

# Library-sponsored faculty book-buying trips

A look at a different approach to collection development

by Malcolm H. Brantz

**A**cademic librarians constantly strive to buy the best books to support curriculums in an ever-changing world. Most book purchases are the result of approval plans, selections by librarians, and recommendations by faculty. A fourth buying channel, faculty book-buying trips, has evolved into a major source of new book purchases at a small liberal arts university in Colorado and is rapidly growing at a state community college. Faculty book-buying trips allow faculty to use library funds at super bookstores to purchase books that support their disciplines.

## Two very different institutions

The university is a nondenominational, Christian liberal arts university offering 25 majors and three master's degree programs to 800 traditional and 1,000 adult students. Faculty book-buying trips began there four years ago when I was director of the library. Historically, the library had been poorly funded and students were guided to other metropolitan libraries for books and journals. The library continues to use faculty book-buying trips to keep its collection up to date.

The state comprehensive community college offers transfer courses, vocational education, work force development, and com-

munity educational programs. Faculty book-buying trips have been used for the past year since I've become the Learning Resources Center (LRC) director. The LRC at the college incorporates a new 27,000 square-foot library housing 44,000 volumes, an online catalog, and 900 full-text electronic journals supplemented by 400 print journals.

Both libraries use Denver's Tattered Cover and Barnes and Noble bookstores, each of which stocks more than 150,000 unique titles. Faculty purchase orders from libraries have varied from \$500 to \$5,000 per trip, with more than 250 books bought at one time.

Prior to final purchase, the libraries check each title to see if it is already owned. The sales receipt, with duplicate titles crossed out, is sent to the faculty showing them what they purchased. These books are quickly cataloged and placed on the bookshelves. This method of buying books has proven to be extremely popular and productive for faculty and students at both libraries.

## Using super bookstores

When the university library first began purchasing books at retail stores, library staff did the shopping. Librarians identified books for purchase and created a written list while at

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### About the author

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the superstores. We would then go back to the library to see if we owned any of the books and returned to the store to buy books not in the collection. On average, ten percent of the selected books were already in the university library's limited collection of 39,000 books. Multiple trips proved to be labor intensive so we had a work-study student accompany librarians to the store and call a second work-study student to check titles at the library. This allowed for a single trip, reduced the amount of labor involved in writing lists, and proved acceptable in eliminating duplicate purchases. We began to enjoy the trips so much that we decided it was time to invite a faculty member to join us.

### **Taking faculty to super bookstores**

The dean of humanities was invited to join us in the second year of the program. We generated a purchase order for \$2,500 at the local Barnes and Noble store for the dean's purchase. He initially selected more than \$2,500 worth of books, but the library already owned ten percent of them. Several faculty members and two additional deans were invited on five more trips during the year. Our planning was minimal and invitations often depended on faculty being in the library at the right time.

During one trip, two members of the English Department invited a student to help with the book-buying and brought a list of literature books to purchase. This trip took more time and effort on their part, but both were pleased with the books.

However, we learned that bringing prepared list of titles can be a mistake when the dean of the school of music brought a list of 200 music CDs to Barnes and Noble.

Although Denver's Barnes and Noble claims to stock 40,000 music CD titles, display categories used by the Barnes and Noble music department at that time were confusing and lacked consistency. The faculty member's experience of searching for specific CDs was slow and tiresome and resulted in less than 20 percent success. Instead of spending \$2,000, we purchased less than \$500 worth of CDs. The faculty member was frustrated and felt the retail CDs were overpriced.

After this experience, we changed our tactics. If faculty had a list, we asked that they give it to the library and we would use a traditional channel to buy the materials. Trips to

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the super bookstores were to be made without lists. The idea was to "let the store's bookshelves speak to their curriculum." This has had an immediate, lasting, and positive impact for speeding up the purchasing process and reducing work on the part of faculty. Faculty came back from the store saying they were pleasantly surprised by the variety of academic books on the shelves.

### **Keep it simple**

We found that we needed to constantly remind faculty to keep their buying trips simple. Our goal was to make the trips a fun time for communicating with librarians and, most importantly, to offer faculty the opportunity to buy books. At the end of the second year, retail buying trips continued to be offered on an informal basis, with some faculty wanting to make trips but not being invited.

In the third year, our university's program became more formal by design and lost some of its personal touch. A memo was sent to six deans at the university, in which the library offered to purchase \$5,000 worth of books for each school. Some deans formed buying committees, while others divided the funds by departments in the school. Due to faculty request, we expanded the retailers to include a local school of theology and a large university's bookstore. Becoming more formal actually reduced the number of buying trips in the year due to lack of follow-through by some schools.

In addition to the offer to each dean, we continued to make special trips with faculty to build specific subject areas. During one such trip, the chairman of the art department purchased \$3,800 worth of books in 45 minutes! At the other extreme, a history professor felt buying new books was a waste of money. This faculty member selected three area used bookstores to visit. We generated a purchase order of \$150 for each store. He completed his purchases and said he wanted to return only to

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the largest used bookstore. He eventually purchased another \$800 worth of books from this store. We invited an art department faculty member to visit the same used bookstore because of its extensive collection in art and architecture books. After his visit, the faculty member expressed an interest in shopping at the used bookstore.

**A community college's experiences**

The community college's experience with faculty book-buying trips is limited. A book-buying trip was used to start a branch campus library at a center ten miles from the main facility. The first trip produced 30 books valued at \$1,000. To our surprise, the branch campus administration decided to pay for an additional \$700 worth of books identified during this trip.

Faculty book-buying trips often produce external money to purchase library books at the community college. Last year, while spending \$1,000 for branch campus books, the same administrators decided to supply \$3,500 more from their 2000–2001 budget.

**What was learned**

Our experience is that books acquired from retail stores differ significantly from books supplied through approval plans. Not surprisingly, the approval books are more often academic. Yet, the number of scholarly monographs we have found on the superstore shelves surprised us. It does, however, take six months for the retail stock to change over to make second trips productive by the same faculty members.

It is possible to send faculty to bookstores by themselves and have them simply pull books and leave them at the institutional sales desk for later payment. Drawbacks to this method range from missing a great opportu-

nity to meet with the faculty to confusion as to which superstore they should visit to the faculty's loss of focus about the purpose of the trip. From the library's perspective, retail purchase trips take time and effort and require library participation in order to maximize the benefits.

However, the library, faculty, and students all benefit from this method of buying new books. Any academic library is assured of obtaining books that are highly useful to their students. The library is also exhibiting its trust in the choices made by faculty and receives much praise for working closely with the faculty. Additionally, our libraries do not have the staff to specialize in many subject areas, and faculty can provide relief for this deficiency.

Faculty win in this process because they can build their part of the collection to augment the courses they are or will be teaching. They can also observe and examine new books which, if valuable, can be acquired on the spot, and they develop a better grasp for which books are in the library.

Students benefit from the book-buying trips in that books that are relevant to what the faculty discuss are in the collection and students are assured that faculty's recommended books have been purchased.

From a collection development perspective, we have received a higher rate of faculty input than before. From a purely marketing perspective, we get great publicity from this effort. While our budgets are not large, we are experiencing a steady increase in levels of support.

**Articles reporting faculty's role in buying books**

In the early 1990s, three articles that address the faculty's role in buying library books had a common thread—the need for the library to have the final say concerning which books are purchased. Strauch<sup>1</sup> acknowledges the need for faculty input in selection. Yet, the final decision on purchasing should be in the hands of the librarians. Strauch listed four “givens” to support this argument: judicious spending, control of budget, finite amount of money to spend, and abdication of responsibility to turn selection over to faculty. We think the positive publicity among faculty and greater ownership of library resources through

*(continued on page 292)*

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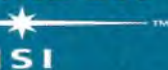


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College Libraries Section and the Community and Junior College Libraries Section to consider a single, unified set of standards for all academic libraries.

The ULS Public Service Directors of Large Research Libraries Discussion Group addressed proposals for expanding its membership, as well as several substantive issues. The new recommendation on membership includes all current members as of 2000. The top 33 ARL libraries, by volume count, up to a maximum of 50 institutions, would also be included. Diane Strauss (University of North Carolina), the group's convenor, reported that they will be voting on this proposal by the ALA Annual Conference in June. The group also discussed library security issues and Web site usability studies during its regular meeting.

The ULS Current Topics Discussion Group organized its session around the topic of what academic libraries can do to enhance the role of the library as a "place" on campus. Betsy Baker (Northwestern University), the group's convenor, presented a newly coined term "inreach"—that is,

establishing facilities and services that draw our library users back into the physical place of the library.

The Current Topics session included presentations from three institutions with innovative new facilities in place, or anticipated. Ruth Kifer described George Mason University's unique Johnson Center, a multiuse facility that provides a wide range of services to students, including some library and information services. Lynn Sutton described Wayne State University's new undergraduate library and some of its nontraditional programs. The last presentation was by Richard Meyer, who presented plans for the new information commons at Georgia Institute of Technology, as well as long-range plans for a new innovative Learning Resource Center. In addition to these progressive facilities, he described several innovative library inreach programs, such as lunch and instructional sessions for senior administrators' secretaries. The discussion group's session was well received with more than 80 attendees present.—*John Lehner, University of Houston, jlehner@uh.edu* ■

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*("Library-sponsored..." continued from page 266)*

faculty book-buying trips far outweighs the issue of final say. The retail trips are, after all, only one of four acquisition channels.

In another article, Buis<sup>2</sup> proposes complex "departmental selection parameters" for acquiring new books. The amount of effort by both librarians and faculty in this system appears to be extensive. The cost of acquiring a book in terms of staff time is a big factor in small higher education libraries. At both the university and community college, investing in materials versus process must receive a high priority.

A later article by Dittmore<sup>3</sup> reports on how Tulane University is bringing the responsibility for book selection back to the library. Faculty politics and better use of resources were cited as a driving force for making this change.

## Conclusion

Changes in the information flows of the late 1990s suggest that new players are joining the patron's information channels. In the foreseeable future, libraries will have even more

competition for materials budgets with other library-like information providers and computer departments.

I believe it is crucial for the library to take a twofold approach to providing students and faculty with books. First, we must take advantage of the electronic advances in order to be efficient and functional. Secondly, we shouldn't turn our backs on spending quality time with our faculty and should use super bookstores to gain an advantage over our library-like competition.

## Notes

1. K. Strauch, "Librarian versus faculty selection: the good meets the bad and the ugly," *Collection Management* 12 (1990): 37–41.
2. E. Buis, "Collection development policies: coordinating teaching faculty and library staff interest at Southeast Missouri State University," *Collection Management* 13 (1990): 11–25.
3. M. Dittmore, "Changing Patterns of faculty participation in collection development," *Collection Management* 16 (1992), 79–89. ■