library at Alexandria. See Georg Luck, ''Scriptor Classicus,'' *Comparative Literature* 10:152 (Spring, 1958).