Leddy Library Collection Policy White Paper
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Introduction

According to Peggy Johnson, the "landmark event recognizing collection development as a new specialization in librarianship" occurred in 1977 (14). What on earth did libraries do before that? Many would agree with Richard Snow that, despite a great deal of (he would argue, wasted) effort spent on developing collection development policies, nothing much has really changed since that watershed date: "The library winds up where it started, with the best collection it can attain relying on all the subjective choices from all the individuals who select books, periodicals and other materials" (193).

The purpose of this document is to examine some of the rationale behind the development of collection development policies. Given that the Leddy Library has determined, in its Operations Strategic Plan, to rewrite its existing policy, it will be important to give some consideration to the role such a policy might play and to develop a framework for understanding the form such a policy document might take.

Why have a collection development policy?

Despite decades of almost dogmatic acceptance of collection policy development in the literature, a significant number of libraries do not have written collection policies. Snow cites various studies showing low rates of compliance with the received wisdom that collection development policies are essential. A 1977 survey of 69 ARL libraries showed only 20 had a policy. In 1988 only one of five academic or research libraries in Alabama studied had a written policy, "with pleas of poverty, lack of time and overwork offered as excuses" (191). Another 1988 study of small to midsized libraries showed 58% had written policies. These studies are a bit old, but there has been little recent work in this area. Indeed, as John Kennedy points out in a more recent article, "at least in Australia where [collection development policies] attracted most attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there can be no doubt that in the early years of the twenty-first century they are not a burning issue" (238). Judging by the rather small number of publications in the area (since 2000, Library Literature reports only 14 articles under the heading "Collection development -- Policy statements") it's safe to say the Australian experience is common elsewhere.

Snow would go so far as to say that collection development policies are "wasted words". He acknowledges the seductive nature of the arguments in favour of a collection development policy (he calls it "The Chorus of Praise"), but puts forward some "gentle reservations" regarding what he sees as weaknesses of collection development policies: the problem of collection evaluation, "one of the librarian's most challenging and confusing tasks" (192); weaknesses of the conspectus model; "the written policy's inflexibility [and] unresponsiveness to change" (192); and the duplication of work involved in maintaining policy documents and approval plans. "The approval plan profile is a living document that translates intellectual endeavor into practical action" (193), unlike the collection policy document which (as our experience in Leddy can attest) can be allowed to fall out of date without any great impact.

Kennedy raises a couple other interesting reasons why the heyday of collection development policies has passed. For one, "collection development policies are closely linked to print materials in the minds of librarians. . . . For many professionals and paraprofessionals today, in particular those working in major academic and research libraries, it is digital resources that are of primary importance" (239). This disconnect is especially pertinent in a case where a collection development policy is developed locally, but the majority of the library's budget is spent on big-ticket electronic resources purchased consortially. However, Kennedy suggests a larger issue that explains the neglect of collection policies:

> The very concept of collecting has been called into question as a primary activity of libraries. When increasingly the resources that the library makes available are ones which are not physically collected and brought within its walls but to which it provides access if and when they are needed, it would hardly be surprising if some came to regard a document that seeks to guide its collecting activities as of diminishing relevance. (240)

Of course, Kennedy is only setting up a straw man here and really wants to argue that collection policies are still relevant and worthwhile. He acknowledges that digital information is less tangible and more subject to change or even to disappear; that the "content of the [digital] collection may be more fluid that it ever was in any print collection subject to the ravages of theft and physical deterioration" (241). And although he doesn't draw this conclusion directly, it may be that this fluidity is itself justification for the development of a policy document.

A new understanding of "collection"

Mary Frances Casserly suggests that a new understanding of the concept of "collection" needs to be developed for the digital age, "It is the abstract idea of collection—philosophy, purpose, scope and boundaries—that, as practitioners, we share with other members of the library profession" (577). Casserly identifies four key elements that support the idea of "collection": ownership, place, control, and permanence (579). Permanence takes on new meaning, formerly taken for granted in the print world, while the other elements make a transition from print to digital. "Ownership" needs little explication, save the fact that generally speaking libraries have traditionally "presented users with only those resources for which the library assumed responsibility through ownership" (579), whereas now we are also in the business of providing access to off-site resources that might be owned consortially or accessed through licenses that give no actual ownership to the library in question. "Place" in the context of collection management refers primarily to the library as storehouse (580). Casserly doesn't directly discuss or even imply how the idea of place remains relevant to the concept of a digital collection, although she doesn't seem particularly interested in the service or community aspects of the "library as place". By "control", Casserly means inventory control at the basic level, quality control at a more conceptual level, and the assurance of content stability. Interestingly, she doesn't mention bibliographic control, which functions at a significantly higher level than inventory control as she describes it. Finally, "Permanence is a property of analog information resources that derives from ownership, place and control" (580). Permanence is inherent in paper and other physical information resources, but digital is inherently impermanent.

Functions of a collection policy document

Casserly doesn't speak directly to the development of policy documents. Instead, she considers five questions that librarians should ask in defining the emerging concept of the collection[†], five questions whose answers will contribute to an understanding of the new concept of collection she desires. And although she does not stipulate it as necessary, these are clearly the kinds of questions that can be answered in a policy document. In thinking about those questions, it might be worthwhile to consider whether the four elements she defines are themselves becoming hybrid, like the libraries they describe. Ownership and place especially can have both literal and metaphoric meanings that converge when the concept of a collection is considered. Control may be of even greater relevance in a digital context, as the complexity of our ownership and licensing situation increases. And permanence? Well, nothing's permanent. Our paper collections may seem permanent, but they are really only longer-lived. Indeed, paper rots; in a digital environment where electronic archiving is carefully implemented, permanence may in fact be easier to achieve.

So what are the accepted functions of a collection development policy document? Wood and Hoffman, in the first chapter of their book *Library Collection Development Policies: A Reference and Writers' Handbook*, draw on a number of sources to provide, mostly in bullet-list form, a considerable number of advantages libraries obtain by writing collection development policies. I would argue that these advantages fall into four general categories according to the processes the document supports: planning, accountability, staff development and support, and communication (see Appendix A for a detailed list). Kennedy provides examples that would easily fit these categories, but would argue that these traditional policy functions must be placed in a new context in a hybrid library: "the policy is more important in the case of digital resources than it ever was in the case of print" (241). Digital resources require significantly different levels of awareness when it comes to issues like format and usability, they often come with complex and widely varying licensing regimes, and in many cases (as has been our very positive experience) they will be purchased consortially (Kennedy 242). Prior to the digital revolution, few if any of these concerns were relevant to collections librarians.

Collection development as public service

In my introduction, I mentioned that Johnson cites 1977 as the watershed year for collection development as an area of specialization within librarianship. The landmark event she refers to was a preconference organized by the newly created Collection Development Committee of the Resources and Technical Services Division of ALA, held before the ALA conference in Detroit. Subsequent to this preconference, the Committee would publish (in 1979) the first edition of the *Guidelines for Collection Development* (Johnson 14). To answer my somewhat facetious rhetorical question: "What on earth did libraries do before that?" (and to oversimplify a little), collection development as a specialty came out of selection and acquisition processes that could no longer cope with the size of the information universe. Acquisitions is normally clustered within the broad category of "technical services": back-room stuff like cataloguing, preservation, invoicing, and so on. As a result, in many libraries collection development is often included on the technical service side. However, there is an obvious public service element to collection development as well, especially in an academic setting where liaison with faculty and students is often an expectation of the job. Other "public services" are things like

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[†] 1. What are appropriate and useful metaphors for your "library" and "collection" in the digital age?
2. How will your library achieve effectiveness as it builds and manages the hybrid collection?
3. How will your library define efficiency in acquiring and managing the hybrid collection?
4. How will your library establish and maintain a focus on collection content in the challenging landscape of scholarly communications?
5. What commitment will your library make to collection permanence?

reference, information literacy, and circulation. In the Leddy Library, collection development is considered a public service, and since July 1, 2006, has been part of the same department responsible for reference and information literacy. That's why I'm interested when Johnson says something like this:

> The opening of library catalogs to remote users, along with access to an endless variety and number of files outside library collections and their catalogs, creates a role for librarians as information guides or mediators. Librarians must be prepared and willing to guide users to files, no matter where they are stored, and ready to advise on retrieving them. Librarians have a mission to provide access to information and sources that have been inaccessible and unknown. (22)

Clearly, there is a service focus here. In a way, we have two kinds of patron: those who need things immediately, and those who can afford to wait. For those who need things immediately, we have been successful in providing a really significant collection of online resources, primarily journal articles. Where we fall down for this group is often in our monograph collection, where limited resources have led to an inability to collect deeply in all areas and where (with few exceptions) we are only able to provide single copies. (Ebooks may solve this problem, but given that we're seeing pricing models that cost about 3 times as much for an individual title, often with use limits in some way built in, I'm not optimistic.) Roughly, the "need things immediately" group will be undergrads most of whom tend to leave things fairly late.

On the other hand, the folks who can afford to wait will generally be grad students and faculty; for this group we can provide access one way or another to almost every publication out there. Thanks to consortial activity and ILL, we can almost conceive of the Leddy as one node of the universal library. This isn't to say that we don't have to worry about ensuring that our local collection meets day-to-day research and teaching needs, but it is important to note that the services we provide expand considerably beyond that local collection. Interestingly, this notion of the collection as something that expands beyond the local is typical of librarians, but not so typical of our patrons:

> when users were asked about consortium arrangement and the various types of proprietary ownership by the library, they expressed their unfamiliarity with—and lack of interest in—these managerial issues. In the unanimous opinion of users, documents were *not* part of the library collection unless they were immediately available and did not require a waiting period, no matter how short. (Lee, "The Concept of Collection" 77)

Lee's study considers a number of fascinating differences in the way patrons and librarians conceptualize the collection, but if that difference can be boiled down to one essential point, it's this: "the user's perspective focuses on access, while the librarian's focus is on control" ("The Concept of Collection" 76). This is natural, in some respects, because control is and always has been essential to what we do with the stuff we buy, but it is perhaps more important than ever that we can also see our collection through our patron's eyes.

Towards a user-centred collection development policy

Michael Stoller provides a nice overview of the ways in which technology has changed academic libraries, arguing that successful collection development is (as it always has been) focused on the user. He summarizes the current state of library collections: electronic resources usually purchased in big, expensive suites eat up more and more of our acquisitions budgets; many of these are actually rented rather than bought; decisions on big ticket items tend to be made by administrators rather than liaison librarians.

> In this environment, market research seems more essential than ever. We always needed to know what our users wanted. But the parameters of that knowledge are infinitely more complex now—to buy or not to buy, to buy in paper or electronic, to locate onsite or offsite. It is a maze of choices, and we need our users' help. The complexity of the environment means we must be all the more sensitive not only to what research materials they need but also how they use them. (6)

Use is an intriguing factor to consider, less straightforward than might first be expected. To an extent, we can only look at past use. We might argue that use over the last two (or three or four) years constitutes a good estimate of current use. And of course we can only guess at future use. Further, we often think of use as being something we evaluate to assist in our selection decisions, but the relationship between selection and use is bidirectional. And, as Lee points out, there is a distinct lack of research into "how a collection of information resources in and of itself forms a context to influence the user's information seeking" ("Collection Development" 30). Stoller suggests that, at least in practice, the solution to this problem has already been identified and even implemented:

> Quite frankly, when all is said and done, there is no better model [than the subject-specialist librarian] for communicating with our user communities. Mind you, I am not referring to the old model of the selector, who sits in an office, pouring over review lists or sorting offer slips from vendors. I am talking about someone with a strong academic background in his or her subject on top of a librarian's training, actively engaged in reference work, instruction and a vigorous liaison program with the faculty and students of a particular discipline. When all these functions come together in a single librarian, we have perhaps the ideal resource for knowing what our users want of us, someone who can talk their language, understand their methodologies and translate them into the information we need to build our collections with accuracy and precision. (7)

So can we actually achieve a user-centred collection development policy, or are we back to where we started with Snow's suggestion that the liaison librarian's time would be better spent delivering the resources and services our patrons demand? Consider what Wood and Hoffmann would ask us to do before we even begin writing policy. In the second chapter of their *Library Collection Development Policies* they identify five steps that should be considered before implementing a collection policy:

- Survey user groups;
- Review the goals and objectives of the institution of which the library is a part;
- Determine the environmental characteristics likely to have an impact on the library collection;
- Compile specifications for the development of the library collection;
- Determine current selection requirements.

Historically, librarianship (or library science) has been about codifying existing practices. Collections existed long before collection development policies. In part, it seems to me Wood and Hoffmann's list of considerations is symptomatic of this tendency. Partially, it's indicative of the reality that any library exists in an already established context. To develop policy for an existing library, one can't simply start from scratch and imagine the result to be a pure, intellectual, systematic construct. Instead, you have to work with the messy reality of what's already there. At the same time, it hardly seems worthwhile simply to describe what goes on day-to-day and call it a policy. The target, I think, lies somewhere in between.

The remainder of Wood and Hoffman's second chapter discusses a fair amount of advice from various sources, but it boils down to a few salient themes:

- Who will use the policy, and for what purposes?
- How will the policy be accessed, and by whom?
- How will the policy be updated, by whom, and how easily?

The key question, I would argue, is to what extent the policy document serves two central functions: providing direction to staff involved in collection development, and informing the library's stakeholders as to its collection development intentions. (I hate the term "stakeholders", but can't think of a better one.) Stakeholders can be divided into a few main groups: patrons, funding sources, vendors, and staff. Earlier, I identified four general categories of arguments in favour of libraries having collection development policies: planning, accountability, staff development and support, and communication. What I'm now suggesting is not so much a reduction of those categories to two, but a recognition that specific aspects of a policy may be either internally or externally oriented. Indeed, a policy could be entirely oriented in one or the other direction. My gut feeling is that collection development policies often try to do too much. Does a library benefit from having a comprehensive policy, or is it better to sketch a general framework that outlines the library's general philosophy?

Principles of policy development for the 21st Century

Hur-Li Lee describes a case study analyzing collection development processes in a women's studies collection through the 70s, 80s, and 90s. She starts from the "basic assumption. . . that collection development involves not only objective professional activities but also complex social interactions" ("Collection Development" 23). In the course of the study, Lee analyzes data culled from internal documentation of library activities, archival records that represent the make up of the institution and how it changed over time, and interviews with librarians involved in collection activities in the area:

> The data revealed two distinctive points of view towards women's studies and women's collections: feminist, and non-feminist. The standpoint held by librarians on both sides of the issue colored their perceptions of user information needs and information seeking and, in turn, became part of their justifications for collection decisions. The feminist group took a women-centered collection approach and worked persistently to establish a separate library collection focused on women. The non-feminist group adhered to the traditional disciplinary model and objected to the proposal for a separate women's studies collection. ("Collection Development" 26)

It's important to point out that Lee does not characterize either side as being necessarily more valid than the other. She gives considerable attention to a fair treatment of the two perspectives in an effort to understand the biases inherent in each. Interestingly, she concludes that, "Neither of the conflicting positions on interdisciplinary inquiry in women's studies was evidence-based" ("Collection Development" 27). If there is an implication for collection policy development it would fall somewhere between one of two poles. On the one hand, a collection policy document could attempt to be the governing factor that would eliminate subjectivity by establishing criteria by which decisions would be made. However, I consider that naive wishful thinking. On the other hand, a policy document could recognize and accommodate the implications of Lee's findings, which I would argue include:

- Collection development is contextual, within the institution, within society, and taking into consideration the individuality of the librarians, faculty, and students

directly or indirectly involved;
- The influence of individual expertise and bias and must be expected, understood and allowed for;
- Political realities, both institutional and societal, will have an impact on decisions being made;
- A policy document will need to provide clear guidelines in terms of directions and expectations, but still allow flexibility for the librarians involved to act with autonomy.

A different kind of collection policy?

My hunch, prior to beginning research in this area, was that a different kind of collection development policy is needed going forward. The existing Leddy Library policy, adopted in 1992, expects the application of a conspectus approach to all subject disciplines. Conspectus doesn't take into consideration areas of overlap in LC, or the fact that some disciplines don't map nicely to LC classification. It also doesn't acknowledge selection within classification ranges. In other words, unless we collect comprehensively within a range, we must select from what's available. A collection level of "4E" doesn't say much about which titles might or might not be selected. The conspectus approach has always seemed to me to be an attempt to express a qualitative reality in quantitative terms. Instead, I'm inclined to agree with Jim Vickery that, "What is required is not merely a traditionally detailed written document, but a broad statement of purpose and a flexible, continually-revised description of the library's aims" (341). Interestingly, Vickery's article covers much of the same ground as Snow's. He provides a nice overview of the arguments for and against collection development policies: the "for" section , brief and canonical; the "against" section much more rich. However, rather than conclude that written policies area waste of time, Vickery argues that "[a] clear, broad statement of purpose, flexibly interpreted, would allow selectors to adjust to changing technology and evolving user needs. Experience shows that the traditional written policy is no longer a self-evident necessity, and work is needed to develop new models" (341).

One possible model for how we might approach developing such a policy document is described by Andy Corrigan, whose comparative analysis of web-based versus paper-based collection policies found fundamental differences: "These new [web-based] policies reflect the advantages of the online medium in which they are presented and in some cases appear to represent significant changes in how collection policies are structured and used" (65). Corrigan is at Tulane, where a change in both library and campus leadership compelled the library to reconsider policy. A task force was established to lead the policy renewal:

> The task force soon discovered that collection policies had dramatically changed from dreary summary documents attempting to broadly describe the overall scope of the collection. Instead, these newer policies were most often sets of individual working documents focused on specific disciplines covered. Most of them seem to have the practical utility of having been developed and maintained by the bibliographer assigned to the discipline at hand. (66)

This is consistent with the approach to collection policy development outline in Leddy's *Operation Strategic Plan* (2005). Our plan calls for the department head to write a general policy document, after which a committee of librarians will develop guidelines for discipline-specific area plans. It's interesting to think of this as a web-based document from the outset. Writing for the web is different from writing for paper. Writing for the web could also conceivably include commenting or even collaborative writing through something wiki-ish.

Corrigan reports that Tulane decided to make a focus on curriculum needs central to its policy development process: "the process of writing a comprehensive set of collection policies. . . began with an inventory of academic departments and programs" (67). Step two was to develop specific guidelines for use by bibliographers in developing their policies. These policies have since been transferred to a database allowing bibliographers to login and update their policies with ease. Interestingly, Corrigan makes no mention of any systematic attempt to involve faculty or students in the process. The subject-specialist's liaison activities will necessarily come into play to some extent, but I think user feedback needs to be an explicit part of the process. One of the tantalizing prospects of a web-based document is the extent to which user input can be enabled and facilitated.

Discussion Points

Here, then, is a list of principles to serve as discussion points in guiding the updating of the Leddy Library collection development policy. They aren't in any particular order, and they aren't necessarily all possible or even mutually in agreement. Nevertheless, it's my hope they will provide a starting point for consideration.

1. The policy must be flexible and relatively easily adapted. A web-based format would be ideal, but the content too must define a flexible approach to policy development and implementation.

2. The policy must speak to traditional and evolving media and access models, as well as being open to the possible development of new approaches. To a certain extent, at least the general principles in the policy should be format agnostic.

3. We need to think about what we mean when we say "the library collection." To the extent it is possible to do so, we should investigate what our patrons hear when we say it.

4. A qualitative approach to describing our collection and our goals for its development will be desirable.

5. The policy will only be about the collection in the sense that it is about the processes and relationships that contribute to the development of that collection; the policy will be less about stuff and more about the people connected to that stuff.

6. Coming out of 5, while the collection is a thing (or a system of things), collection development is a service. A collection development policy should, therefore, be service-oriented.

7. We should not forget that while the inherent bias in our profession is toward resource control—recognizing that there is considerable need for control—our patrons' primary concern is access.

8. Related to 7, we need to ask Wood and Hoffmann's question, "Who will use the policy, and for what purposes?" If communication is desired as a primary purpose, we will need to tailor the language and orientation of the document accordingly.

9. At various steps along the way, stakeholder input should be solicited. Administrators might be interested in contributing a thought or two, faculty liaisons certainly will, and students may have a surprise or two for us as well.

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