

The Role of Public Services in Collection Evaluation

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THE ROLE OF THE public services department in the process of collection evaluation is to assess the collection in qualitative terms, to plan the collection of materials in the long run, and to assist in making decisions from a management point of view in the areas of budget, staffing and services as they impinge upon the collection, its users and the services imparted. It is peculiarly apt for this role to fall upon those in the public services area since, by tradition, they have the closest ties to individual users of the collection, to the selection of materials for the collection, and for the services based upon reference and research collections. From these ties it becomes possible for public services personnel to obtain knowledge of the trends, goals and objectives of users. It is easy then to determine what the library's long-range plans might be to meet the needs expressed by users in their day-to-day interaction with the collection. The type of information that reaches those in the public services can lead them to make useful input to management decision-making, especially in the realms of staffing, services and budgets as they relate to collections. Such information can be used by management of libraries in making informed decisions concerning administration and financing.

A great deal has been written about various audiences for whom the process of collection evaluation has been undertaken, about numerous formats of materials and how each is to be evaluated, and about types of methodologies employed for carrying out evaluation. Less has been written about who should be evaluating collections and why whoever it is should be doing it.

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In determining who is best suited to carry out the process of evaluation, it might be wise to begin with a precise, working definition of the process itself. Collection evaluation is the process of assigning value to the library's collection based on three different criteria:

(1) what kinds of material are in the collection and how valuable each item is in relation to other items which are not in the library; (2) the kind of community served, in order to decide whether the materials in the collection are actually appropriate to that clientele, regardless of how valuable they may be in terms of an abstract evaluation of their worth; (3) the purposes which that collection is supposed to accomplish given that particular community of readers.¹

Public services departments usually consist of persons who deal on a daily basis with the user community—i.e., patrons who make information requests at the reference desk. Since public services staff deal with those needs by finding answers in collections that the library has (at least as a first attempt), these individuals also have strong knowledge of items that make up the collection. In fact, they may have a stronger grasp of collections on an item-by-item basis than they do of them as a whole. Those in the technical services department of acquisitions might have a better idea of what the collection looks like as a whole. In addition to close contacts with individual patrons and individual reference items (and even individual circulating items, since reference hardly stops with reference collections), those in public services also tend to have close ties to selection of items that make up collections:

Selection has increasingly become a library responsibility....Even in science libraries, where the teaching faculty's role was greatest, the proportion of librarian selection was 75 percent; in humanities and social sciences, the determination of what went into the collection belonged almost entirely to librarians. Other studies document a trend toward greater library responsibility in selection even in institutions where faculty influence had traditionally been strong along with a wide sharing of decision-making in allocation, policy-making and selection, particularly among reference and branch librarians.²

In recent years, public services librarians tend to make up the majority of bibliographers or selectors for academic libraries. In public libraries, the job of selection is usually held by a public services librarian or in some cases, by several public services librarians. Selection responsibilities fall upon public service librarians in small branches of large systems where one librarian is in charge of everything, or, in the case of the central library, collections are divided into subject areas where reference librarians tend to control not only selection of reference works,

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but, on the basis of librarians' subject expertise, the circulating collection too. As Bonn points out:

The selection process in public libraries has a long history and it has successfully adapted itself to changes in philosophy and method over the years, largely, no doubt, because selection has always been in the hands of public service librarians who have been in a position to know and to react quickly to the changing needs and moods of the community.³

Where school and special libraries are concerned, selection is either the same as in public libraries, in that it is done by a committee composed of professionals from several school media centers, or it is likely to be done by one individual who is doing not only selection but reference and any other professional duties needed to run the library. In either case, selection is a very important task in relation to collection evaluation, since the evaluation is really a test of how good this selection has been over time. Where there is more than one professional employed in the library, the selection is most apt to be done in conjunction with public services than with technical services. In all, it would appear that public services professionals have a lot to do with the individual components that make up the process of collection evaluation.

The first criterion upon which a collection evaluation is made is of the kinds of material and their value in relation to other material not in the library, and it can most easily be judged on a daily basis by public services librarians. This judgment will be made every time a patron comes to the reference desk and asks a question and librarians there seek to find answers for that query in collections of materials at their disposal. Although this is a subjective analysis of the reference process, surely no one else could determine the relationship of items in the collection to those not in the collection better than the person who must use only those items in the collection to answer the queries. A really good reference librarian will know a lot about items *not* in that particular collection because it is incumbent upon this professional to send the patron elsewhere to answer a query that cannot be answered by the library's own collection. Therefore, this knowledge of what is actually out there—even in other libraries—held by all really good reference librarians, helps to achieve a subjective, daily assessment of the value of items in the collection in relationship to those which could have been purchased. Since, as Bonn says: "During the past forty years or so selection more and more has become the responsibility of public service librarians...."⁴ and selection consists of having knowledge of publications and then choosing the best of what is available, these selector-

reference librarians must know not only what is in their collections (since they have done the selecting), but also what is not in their collections (since these are the items that they have rejected in favor of the ones selected).

The second criterion for assigning value to a library's collection is to know the community that is being served. Only if one knows the community can it be determined if the collection "fits" the library. This must be considered regardless of the absolute value of any items. A most worthy item on its own merits might have no business being in a particular library's collection due to the community that that collection serves. Public services personnel do get to know patrons by questions they ask at reference desks. They even get to know some nonlibrary users who may call in their questions but who never actually come into the building to borrow a book or to use any of the library's other services. It behooves public services personnel to keep up with the world outside that of the library's collections and patrons by being open to all forms of mass communications and other information sources that may abound in the area served by the library. These other sources afford the librarian a knowledge of the community surrounding the library, and this community includes library users, nonusers and potential users. Bonn states:

Competent professional librarians make the difference between a general collection and a dynamic, well-used, highly regarded library. They are the links between the community's needs and the library's collection on one side, and between the library's collection and a specific user's needs on the other. They interpret the community to the library through selection and they interpret the library to the members of the community through public service. The proper evaluation of a library's collection must, therefore, take into consideration the presence or the absence of competent librarians in the important areas of selection and public service.⁵

It would appear then, that those librarians who might be expected to know the community best—again, from a subjective point of view derived from contact with that community—reside in the public services area.

The third criterion for assessment of the library's collection is knowledge of the purposes that the collection is supposed to fulfill, given the user community. This would entail a knowledge of the goals and objectives of the library and the equivalent goals and objectives of the larger administrative body in which the library is located—i.e., university or college in the case of academic libraries, town or municipality in terms of public libraries, and school system or corporation in

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terms of school media centers and special libraries respectively. Nowhere is it written that a knowledge of these goals and objectives is the particular purview of public services librarians, and it probably isn't. Certainly it is likely that with what *is* in the public services sphere, it would come as no surprise that public service personnel would also have broad knowledge of the policies of the library in which they work. They do have very good knowledge of patrons and collections, so it would be logical for public services librarians to understand the purposes of that collection given those patrons, just from doing their jobs. It is a mark of a professional to look at the larger picture of the processes a professional is asked to carry out, and it would be impossible not to know the purposes of the institution when working so closely with its parts. Therefore, although it cannot be proved, it is probable that those working in the public services department would have knowledge, albeit subjective, of the purposes of the collection in terms of the community served.

Qualitative Analysis Methodologies

With a clear and precise definition of collection evaluation, the next stage is an indication of processes that encompass collection evaluation and how they relate to the concept of the role of public services departments in evaluating the collection. To some, the process of collection evaluation "is exercised on an ongoing basis by judging it against qualitative standards, that is, through consultation of knowledgeable people and through comparisons of the collection with standard, general and specialized bibliographies."⁶ It appears that in some practical sense, all collection development must be done on a more or less qualitative basis, since even the most statistical of methodologies of collection evaluation have aspects of the qualitative in some of the judgments and assumptions on which their implementation is based. As a rule, in most literature evaluation, there are two types of evaluation processes: qualitative and quantitative. In almost all of the policy statements, when evaluation is mentioned, the qualitative aspects are more commonly stressed:

Evaluation of the collection, as the word implies, is exercised continually by judging it against the qualitative standards, that is, through consultation of knowledgeable people and through comparison of the collection with standard general and specialized bibliographies. No quantitative goals are stated here, not only because these must inevitably fluctuate as the university grows, as the research needs of its

faculty develop, and as the depth of instruction offered in various fields increases, but also because statistical assessment is useful only as a means of comparison with other collections or with standards suggested by expert opinion, both of which are subject to frequent change, and because such assessment gives no information concerning the content of the collection. Therefore, the size of the collection will be considered adequate only when it meets the increasing needs of the clientele of the library.⁷

Although the two previous statements on the importance of qualitative evaluation over quantitative were written ten years apart, they are similar. Both are taken from actual written collection development policies. Obviously, over time, practitioners have retained the opinion that qualitative evaluation methodologies are most important in collection evaluation.

A large number of libraries have policy statements, but many such statements do not address evaluation or its procedures. Those that do tend to be along the lines of the ones just quoted. The lack of concern for comparisons of library collections can be described as being even more pronounced in the public library sector than it is in the academic sector—where there has been a movement among some large university libraries to develop long-range goals and objectives based on results of longitudinal quantitative collection evaluation studies. Generally, all types of methodologies have a thread of subjectivity running through them. In an early survey of evaluation methodologies, S.E. Ifidon concluded that:

First, by means of statistical techniques—regression and multivariate analysis—some empirical basis has been established for qualitative evaluation of academic library collections. Secondly, by way of contrast, all the published standards for collections are based on the “best” general practice which cannot be tested empirically. Thirdly, the analysis of citation counts is fast gaining ground because it is a useful method of undertaking objective qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation of library collections.⁸

It is left then to go through several types of methods used for evaluation of collections to see how unique attributes in the public services area can be utilized in their procedures.

Among those methodologies usually considered qualitative, the most common is list-checking. It is the consensus that:

[The] most widely used system of evaluating a collection is that which compares a library's holdings with one or more lists of selected titles.... The assumption is made that such lists, which represent the composite judgment of many librarians, will pick up the most important titles in the several subject fields.⁹

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There are many advantages and disadvantages to evaluation by list-checking which are not of great concern here, except one; and it introduces a different kind of checking in addition to the published list. What the list-checking method fails to take into account are those items which are in the library and are exceptional but which have not made it onto the list of selected titles. The converse of using a selective or selected list for qualitative evaluation of the collection is to check what is in the collection through several lists to see if what is owned is on any lists. This would show how many of the "best" books had been purchased for the library, and it would tell how many of the total purchased for the library were considered "best" books by some reputable, outside source. The public services librarian is ahead of the game in this methodology, since it is usually this librarian who knows of various selected "best" books lists. Since public services personnel use selected "best" books lists in their reference work, they are more familiar with them than are many other librarians. The public services librarians are most familiar with items that have been purchased and may be on some of these lists since they provide services from all of the collection. Most list-checking would be done under the public services department, and under the general direction of reference librarians. Whether the list checked is a published catalog of another library, a bibliography of a particular subject field, or an ad hoc list made up by using recommendations of faculty or subject specialists, it is public services librarians who have the best "feel" for what is in the collection and to whom the task of coordinating this type of methodology must inevitably fall.

A type of ad hoc list usually created by those who are carrying out the checking is citation counts. This method is considered an improvement over a straight quantitative methodology because it is a measure of quality at the same time.¹⁰ Since the list that is checked is available in the library and comes from those who are able to choose whose citations to look at and what are the best journals in which to find citations, this methodology definitely falls into the category of qualitative analysis. Although judgments of what to use in doing citation counts generally come from subject experts rather than public services or other librarians, still it is reference librarians who can identify who on the faculty, in the community or in the corporation is likely to be able to come up with lists which can be checked with some confidence in the authority and quality of the works included on them. For that reason, public services librarians can be said to be the best people for the job.

A second type of qualitative methodology also used in collection evaluation is impressionistic or direct observation. Commonly, it is

used in academic or special libraries, and an expert observes only that portion of the collection in his or her area of expertise. Who, in a library, is most qualified to look at a collection to assess—based on background and experience—what are the best books and whether or not the library has them? If not done by outside consultants, certainly the only librarians with such expertise must be those with selection responsibilities in subject fields, and they tend to be public services librarians. In fact, collection development librarians “work in smaller academic libraries as well as in the largest research libraries, and they are less likely to devote their time exclusively to selection....[T]hey often work only part-time in collection development, with a primary assignment elsewhere in the library. That assignment is typically in reference....”¹¹

A third type of qualitative methodology used in evaluation of library collections is survey of user opinions:

The goal of a user survey is to determine how well the library's collections meet the user's information needs by gathering written, and/or oral, responses to specific questions. Information from user surveys can be used for:

- A. Evaluating quantitatively and qualitatively the effectiveness of the collections and services in meeting users' needs.
- B. Providing information to help solve specific problems, modify particular programs, or assess the needs for new services.
- C. Defining the makeup of the actual community of library users.
- D. Identifying user groups that need to be better served.
- E. Providing feedback on successes as well as on deficiencies.
- F. Improving public relations and assisting in the education of the user community.
- G. Identifying changing trends and interests.¹²

In general, user surveys have distinct advantages and disadvantages. For the most part they do tend to give a picture of how services and collections of the library are fulfilling expected needs of library clientele. In the ordinary way, on a day-to-day basis, public services librarians get feedback every time they answer (or cannot answer) a query from a patron. This is why most of these professionals believe they know how the library's services and collections are being received. What a survey can do, aside from other kinds of information listed previously from the *RTSD Guidelines*, is to validate what librarians have known or surmised all along. The only problem with daily feedback on the collection's strengths and weaknesses is that each professional on the reference desk may be receiving only a part of the answer to users' questions, which would produce a skewed vision of how collections and services are perceived by users. A carefully designed survey of users will

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enable the librarians to have confidence in their own interpretation of the feedback. Users of a library's collections are better at knowing the extent to which material in library collections fulfills objectives of the library. Heavy users of any library will be familiar with collection strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas of interest. In academic settings, both faculty and students who use the library's collections on a regular basis can give good information about their worth. In looking at the results of a survey, it is those types of users that can really help to measure the effectiveness of the collections and services in meeting users' needs.

If the library designs the questionnaire with precision and skill and with an eye to the type of information really needed from such a survey, answers to questions can provide information on missing items, on areas where the collection is weak or out-of-date, or other types of problems that may hinge on the reception of the collection by its users. For example, a user survey might point to a need to change certain services—e.g., reservation of materials or photocopying of such—or it might point to a need for a different type of material in the collection—e.g., videocassette recordings. These answers may be prompted by a questionnaire's design as well as being generated by respondents. Well-constructed questions will focus on policies, services and subject areas on which feedback is most desired. Questions should not encourage users to ask for collections and services the library lacks the resources to provide, unless the survey's purpose is to get feedback on users' priorities for possible future offerings.

A survey questionnaire administered to those who come into the library can give a good picture of actual users of the library. Reference and interlibrary loan personnel may not have a good indication of all types of users, since a great number of people may never use the services of the reference department, interlibrary loan or online searching. Many users may do all research for themselves and may visit the library mainly to borrow books and other material. Asking only the reference librarians who the patrons are might greatly skew the data on users and their interests.

Before a survey of users is taken, it is always wise to know as much as possible about the community that the library serves. In that way, it will be easy to determine what groups need library services but lack them because they do not come into the library. Once groups of nonusers are identified, something can be done about getting them to use the library's services and collections. If a nonuser group is identified by a community survey, outreach or extension services usually come into

play. Outreach and extension services professionals can be used to contact the public outside of the library building. In most cases these librarians tend to be in the public services department, too. Therefore, initial contact with nonuser groups is made by public services personnel.

Public services librarians are in a good position to get feedback on their successes and on the strengths of the collections. Patrons may come to the reference or circulation desk to talk over their reading. They may thank the reference librarians for help in answering a question, but patrons are less likely to return to the desk to report their failures to find answers in sources the librarian selected. If an answer is not forthcoming, most users simply walk out the door. Somehow in the daily life at the reference desk, patrons have to be educated to report not only successes, but also failures. Patrons must be encouraged to see that these are not their failures, but failures of either the sources or the librarians that led them there. It is necessary for librarians to learn from mistakes and to accept that they are made. As in many other professions, this is a difficult task. Yet, by accepting negative feedback, public services librarians can learn from their mistakes and improve the coverage of any part of the collection that does not measure up to expectations.

One of the jobs taken over by public services personnel is that of teaching library skills, now called bibliographic instruction. This new service, begun in earnest ten to fifteen years ago, has improved the public relations between the library and its clientele. Bibliographic instruction sessions also give the instructors feedback on how the library's collection and services are being received by those who attend the instruction sessions. In all, public services librarians' daily jobs put them in a position to get feedback and to act as public relations officials for the library.

In obtaining users' opinions, there is one particular group whose use of the collection should not be overlooked. To aid in the subjective evaluation of the overall quality of the collection, it might be wise to ask the opinion of those who use the collection most of all. And who are these people? Why, the public services librarians, of course! Gardner says: "In considering users, library staff members should be consulted as well as patrons. Often, staff members, particularly those in reference positions, have an even greater knowledge of a collection's strengths and weaknesses than the average user."¹³ It seems rather commonsensical that reference librarians should be asked their opinion, and yet in a majority of user surveys, no professionals are asked how they view the collection. An objection to asking the librarians seems to be that their

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answers will be self-serving. Actually, the survey cannot count on anyone being completely objective. What does it matter if in a qualitative evaluation, another user group is asked to give opinions about the quality of the collection? Most analyses of user surveys have found that users tend to be much too generous with their praise for the library and that praise leads administrators to think that libraries are doing a good deal better than they actually are. In any case, since survey research is fraught with subjectivity, why not ask the librarians for their subjective reactions, too?

Bonn cites another reason for asking those in reference to participate in user surveys on collection adequacy: "The best in-house evaluators of the collection, according to one recent writer, are the reference librarians. They can tell 'what is sufficient, what is adequate' for *this* library, and they should be in touch with what the public of this particular library wants."¹⁴ In this respect, asking reference librarians for their opinions about the library's collection actually answers two purposes in the evaluation of that collection. Not only may the librarians give their perceptions whether or not the collection has helped answer patrons' questions, but these professionals can consider the users' needs with respect to the collection at hand. It is the reference librarians who know what is needed by their library for the particular patrons they serve. This knowledge ties together the library's goals and objectives and users' opinions. In the end, this type of information helps librarians make long-range planning and management decisions.

The fourth type of methodology used is applying prescribed standards to the library's collection. There are numerous types of standards available—e.g., for public libraries, school library media centers, junior college libraries, college libraries, university libraries, and medical and law libraries. Standards tend to come in two different varieties: qualitative and quantitative. For that reason, when looking at types of evaluation techniques, linking the collection to published standards is often considered to be a quantitative methodology, since reference to quantitative standards makes it possible to compare two libraries:

Some library standards, such as those promulgated by national library associations, are concerned with setting minimum criteria for collections, services, staff, etc. in specific types of libraries....Although these statements of standards usually include quantitative guidelines, emphasis in recent years has been on the quality of the collections, especially as it might be judged in terms of the goals and objectives of the library in question. In addition to the type-of-library standards, there are sections on libraries and library collections in the statements of standards developed by regional and professional

accrediting agencies. These standards also tend to emphasize quality of the collection without offering many quantitative guidelines.¹⁵

In the past twenty years, most published standards have been qualitative because setting quantitative minimum standards has been seen as a threat to the bigger and better libraries' gains. To make the point: when minimum standards are set, then there is no yardstick or reason for measuring excellence above these minimums. For those libraries whose administrators must rely on standards to gain budget increases for better facilities, larger collections or more services, minimum standards can only act as a barrier to improving the library's quality. For that reason qualitative standards have been in fashion for the past few decades. At the same time, there has been a trend toward combining qualitative and quantitative standards to measure a library's achievements in relation to its goals and objectives.

Another change in the standards as libraries switched to qualitative measures was "the almost universal stress on quality rather than on quantity as the decisive factor in making evaluations."¹⁶ Both quality and goals and objectives are hard measures to pin down when doing the type of evaluation that accrediting agencies do for libraries. In any case, the people in a library most suited to grasping these very difficult measurements of a library's worth tend to be those who have close connections with both users of libraries and materials in the library—the public service librarians and other personnel in that department. Throughout this close examination of the qualitative approach to library collection evaluation, in almost every case, those most suited to carry out the evaluation are those who are in the public services areas. It is their unique position in the library that allows this to be so and it is to them that library managers turn when trying to decide who is to do the evaluation using qualitative methods.

In determining who is to do the evaluation, no matter what kind of qualitative methodology is called for (see Intner's article in this issue for the quantitative approach), the discussion has centered on public service librarians as most qualified. It is these people who direct the qualitative methods mentioned so far, although in several instances they are not the ones who carry it out. In the list-checking method, after selecting the catalog or bibliography, or after creating the ad hoc list to be used, the role of the professional might be over (except for overseeing the project), and it would be up to support staff to carry out the actual checking. After checking was done, it would again be up to public service librarians to interpret results of what was found. In fact, list-checking is not an easy analysis since: "No one has ever set a standard as

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to how many books on a list should be held by a library in order for it to be considered an 'A' or 'B' library."¹⁷

If the library is attempting impressionistic or direct observation methods, most likely an outside consultant or public services librarians would do this analysis. There are many disadvantages to any direct observation method. Some exist no matter who does the analysis. Without proper advance planning and without consultation with staff, using an outside consultant may introduce tensions and it may impair the utility of the analysis. Public service librarians may not have the subject expertise for evaluating the coverage of all areas of the collection, although they can sometimes contribute an idea of what actually is in the collection and where subject inadequacies may lie. This methodology can prove a good starting point for a weeding project as well as for an evaluation of the collection. A consultant hired from the outside may not understand and may not be given information on the goals and objectives of the library or the relationship between users and collections. It becomes a tricky operation, especially if there is no written collection development policy. Even with access to a written policy, it might be better if the consultant had opportunities to review the evaluation report and its recommendations with library staff. If there is sufficient staff expertise and interest, and if they are given release time to do it, the public service staff could do all or help the consultant out with much of a collection evaluation.

The user survey method would be done mainly by support staff handing out questionnaires to those entering the library at designated times, but the initial questions would be designed—or at least influenced—by the knowledge and experience of the public service librarians. It might also be important, if the survey was conducted by interviews, for librarians to do the interviewing. In that case, those with whom the public had had the most contact would be doing the interviewing.

Most methodologies—even quantitative ones—contain a good deal of subjectivity in their approach, and they rely implicitly or explicitly on decisions made from knowledge and experience. No matter what type of qualitative methodology a library decides to use, among the best for the job are the public service librarians, especially those who serve at the reference desk.

Long-Range Planning and Public Service

In assessing the role of the public services division of the library, the second aspect of collection evaluation for which these personnel are

most ably suited is long-range planning for the library's collection. It might also be true that reference librarians are equally useful in making long-range plans for services, staff, and budget, but for the purposes of this paper, only planning as it relates to collection development and evaluation will be discussed.

What kinds of information are needed for long-range planning? How do the methodologies which public services personnel are so capable of handling get needed information for long-range planning? First, consider some of the possible long-range goals associated with collection evaluation. Certainly, one of the most impressive of these goals would be a distinct change in the direction the collection would take. What this would mean is that goals and objectives of the library might be changing and these might entail changes in subjects or parts (or of the whole, in the case of special libraries) of the collection. Other long-range changes might arise in differing formats of materials being collected in the library. For example, this might mean going from print to microform periodicals or from 16mm and 8mm film to videocassette recordings. If the library is to decide on changes in its collections, it would seem to take quite some time to decide the direction to take. There are a number of long-range goals which, of themselves, might not be directly concerned with the library's collection but which, if made, might affect those collections equally as much as long-range collection planning. One such long-range goal might be a change in the audience that the library is attempting to reach, or a change in the manner by which the library is attempting to serve an audience it already has. In the former case, an unserved part of the community might be targeted, or an entirely different type of clientele might enter into the community. In the latter case, the long-range change would probably be initiated by a new objective for the library. In either case both would entail a long-term change in the composition of the collection.

Other changes in long-range planning might eventually affect the collection, even though, at the start, they would seemingly have more of an affect on the staff, services or even the building. Given the kinds of planning that are typical of the long-range as opposed to the short-range, what role does the public services department have in each? Since public services personnel work with the collection daily, it is apparent that they would be first to see any needed changes in subject, direction or format. In the public library, reference librarians keep up with trends in people's interests, since these appear in the reference questions that are asked. If the reference collection is not equal to the task of providing answers to questions on a particular topic, it can be pretty certain that

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the circulating collection is also weak in the area. For that reason, it would be those at the reference desk who might be able to see new areas where the collection needs work. In an academic library setting, with students doing papers on the "hot" topics of the day, and faculty doing research at the "cutting edge" of knowledge, it is not surprising at all that those librarians who help get sources for these assignments and topics of research are the first to know of any substantial changes needed in the collection.

In their capacity as selection librarians, subject bibliographers would know of any curriculum changes or trends not currently supported in the collection in a subject or area of their expertise. When dealing with various faculty members in subject fields in their charge, it is subject bibliographers who would know whether the department was looking for a faculty member whose research field was in an area in which the library's collection had not been developed. Bibliographers might be knowledgeable about any topic-related institutes, areas of specialization or degree programs about to become a reality in the college or university. The public service librarian should be first to know of changes in subject coverage in an academic institution almost as soon as the faculty members such changes affect.

Any librarian who daily is helping students to find material on a particular subject is also the right person to tell if there is too little (or too much) material on a subject in the library's collection. Passing row upon row of unused material, sometimes in duplicate and triplicate copies, means that the topic is no longer of as much interest as it had been in the past. This is a good indication that one of the long-range goals for planning in collection evaluation might be the weeding of the collection. Similarly, passing shelf upon shelf emptied of materials because they are constantly in circulation might be an indication that more books are needed in these heavily used areas of the collection. A reference librarian's knowledge of what the collections of the library can handle may be a useful addition to the information required to make such decisions. Information gleaned from use can also be a way of evaluating a collection in long-range institutional planning. In a school media center, in some ways very similar to the academic setting, the librarian can often tell the direction of the curriculum by what the teachers are looking at in the library. In this case the information comes not from the students but first from the faculty members. In a special library, it is imperative that the librarians have a close knowledge of the direction that the firm is going or else the highly specialized collection will fail to meet new information needs. Therefore, it is especially

important for the special librarian in the corporate setting to recognize trends at a very early stage to insure enough lead time to change or augment the collection of material for the firm's use.

Another change which can be seen by public services personnel is the acceptance (at least down the road) of some kind of format change in the material used in the library. This may come about naturally, as the acceptance in a good number of libraries of video format to replace and add to film collections; or it may come about because of the library's financial or space needs. For example, space limitations may lead to half-hearted acceptance of microfilm to substitute for print material, especially in collections of periodicals. In either case, new formats require a great deal of initial outlay. To justify the cost, there needs to be some indication of support by the public services personnel, who can see these changes and who, by their very attitudes, can "make or break" the new format. Staff acceptance of the new format and their willingness to deal with the public's problems must be considered in any long-range planning along these lines.

Changes in audiences—which might imply changes in the collections—could certainly first be seen by those serving new audiences. A change in interest of a portion of users of a library's collection can be seen in the circulation department and the reference department. In the circulation department, changes in materials being checked out can be seen. In the reference department, in-house use of materials can be better judged. Combined, these changes can show new directions in audience needs. If the changes imply that there might be a new audience—either one not previously served or a new one moving into the service area—reference librarians and circulation staff are bound to recognize this at a relatively early stage. It is important for public service personnel to keep up with changes in user interests and in the community, no matter what kind of library is being discussed.

Long-range goals that affect the growth or spread of the collection will most likely be seen at an earlier stage by public services librarians than by either the technical or administrative personnel in the library. For that reason, it would be beneficial for the library to invite the comments of public service librarians at the early stages of any long-range planning. Not only are public service librarians good at predicting in the long run what the collection will (or should) look like, but they are also able to set priorities on the order in which these changes might best be carried out.

Only those who have an in-depth knowledge of users can predict how they might react to such changes and what the best way of enacting

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them might be in order to help users adapt. The public services librarian is, therefore, a good interpreter for long-range planning and will be especially valuable in implementing long-range planning decisions.

Decision-Making and the Role of Public Services

A consequence of involving public services personnel in qualitative analysis and long-range planning for the collection is that they will influence decision-making on collection evaluation throughout the library. Even in written collection development policies, the role of the public services department in collection evaluation "will cause a significant refinement of the selection policy, and, hopefully, will form the basis of a strong statement, founded on facts, for greater financial and space commitments for the university."¹⁸ The largest impact these plans and evaluation procedures are likely to have is on financial aspects of the library and its collections. Needs for additions or changes in coverage because the collection does not give users what they want, or because there is a change in the makeup of the community, might lead to more money being made available for materials. In turn, more materials or changes in the ways patrons use the library might lead to a requirement for more space. In today's economy, the space is apt to be for second-level access—i.e., better use of what is already available. Still, the impact an evaluation can have on library administrator's decision-making might be enormous. As Palmour explains:

Library management requires a system of data, or statistics, to provide information for decision-making, to meet the reported requirements of local, state and federal authorities, and to allow for comparison with other libraries. In addition, the long range plan developed in the initial cycle of the planning process requires specific data that will:

1. Measure the library's performance in meeting objectives.
2. Update the library's understanding of its environment and population.
3. Fill in the gaps in the information gathered in the initial cycle.
4. Monitor and evaluate the library or system plan and the continued relevance of current library services to community library needs.¹⁹

Information required for answering three of the four specific data requirements can be gotten through qualitative analysis and the day-to-day knowledge public service librarians have of the audience served, the collection being serviced, and the goals and objectives of the library. Without actually collecting data in a formal, scientific style, reference librarians have long known the most about the collection and its audience. Now, when we have begun to formalize the data-gathering

processes, it would be a shame to ignore the insights of those who always have been involved in the working of the collection and its users. It is always better to have trained personnel to carry out even the most formal of surveys and statistical designs because of the impressions and knowledge they bring to the study. Public services staff may be able to spot problem areas on user survey questionnaires far sooner than those whose work is behind the scenes. Who more than an online searcher, an information desk librarian, or a clerk at the circulation desk would know about the idiosyncrasies of the library's users? For example, public services staff might know that fewer people come on Tuesdays, because Wednesdays are the day that the date-due stamp is changed each week, or that late Thursday nights are bad for patron attendance because many in that particular community watch "Hill Street Blues." The more that can be accounted for when dealing with a survey questionnaire, the more confidence can be had in the results obtained. It is especially true when it comes to survey information that will be used in decision-making, which very often has repercussions on the budget. The better the information from an evaluation, the better will be monetary decisions resulting from the survey. Since there are numerous types of evaluative studies that can be done, it is only fair that the choice of evaluative methodology must be based on the type of information needed by the administrator; and the goals of the survey should determine the methodology chosen, not vice versa. In a discussion of collection evaluation methodologies, Holt mentions a number of methods and how each yields different sorts of information which the administrator may use as problem-solving tools:

Designing appropriate evaluative methods is an important part of assessment; collecting the information is very time-consuming and may be expensive, but the results obtained can provide managers with reliable information for decision-making in collection development. When the study is considered in library planning, improved library collection and upgraded services will be the outcome.²⁰

Conclusion

It has been the thesis of this paper that the people most suited to do collection evaluations using qualitative methods are those in the library's public service departments. It is these librarians and other personnel who have developed unique backgrounds from dealing with both the community of users and the collection. Most of their abilities in applying qualitative methodologies stem from this knowledge and

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experience. In addition to aiding in the evaluation, their information can also contribute to long-range planning, especially in defining and changing goals and objectives for subject collections and audiences for these collections. In addition, the knowledge that public services personnel get from daily feedback at the reference desk can prove beneficial to the decision-making function in library administration. In these three areas, the role of public services in collection evaluation cannot be overestimated.

What is it about individual public services librarians that makes them successful at their jobs and gives them the information that is essential to conducting collection evaluations? Bonn states:

Continuous evaluation, at least to some degree, seems to be common in well-run, smaller public libraries and seems to have a relatively speedy effect on acquisitions, possibly because good public librarians are (and must be) close—and sensitive—to public opinion, which is...a good barometer of the adequacy of a library's collection.²¹

So it is not just that public services librarians tend to be the people who can get this information. Only public services librarians who are sensitive to users' interests and who see the larger picture of library goals and objectives are capable of extracting qualitative evaluations of the collections from their experiences with the people they serve. It is good public services people who can make the most of their positions and add the knowledge that libraries so desperately need in order to evaluate their collections, plan for the long-term, and contribute to decision-making as a whole. As many have said, the best evaluator is an experienced and intelligent librarian,²² preferably one with a good sense of humor!

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