



**Keeping Up With the Joneses: New Models to Support
Developing Needs**

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The purpose of this paper is to explore models that may improve interdisciplinary collection strategies. Practical alternatives and expansions to existing services that can be explored without the burden of irreversible consequences will be discussed. This paper is intended more so as a conversation starter about altering our thought processes in regards to how librarians carry out their work to meet new demands. It is not intended to be a guide with proven methods that will work universally. These proposals are set within the context of a library that is part of a large research institution. More specifically, I will draw upon my experiences as a collection management librarian at North Carolina State University (NCSU).

There are two models I propose to facilitate the support of interdisciplinary collections. First, there should be a reevaluation of how funds are labeled within the library. Attaching disciplines to particular funds and/or parts of the budget creates an unstated obligation for those funds to be used on subject specific material for that particular discipline. This results in funds being spent on clearly defined/labeled material, leaving gray areas, such as interdisciplinary areas, of the collection undeveloped. Next, a reevaluation of the outreach/liaison work of librarians is needed. Most often these roles are isolated, one-on-one relationships that have not taken advantage of the broader connections and more meaningful relationships that are possible between librarians and faculty members.

Today, libraries and librarians are operating in a much more complex environment. At their best, they must respond to current competing demands while anticipating future needs. This is particularly true in an age of increasing material cost and declining budgets. In addition, librarians have embraced the acquisition and

maintenance of new material formats, a broader publishing market from which to select material and increasing user demands for unlimited, uninterrupted access to information. In addition to more material to examine in order to make selection decisions, librarians have an increasingly more ambiguous user community whose research needs are ever-changing. Coupled with rising costs and an increasing amount of material, the task of selecting relevant resources becomes overwhelming.

As our available resources expand and facilitate the possibilities for research beyond the confines of established disciplines, researchers not only have convenient access to their discipline specific resources, but access to material from other disciplines as well. This access has helped facilitate the expansion of disciplines and scholars taking a more cross-disciplinary approach to their work.

Increasingly, there is more emphasis on global and interdisciplinary approaches to higher education. Graduates of higher education institutions are competing for jobs and must work cooperatively, often on a daily basis, with colleagues world-wide. This reality requires faculty and students to examine and consider all issues from a much broader perspective.

Within a campus community, many faculty members are now fulfilling appointments in multiple academic departments. This not only allows the faculty member to apply a broader perspective to their work, but also provides the student with the much needed, broader perspective to function and compete in today's global market place.

The pace and more inclusive nature of scholarly communication has increased the development of new areas of research. The cycle of scholarly communication

functions most quickly through speedier forms of information dissemination, such as journals. The wide accessibility of on-line journals has further increased the speed at which research is disseminated. To further complicate issues for researchers and librarians, the exceptionally high cost for on-line access has, in reality, limited the promises of on-line access. However, open access movements, the creation of institutional repositories and an increasing personal web presence by scholars through non-traditional scholarly methods of communication, such as e-mail or blogs for example, have helped fill the gap in terms of allowing access to a broader community. Within this context, the possibilities for collaboration and the creation of new research areas are endless.

Patrons' evolving needs and demands in regards to content and access create great strain for libraries as they work to meet expectations. Within libraries, the selection and acquisition of materials has traditionally been designated to the duties of specific departments and librarians. While the volume of work and needed expertise requires those roles to remain separate, the acquisition of and access to material has become a major issue selectors must consider when making selection decisions. This is particularly true in regards to obtaining access to electronic resources. In regards to ensuring that content meets users' needs, it is within the context of budget allocations and how selection decisions are made that processes need to be reexamined.

Within libraries, budgets are often first divided by the format for which the funds are to be used, (i.e. monographs, serials, e-resources). Subject allocations are then made to form a subset of budget lines. Not only is the subset of budget lines assigned to various subjects, they are often labeled as such to simplify the management of funds.

For example, funds that have been designated to purchase monographs for political science will be named as such or some variation thereof. This allows the selector to know exactly how much is to be spent for a particular department, and the acquisition department will know from which budget to draw funds when making purchases. An advantage to this is that data can then be easily generated to demonstrate the library's support of a particular department.

As research areas and interests broaden, and budget and selection decisions continue to be based along subject lines, it becomes unclear which funds should be used to support research that does not fall between the lines of traditional disciplines. In an effort to support interdisciplinary areas of research when using labeled budgets and making subject defined selection decisions, the first obstacle to be encountered is that formal departments for interdisciplinary studies are very rare. As a result, funds are often taken from traditional disciplines in an effort to ensure all needed material has been selected. In instances where funds for interdisciplinary studies have been set aside, it is typically in response to a small, well-defined user group. In such situations, a group of researchers and their interests have been identified and are responded to in similar ways as within traditional disciplines. While beneficial to the interdisciplinary subject area, this does not allow for broader collection decisions that will support evolving areas of research. In this case, following traditional collection practices yields a collection that does not fully respond to or support user needs.

To address this issue, the model I propose would provide librarians who select for multiple disciplines a single fund from which to purchase material. This assumes that librarians with multiple areas of selection responsibility select materials in related areas.

Having a single fund to purchase material for multiple disciplines will require the librarian to broaden his/her selection criteria. Within this context, a single selection must be useful to a wider audience as every item selected reduces the resources available to all. For example, traditionally a selector will purchase sociology material with designated funds for the designated audience. As a result, the usefulness of selected resources is narrow and does not fully utilize the library's financial resources. If the selector is working from a general fund, resource selections must cast a broader net in regards to their usefulness. A more generalized budget will support a more encompassing approach to collections while potentially filling gaps that may result from a more ridged allocation of funds and resulting selection decisions.

While serving as a collection manager at NCSU, I managed approximately eight budget lines from which I made firm orders. Each fund was labeled by the corresponding subject area the funds were to support. Because the subject areas I selected for were closely related, I often found material labeled for sociology, for example, might be equally or more useful for faculty members in economics. To broaden my selection criteria and make better use of funds, I begin viewing my budget lines as one pot of money. For example, instead of eight budget lines with various amounts of funds, I adopted the view of having one firm order budget.

When making selection decisions while using the separate budget lines, the intended audience for materials I selected was much narrower. If funds for political science were being used, the selection criteria, in terms of usefulness, were limited to researchers associated with that department. This method resulted in the selection and acquisition of subject specific items that were intended for a specific user group. As a

result, ultimately the collection would not reflect or support new areas of scholarship. Using the approach of working from one firm order pool of funds facilitated the selection of material that would more likely bridge the gaps between traditional disciplines. The expected result would be a collection that would support interdisciplinary research.

As scholars abandon traditional discipline based inquiry to build relationships and explore new areas of research, librarians must adjust in the same way when anticipating needs and acquiring materials. Collection development work can no longer rely simply on subject based selection decisions. At its core, research is about relationships and how various entities interact with and what impact they have on each other. Having an understanding of these relationships and being in a position to anticipate potential partnerships will allow the librarian to make the best decisions. When making collection decisions based on relationships and not limiting resources' usefulness to specific subject areas, gaps within the collection will be filled and able to accommodate more interdisciplinary inquiry. This context can be created by pooling financial resources to support developing relationships and new areas of research instead of budgets, selection decisions and resources being divided by subject lines.

Sound collection development practices and selection decisions require knowledge of the material as well as the library's user community. Librarians must form and maintain strong relationships with faculty members. These relationships help determine what to purchase and how to plan for future needs. Librarians must acquire an increasing knowledge of the external issues that impact and influence future research endeavors. The roles of librarians within the library and broader institution must be reevaluated.

My second proposal involves refocusing librarians' outreach/liaison work with faculty. Librarians with selection responsibilities, whether as subject specialists in a reference department or bibliographer in a collection development department, often meet and work with faculty to discuss current and future needs from the library. At its best, this relationship is a two-way interaction with the focus being on ensuring needed resources are available. This relationship often puts the librarian in the position of mediator where they must understand and represent the faculties' needs while diplomatically addressing the goals and possible limitations of the library.

The librarian's role in this relationship can be expanded. These individual relationships cannot exist within a vacuum. The librarian can use this unique position to his/her advantage. By proactively serving as a resource to build interdepartmental relationships, the librarian could serve as the key to establishing relationships between faculty members in various departments.

Most often faculty members are isolated from each other due to their own workloads, department related responsibilities and/or simply their geographic proximity to other departments. The librarian has the rare opportunity to become familiar with multiple faculty members' research, and serve as a bridge to connect researchers who may otherwise remain unaware of each other and the work each produces. In this role, the librarian could not only connect researchers and be the link that may help spark meaningful collaboration, but could also gain a better understanding of the possibilities of these collaborative relationships. The librarian gains a deeper understanding of useful resources and is able to make more valuable selection decisions.

This unique opportunity occurred to me while working in a similar role at NCSU. While serving as Collection Manager for the College of Management and Social Sciences, my primary duty was to build the research collections in these subject areas. In addition, I was also expected to establish and maintain relationships with faculty members.

Geographically, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) and the College of Management (COM) at NCSU are on opposite sides of the campus. My knowledge of the research interests of a particular faculty member in COM reminded me of similar research interests of a political science professor with whom I worked closely. Both were working on projects related to tourism in the Caribbean. One faculty member was interested in the government's role in tourism while the other was interested in the business aspects of tourism.

Connecting these researchers enhanced their individual work and ultimately resulted in their collaboration on projects that were beneficial to government bodies and business investors in the region. Equally important, my understanding of their work allowed me to make more useful selection decisions. These more informed selection decisions provided better support of their efforts versus selection decisions made within the boundaries of traditional disciplines.

The nature of collection development work is rapidly changing. Previously, libraries would strive to build collections that not only served the needs of current and future researchers, but also served as some historical documentation. As the paradigm shifts from developing to managing collections, new formats, such as e-resources, demand a wider skill set and knowledge base. Librarians must select resources with

relevant content and balance issues of resource access. Ensuring access to needed resources can also be complicated by legal contract negotiations and ever-changing business models.

The goal of a comprehensive collection is often the driving force behind collection policies, particularly within large research libraries. As a result of market forces, libraries are placing a premium on access while ownership has in many ways become the exception. Decreasing and/or static library budgets are yet another issue that greatly impacts collection practices. To ensure we are being good stewards of limited financial resources, selected material must be useful to a broader audience when there are continuous increases in the quantity and quality of available material.

To reestablish and maintain control of how we select and acquire material, a shift in how we think about acquiring material and its utility must be made. Just as researchers' approach to their work has shifted, librarians must adjust in similar ways to ensure proper materials are being acquired to meet the needs of users. To facilitate this shift, our selection process must change from viewing our audience and subject areas as if they exist in a vacuum. Theoretically by providing equal financial resources to disciplines and not labeling specific amounts for them, the thought process for making selection decisions will broaden. The goal would be to ensure areas of research that do not fit within discipline boundaries will be equally supported. Librarians must also take on a proactive role in strengthening external relationships and serving as a critical link in the development of new research relationships.

As scholars explore, collaborate and continue developing new areas of research, the need to be aware of new developments is imperative. We must be attuned to new

developments within specific disciplines as a way of knowing and anticipating possible connections to other areas. We must maintain a thorough knowledge of resources and continuously seek innovative ways of accessing and delivering content to users. To ensure that resources are available to meet developing and ambiguous needs, we must act upon the knowledge we gain by maintaining strong relationships. The research and the possibilities we become aware of through these relationships can begin to drive our collection decisions and practices.

To implement these models, the librarian must first be able to set aside traditional practices and explore new approaches to his/her work. This must be done within a context that will allow the librarian to adapt and adjust to changing external needs. As a result, librarians could be in a prime position to assert themselves as the key to expanding interdisciplinary research while building appropriate collections.