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6030 WHITE PAPER

Encouraging Faculty Requests for Library Materials: Midwest's New Book Selection Service

by Lydia F. Knight

Faculty participation is an important foundation of academic library collection development. It can be a challenge to find ways to encourage more input from faculty who have so many demands for their time and attention. Some faculty members submit numerous materials requests each year, and others rarely, if ever, request materials. While the librarians have the professional expertise to maintain and develop the collection, they should not be the only source for recommendations for purchases. Faculty are experts in their fields, and their participation in collection development is crucial to the currency and overall quality of the academic library collection. The challenge is to encourage all faculty members (not just a few) from all disciplines to provide input for collection development.

The first step is to maintain a current collection development policy. Georgia Public Library Service has a helpful Web site on "Resources for Library Development" that provides many useful resources that can be used to draft and update collection development policies (www.georgialibraries.org).

The Dalton State College Collection Development Policy states:

The quality of the collection depends largely on the involvement of teaching faculty.... No one person can have complete knowledge of all fields or know the needs of an entire community to assume responsibility for all selections. Faculty input is integral to this process and ensures that collections are balanced and reasonably support all college courses (Dalton).

The policy also states that the library's priority is

supporting the needs of students and faculty at the appropriate degree level. From its founding and up to 2000, Dalton State College offered associate degree and certificate programs. Beginning in 2000, the college added three bachelor's degree programs and by fall 2008 the college had 10 bachelor degree programs. The Roberts Library collection development process had to reflect these changes and support the curriculum with upper undergraduate materials.

In past years, librarians have routed publisher catalogs, brochures and new title announcements to faculty for selection. Faculty members have also sent requests via e-mail, phone and campus mail for library materials. Increasing the total number of faculty requests was one of the departmental goals for Roberts Library. To help meet this goal, Roberts Library began using a notification slip plan in 2005-2006. A profile was set up with the vendor using Library of Congress subject headings to customize titles for our curriculum. Printed, multipart 4x6 forms were mailed to the library weekly. The forms were sorted by discipline and routed via campus mail to faculty who volunteered to be discipline coordinators. The discipline coordinators then routed the slips to their colleagues within the department. Faculty would initial slips for titles to add to our library collection. After the slips were returned to the library and reviewed by the director, the firm orders were complete. The first year Roberts Library used the notification slips, the number of titles requested went up 7 percent. The second year, the number of titles requested increased by 30 percent. During the same two-year time period, the number of full-time faculty increased 11 percent. Both the addition of faculty and the notification slip program probably were factors in the rise of the number of titles requested.

While the notification slip plan did result in meeting our goal for more faculty requests, there were some drawbacks. Even though we modified our institutional profile, the number of notification slips mailed each week was high. In addition, we were still receiving many titles that were not applicable to our curriculum. Sorting and routing the slips by discipline was a cumbersome process. It was time-consuming for the faculty discipline coordinators and added to their weekly paperwork, and some faculty disliked using the notification slips. The time constraints, the paper waste and faculty complaints were considerations on whether or not to continue the notification slips.

The decision was made to cancel the notification slip plan and try a different method from another vendor. Midwest Library Service offers a New Book Selection Service; instead of notification slips, forthcoming title lists are distributed weekly via e-mail. These lists can be profiled by using Library of Congress Subject Classification. Of course, it would not be practical to send tailored e-mails to each faculty member. Instead of using individual email addresses, group e-mail addresses were used for each division, for example, nursing@daltonstate.edu. A profile was created for each of the 15 departments: business administration, business/technical, criminal justice, education, health/technical, humanities, natural science/math, nursing, philosophy and religion, political science, psychology, social work, sociology, technology, and world and U.S. history.

Before we started sending the e-mail notices, the division chairs were notified of the new program, and they responded positively to the proposed service. Next, an e-mail explaining the new book selection service (NBSS) process was sent to the entire faculty. During the annual faculty retreat in fall 2007, the library director presented a five-minute PowerPoint presentation demonstrating the procedure for the service. A handout explaining the NBSS process was also included in the faculty packets at the meeting. Afterward, several faculty members mentioned they were glad the paper notification slips had been cancelled.

The e-mail notifications were activated during the fall and spring semesters of 2007-2008. During the breaks between semesters and the summer term, the e-mail notifications were inactive. Each week the faculty members would receive the e-mail relevant to their division. After opening the e-mail and the new titles list, faculty could check boxes for recommended titles and submit the list online. Once submitted, the list went to a file marked "confirm transactions" on the Midwest Web

site. The Dalton State library director would receive an email notification that there were "x" number of pending transactions from that division. Once a week, the confirm transactions file was checked by the library director, and titles were evaluated based on the Collection Development Policy. For example, the policy states that Roberts Library will not purchase textbooks unless there are special circumstances, so textbooks would be deleted from the file. A staff member would also check for duplicates in our OPAC. Afterward, titles were ordered as funds permitted or saved for later consideration. During the first year, there were a few e-mail or phone questions from faculty as they learned the new process. Some faculty thought the e-mail notifications were spam at first, so it was important to let them know to add the Midwest e-mail address to their list of "safe" addresses.

An increase in faculty participation was immediately apparent. Each week there were about 30-50 submissions for new titles. At the end of the 2007-2008 year, the total number of titles requested by the faculty had increased by 70 percent. This was an amazing number, and it was not expected to be so high. (Only one full-time faculty member was added that year.) It was gratifying to see statistical proof of the success of the e-mail notifications. This plan enabled the library director to be confident that funds were being spent efficiently and wisely on the purchase of titles that were recommended by faculty and that directly supported our curriculum. In times of budget constraints, it is even more important to demonstrate careful use of funds. The Midwest New Book Selection Service has proved to be another valuable tool in measuring institutional effectiveness and demonstrating completion of the library goals and objectives. Documentation of this plan and statistics will be kept on file in preparation for our next Southern Association of Colleges and Schools self-study and visit. ►►

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