

Chapter 23

Collection Development in Architecture: A View from the Field

Barbara Opar
Syracuse University, USA

ABSTRACT

Most new and even many experienced librarians are initially daunted by collection development and the decision making involved in choosing, deselecting, transferring, helping to assign call numbers, or responding to queries about issues like binding. What can become a gratifying experience also requires subject knowledge, information about specific patron needs, sound judgment, and numerous big and small management decisions. Most librarians assigned such new tasks have wished for some guidance and practical tips those first years. This chapter is intended to provide an overview of the tasks involved in building and maintaining an academic architecture collection. It will also address related duties such as liaison work and scholarly communication. The extensive bibliography is intended to provide sources for further reading on topics addressed in the book chapter.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Judith Holliday, then working as the Fine Arts Librarian at Cornell University, contemplated the architecture library of the future:

Collection development is a major activity in today's architecture library. I predict it will remain so in the future. Although the activity is ancient, collection development is a relatively new term... Bibliographers, selectors, developers, collection

managers, whatever we call them, these are the people who choose the books that go into our libraries...To my mind, collection development is at once the most blessed and most cursed of all aspects of library work. What can be more wonderful than spending thousands of dollars of someone else's money to buy beautiful books? This is balanced by the chronic fear that you are missing something and that generations of future scholars will curse you for not having the foresight to buy in a certain area (Kusnerz, 1989, pp. 63-64).

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Many of Holliday's statements remain true today, though the future of collection development is likely to become even more complicated and less ideal than Holliday could have imagined.

Indeed, as noted in the editor's objective, collection development is made more difficult by the different models at play at each institution. Perhaps like selecting a great bottle of inexpensive wine, it requires patience, practice, an innate sense of appropriateness and some trial and error to learn, but even without a strong subject background or years of experience, attaining certain skills can make collection development into the "wonderful" work to which Judith Holliday refers.

Before addressing the practice of collection development and how it might be made easier for the person new to librarianship or the discipline, this chapter will present an overview of each of the aspects of collection development as well as the many models of collection building out in the field. Whenever possible for each of these areas, the published literature and/or surveys of colleagues will be included to supplement the author's own experiences. For each task, a brief description of what is involved will be provided along with some of the problems that can arise as well as lessons learned through experience.

BACKGROUND

What is entailed in collection development? While we talk about collection development as collection building, that is only one component of what is a much broader task, especially in times of limited funding. Collection building does include the selection of new materials in appropriate formats while maintaining fiscal responsibility. It is also concerned, though, with meeting today's needs with an eye to the future. The collection development librarian needs to know the subject, the intended audience, what other materials already exist in the collection, as well as to venture a guess as to potential use by other disciplines.

Collection maintenance can be equally important, but perhaps offers less joy. It includes tending to lost and missing items and those needing repair. The "dreaded" thought of weeding as well as targeting specific areas of the collection for off-site storage are all part of collection maintenance or management.

The "library of record" is a phrase often repeated by administrators in talking about the nature of collections. While not all cooperative regional arrangements have come to fruition or operate as desired, taking a hard look at one's own collection is more important than ever. Retention of old directories and perhaps even bibliographies can rarely be warranted in most libraries. Use patterns must dictate our collections more than ever. Yes, collections may become even more slanted than one might wish, but we can, at the same time, observe them being used. The casual browser will not be thrown off by dusty, less frequently consulted texts.

Much can be said about strategies for developing new as well as retrospective collections. The same goes for collection maintenance considerations. However, the context is very important. What can and should be done will, to some extent, be determined by the institutional infrastructure for collection development.

Collection Development Models

What are the models? They are numerous and sometimes what goes around comes around. In many institutions, approval plans account for some if not up to half of the available monographic funds. Approvals may be supplemented by "slip" selection. Bibliographers may have general oversight or total responsibility for collection building. Subject librarians, with or without additional reference, instruction and/or liaison duties may merely voice their opinion on collection decisions, or they may take primary responsibility for adding new materials to the collection. What is the role of faculty? That too depends on the individual

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