Teaching Digital Collections Management: Issues and Priorities for the Future

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Summary

The paper contrasts traditional collection management instruction with that which is necessary in the context of digital collections. A brief review of the transition from print oriented collection management issues and priorities to those of digital collections is provided. The role of digital collections management in library and information science and in specialized digital library curricula is analyzed. Specific issues related to digital collections, such as models of ownership and access, negotiating contracts with vendors and digital content providers, the role of consortia and cooperative agreements in obtaining cost-effective collection content, are explored. These and other issues will be prioritized in terms of their significance for the future education of library and information science professionals. Model syllabi of digital library collection management are reviewed and critiqued with suggestions for core elements that should be part of the competencies of anyone working with digital collections in the 21st Century.

Key words: library and information science education, collection development, digital libraries

Introduction

There was a time when collection management was considered one of the core courses in Library and Information Science (LIS) education. For years it was one of the required courses in the LIS program at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (GSLIS-UIUC). Both the authors of this paper obtained their master's degrees from this program, although some 40 years exist between the time each

of us were granted our degrees. Thus we can provide a personal account of some of the similarities and differences in teaching Collection Management at one of the top LIS programs in North America. Until the last quarter of the 20th century, a course in collection management was one of four required courses at GSLIS-UIUC. The other three required courses were cataloging, reference, and library administration. In the 1970s, the curriculum at Illinois, as at many other LIS programs, was updated and revised to include the establishment of a smaller number of required courses, which were to provide an introductory overview of what had been the four "core courses." These changes came about because of the recognition of the growing role of technology within the profession as well as other social and cultural issues, which affected access to information. These changes required a tailored approach to course work in the one year master's degree program to meet a greater variety of job opportunities in the expanded information profession. The content of four core courses continued to be taught as advanced courses, but was no longer required of all students. At Illinois most students, often 80% or more in the master's degree program, took cataloging, reference, and library administration as part of their course work for the master's degree. However, the number of students who took the collection management course steadily declined. This may be because faculty had argued that the concepts of collection management should be integrated into the other courses, and specifically courses in library administration and reference expanded their syllabi to cover collection management issues. In fact, some specialized courses were developed under the titles of legal issues and related concepts to cover the copyright and censorship content of what had been included in collection management courses.

All of this was happening at a time when greater emphasis was placed on expanding the scope of the LIS curriculum beyond that of traditional jobs in the institution of the library. In fact, there were movements to "deinstitutionalize" Library and Information Science education as it was argued that in the future fewer graduates of LIS degree programs would work in traditional library settings and more in would work in alternative careers. While efforts to promote alternative careers for LIS graduates has made considerable progress in Europe and other parts of the world, in North America there is little evidence of much movement to these alternative careers. But ironically the literature and the course syllabi in the area of collection management suggests that with the evolution toward electronic and digital library collections, the role of educating the new professional for collection management may again be an important factor in the future of the profession.

The terms "collection management" and "collection development" are often used interchangeably, although in the U.S.A, the preferred term seems to be "collection development." Kennedy (1998) suggests that one of the reasons for this preference may be the need for the American Library Association to identify a group of specialists working in the library that have responsibilities for

selection policies, collection evaluation, user needs assessment, selection of materials, collection maintenance and weeding, and planning for resource sharing. Kennedy notes that there may be many reasons for the transition from the term collection management to collection development, but he suggests that the most likely reason for the adoption of collection management as an umbrella term for the activities involved in library collection maintenance grew from a change in academic libraries. Previously faculties were primarily responsible for the selection of materials in their subject disciplines and librarians were responsible for managing the collections. More recently, however, professional librarians have assumed the selection as well as the management role. The reason for this change, Kennedy argues, was the growth of higher education institutions in the latter half of the twentieth century. This growth caused an increase of students and faculty as well as an increase in library budgets. As more materials were acquired, the task of selection was "professionalized" by the collection development librarian, or in larger institutions, the collection development unit. In fact, the subject bibliographer position, which had existed in many libraries, was transformed into the more multifaceted position of collection development librarian. Kennedy argues that electronic resources led to the return of the collection management position because in the electronic environment, collection managers not only spend much of their time negotiating licenses for electronic access, but also create and disseminate electronic documents in institutional repositories. (Kennedy, 1998, p. 3)

Prior studies of Teaching of Collection Development

For most of the 20th century the focus in collection development courses in LIS education was on the selection of "good books" that would make a difference in the lives of readers. Part of this tradition had its origin in the development of "readers advisory" services in public libraries and the extended education mission of school and academic libraries. Within this context was the Bibliotherapy movement what suggested that books might be "prescribed" by professional librarians to meet the medical and psychological needs of readers. (Bibliotherapy Education Project, 2009). There were debates from time to time as to what kinds of "popular" reading materials might be appropriate to hold in a collection. These books were sometimes justified as "bait" to hook the potential library user on reading anything so they eventually could be upgraded to "good" literature consistent with the quality assurance standards of the library and of the professional librarians that were educated in such selection guidelines. Jean Weihs, in a 2008 article, reminisces about her experiences as an LIS student taking a "Book Selection" course in a Canadian library school in the mid-20th century. (Weihs, 2008, p. 9) The text for the course was Haines, *Living with Books,* which was a standard text in LIS education for many years in the mid-twentieth century. Robert B. Downs, Dean of the Library and Library School at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was active in writing a series of

volumes on the impact of good books, including *Books that Changed the World.* This approach to collection development applied not just to print materials, but also to other media, such as sound recordings, films, and other non-traditional resources. While such assumptions were challenged from time to time, with "rebel" librarians encouraging young people and others with graphic novels, Harlequin romances, and other "popular" or sometimes characterized as "trash lit" one could argue that the true challenge did not materialize until the advent of digital materials when the universe of resources expanded well beyond the self-contained "good book" collections.

Kennedy, in his 1998 paper, includes a study of the "conditions" of education for collection management/development in the United Kingdom, Australia and North America. (Kennedy, 1998). His review of the literature in the last decade of the 20th century established the changes that occurred in LIS education for collection development. Specific courses in collection development are no longer required in (most?) LIS schools and within collection development classes the trend is to recognize the more managerial aspects of collection development tasks, such as financial management and financial negotiation skills. Fund raising and knowledge of preservation are also considered more important for collection development than in earlier decades. Ultimately, Kennedy argues against those who predict that local collections, and thus collection development activities in libraries will be made obsolete by the expansion of "universal" collections made possible by the Internet. Writing before the Google book project was put into full development, he dismisses such speculation as unlikely because of the significant financial, logistical, legal, and constitutional obstacles. (Kennedy, 1998, p. 7) Of course, in 2009 we are seeing Google and others confronting these obstacles and overcoming some of them.

In 2007, the Collection Development Education Committee of ALA's Reference and Adult Services Association CODES (Collection Development and Evaluation Section) described a 2006 study of collection related course offerings in ALA accredited LIS programs as indicated from the websites of the schools. They found that all but six programs had one or more courses related to collections. That suggests a continuing strong commitment to collection related courses in U.S. and Canadian LIS programs as of 2006. (American Library Association, RUSA, 2006)

Elements of collection development courses shared by pre-digital and post-digital course offerings and elements that are unique to each

For purposes of analysis we are defining "pre-digital" collection development courses as those developed prior to 1990. Post-digital will include courses developed after 2005. This somewhat arbitrary distinction is chosen to reflect the fact that the transition to digital libraries took place in LIS schools between 1990 and 2005. Although there are many instructors who incorporated digital library issues in collection development courses prior to this, by 2006 the im-

portance of digital library collections was clearly recognized in the course materials and in the literature of library and information science. The "pre-digital" collection development courses had a variety of titles, ranging from "Introduction to Collection Management" to "Materials Selection." In the earlier days of 20th Century LIS education, the term "Book Selection" was often used with the caveat that the term "book" was meant to be used "generally" to indicate any type of information medium.

Traditional "pre-digital" collection development courses included the following content
1. Identify and evaluate the various reviewing sources.
2. Obtain data relating to the information needs of users.
3. Collection development policies and procedures.
4. Cooperation and networking among information agencies.
5. Evaluate and select resources in all formats and for a variety of user needs.
6. Issues related to intellectual freedom.
7. Relationship of copyright laws to collection development.
8. Resource sharing, collection evaluation, and networking.

The syllabi of two post-digital collection development courses at GSLIS at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign were examined. The syllabi represented two different courses on collection development taught by two different instructors. One course (LIS 590CD-"Collection Development" clearly attempted to cover collection development in all types of libraries and the other course (LIS 590CD2-"Current Topics in Collection Development"), which focused on collection development issues, clearly had an academic and research library orientation.

In the case of the first course, all the elements found in a pre-digital collection development course were maintained, but a number of topics were added. These included units on Acquisition Procedures, Budgets, Licensing, Vendor Negotiation, and Access vs. Ownership.

The second course was more issue oriented and was more focused on academic and research libraries. It was not a more advanced course than the first in so far as the first course was not a prerequisite for the second. The second "issues" course covered most of the content in the pre-digital course, but explicit references to intellectual freedom and legal issues were not evident in the course syllabus. In addition to the units found in the first analyzed post-digital course (units on Acquisition Procedures, Budgets, Licensing, Vendor Negotiation, and Access vs. Ownership) this issues oriented class included units on scholarly communication, institutional repositories, and the open access movement.

Clearly there are changes in the content of LIS courses on collection management in the course offered at this one LIS program. This pattern of content seems to follow the prediction of Kennedy and others as to the future trends of

teaching collection development in LIS programs. Aspects of electronic and digital collection management are clearly incorporated into the course syllabi in the course work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. But the next question is, what is the role of collection development in the digital libraries program at the same University?

Inclusion of post-digital collection development elements in digital library courses

The GSLIS-University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign digital library program is a sixth year post-master's degree program. The program description and list of required and elective courses can be found at: http://www.lis.illinois.edu/programs/cas-dl.html.

The four required courses are: LIS453 "Systems Analysis and Management", LIS590DIL "Introduction to Digital Libraries", LIS590IML "Information Modeling", and LIS590MD "Metadata in Theory & Practice". Of the four required courses, only LIS 590DIL has elements of content found in collection development courses. LIS 590DIL (Digital Libraries Research and Practice) includes units on Intellectual Property, Security, and Privacy. It should be noted that the "Current Topics in Collection Development" course that is discussed above, is one of the suggested electives, but not a requirement, for the advanced degree in Digital Librarianship. Thus is it possible for someone at Illinois to complete a degree in digital libraries without being exposed to the fundamentals of collection development beyond he few elements in LIS 590DIL. The focus of most of the courses in the program is on the technical side of developing and maintaining digital libraries rather than on the theoretical and managerial side of building collections.

How does this compare to digital library courses in all ALA accredited programs? Pomerantz and others in 2006 published an analysis of the digital library course syllabi in ALA accredited programs and found that collection development was third in the frequency of reading topics found in digital library syllabi. (Pomerantz, 2006, Figure 2: Distribution of readings across topics). Only "Project Management" and "Architecture" exceeded the Collection Development readings.

This finding seems to be puzzling given the lack of readings and focus on collection development found at Illinois in the digital library courses. Two possible explanations come to mind. 1) Illinois may not emphasize collection development in digital libraries as much as other programs; or 2) there may be a difference in the frequency of readings in those courses offering collection development topics in digital libraries compared to other topics. Since the literature of collection development has a longer history than that of digital libraries, perhaps the measure of readings is reflecting that richness of resources rather than the actual content of the digital library programs. More investigations would be

required to determine whether this second explanation has merit. (Pomerantz, 2006)

It should also be noted that in the Framework for a Digital Library Curriculum (2008) "Collection Development" is broken down into the following categories:

3-a: Collection development/selection policies

3-b: Digitization

3-c: Harvesting

3-d: Document and e-publishing/presentation markup

3-e (7-e): Web (push) Publishing

3-f (7-f): Crawling

Of these six categories, most librarians would consider only 3-a to be directly related to collection development. This might also explain the larger number of collection development readings found by Pomerantz in 2006.

Digital Library model curriculum

The Digital Library Curriculum Development Project, funded by the National Science Foundation and established as a joint research project at Virginia Tech and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill has as its goal the development of a model curriculum for digital library education. The project began in 2006 and was funded through 2008. While many of the curricular modules have been completed, one that was not completed by the end of the project was "Collection Development – 3a Collection Development/Selection Policies" As noted above, while this is just one component of a collection development course taught in general LIS programs, it suggests that among those instructors and researchers involved in digital library curriculum development, collection development is of a lower priority that other elements of the curriculum. This may be the case because it is assumed that the theory and principles of collection development will be obtained from other coursework in the LIS curriculum. But regardless of the reason, the gap left in the model curriculum development for digital libraries is a concern for those who believe that collection development is a very important issue in the digital library world.

Conclusions and future research directions

Clearly, courses in collection development are adjusting to the digital age and are upgrading content to cover the necessary competencies needed for maintaining digital library collections. More attention is being paid to the financial side of collection development, including vendor negotiations. While instruction in collection development has made considerable accommodation to digital material, the question is, have programs of study in digital librarianship recognized the importance of collection development to their instructional mission?

It is the intent of this paper to stimulate the discussion raised of what should be in a model curriculum for collection development in a world of digital libraries. A related question is whether assimilation of the content of collection develop-

ment courses into digital library courses is the best solution. And behind both these questions is perhaps an even more important one: Will the profession tolerate a continued separation of digital and non-digital education content as represented by those programs that are established as independent or advanced programs in digital librarianship?

It is our belief that in the future, digital library education programs will be integrated into the basic professional education of librarians and information science. This integration will answer the questions posed above and hopefully will result in the recognition that all librarians and information scientists must be equally exposed to the principles of collection development and effective collection management.

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