



Collection Building

Interview with Pamela Skinner
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Interview with Pamela Skinner

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Abstract

Purpose – An interview with Pamela Skinner, Head of Collection Development, Smith College, USA.

Design/methodology/approach – Interview.

Findings – An interesting interview providing information about collection development in a private college that is part of a consortium.

Originality/value – This interview shows how Smith College Libraries is dealing with a changing collection development environment.

Keywords Academic libraries, Electronic resources, Collection development, Consortia, Demand-driven acquisitions, Future of collection development

Paper type Viewpoint

Interview with Pamela Skinner, Head of Collection Development, Smith College, Massachusetts, USA.

Smith College is a member of Five Colleges, Inc., which was founded in 1965 to promote the broad educational and cultural objectives of its member institutions; the other members include Amherst, Hampshire and Mount Holyoke colleges, and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

The following is an interview with Pamela Skinner, Head of Collection Development, for Smith College Libraries. Smith College Libraries consist of Neilson Library (which serves as the main library and includes significant special collections), Hillyer Art Library, Josten Library for the Performing Arts and the Young Science Library.

Can you tell me how your collection development is organized?

We have an active liaisons program, in which librarians work with academic departments to build the collections; in some subject areas, the librarians do the bulk of the selection, while in other areas, the faculty are very heavily engaged. The library also has an approval plan with YPB. Core titles that meet our subject/publisher profile are shipped automatically and arrive shelf-ready; for more tangential areas, librarians receive electronic approval slips for consideration. The Libraries' Collection Development Working Group vets recommendations for "big ticket"

items and new subscriptions; it also sets the general direction for collection development and establishes/tweaks policies as needed.

Do the same selectors order both print and e-resources?

Yes, the selectors do title-by-title selection for both print and e-books. However, many of our e-books are part of large packages. Some are subscription packages (e.g. ebrary Academic Complete), others are direct purchases (e.g. Springer e-books) and two large packages (EBL and JSTOR) are part of a Five College e-book demand-driven acquisition (DDA) program. We find that different users have different preferences regarding format, and we sometimes make available both the print and the e-book version for a specific title, as requested.

How much of what you order is print versus e-resources?

Of our journals, 90 per cent are electronic only. As renewals are processed each year, our Serials and Electronic Resources staff checks for online availability, so the proportion of titles available electronically continues to grow. It is hard to give a corresponding number for books, as many of our e-books are not selected individually, but are part of larger packages or e-book DDA programs. Starting possibly in 2017, Neilson Library will be completely renovated over the course of two years. Our print collection will be in storage during that time, so we may well be looking at purchasing many more e-books and buying fewer hard-copy books for a few years.

Do you do much title-by-title selection?

Yes, we definitely still do title-by-title selection. But every year we order fewer print volumes. Between approval plan titles and firm orders, Neilson Library only added about 6,000 titles last year. In addition, the Five College Libraries adopted an

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“added copy policy” five years ago, and we view our collections more consortially than we did in the past. For seminal titles, we may still order 4–5 copies across the Five Colleges; for most titles, 2–3 copies suffice; and for truly specialized works, one copy may suffice in the consortium. The “Request Item” service in the shared Five College Library Catalog allows users to easily page books for delivery to their home campus. This is an about-face from our practice years ago, when we believed that for most titles, we needed 4–5 copies in the consortium; however, circulation data showed that many of these volumes were not circulating and that a smaller number of copies would suffice. This also allows us to devote more funds to other kinds of materials.

Are you doing some user-driven acquisitions?

Yes, we are doing user-driven acquisitions with our e-books; EBL and JSTOR are the two examples. (The Five Colleges are also doing something similar with Kanopy streaming videos, having loaded the entire catalog of Kanopy titles into the Five College Library Catalog.) However, DDA for e-books feels like the Wild West at the moment, with some publishers dramatically increasing their fees for short-term loans and others ceasing to offer their titles via a short-term loan at all. It is hard to predict what our e-book DDA programs will look like in the next few years.

Where are you going with your reference collection? Are you trying to keep a print collections?

We do have a legacy print reference collection that is sorely in need of downsizing, and it is not used heavily. As much as possible, we prefer to buy reference materials in the electronic format, now, both title-by-title and as part of larger packages (e.g. Blackwell Reference Online Oxford Handbooks Online, Routledge Handbooks Online, etc.).

How do you think collection development is changing? What do you like and what do not you like about the way collection development is changing?

One thing that is changing to some extent is that we are moving to “just in time” ordering and away from “just in case”. And, of course, we are viewing our collections more consortially and are always weighing access versus outright ownership. These are both positive trends, as far as I am concerned. There have been huge strides in being able to offer journals, finding tools, primary sources and data in electronic format, which really broadens access, both on- and off-campus, 24 × 7. But while electronic works well for many types of publications, e-books and e-book platforms still need work; I receive a fair number of complaints from faculty members, in particular, about platforms and navigation for e-books. In terms of other issues, our users’ expectations are high, and they think we can get anything for them; I guess I should be flattered that our students assume we can purchase the DVD of a film that is still playing at the local theater. I wish there were a Netflix-type service for academic libraries. And I would like to see more newspapers offered with campus-wide site licenses via IP address; many foreign ones still work via username and password, which is a barrier to use. Another access issue pertains to our alumnae, who stay connected with Smith long after they graduate; many expect access to all our licensed resources after graduation. While some of our products do include alums in the category of “authorized users” (e.g. Project Muse, Sage, Mango Languages) – or offer alumni access for a good price (JSTOR Archives) – many do not. Finally, at Smith we are very interested in supporting open-access initiatives. Our faculty recently approved an open-access policy for their output, and the library has contributed to initiatives such as Knowledge Unlatched, The Digital Scriptorium, etc.

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