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Grace Andrews

Wesley Biblical Seminary, gandrews@wbs.edu

Renee Carey

Faith Bible College, rcarey@faithbiblecollege.edu

Jon Jones


Baptist Bible College, jjones@gobbc.edu

Deborah H. McConkey

Epic Bible College, mcconkeyd@gmail.com

Jim Mancuso

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Distributed Collection Development: How to grow your library without knowing everything!



Grace Andrews, Director of Library Services, Wesley Biblical Seminary

Renee Carey, Librarian, Faith Bible College

**Jon Jones, Director of Library & Academic Services,
Baptist Bible College**

J. James Mancuso, Head Librarian, Northeastern Baptist College

Deborah H. McConkey, Library Director, Epic Bible College

ABSTRACT

This article is designed to help librarians, especially solo librarians, recognize how the professionals around them can assist with the development of their library collection and to provide practical instruction and tools to encourage their collaborative process.

But I was an English major as an undergrad. What do I know about biblical theology resources? If this type of thought has crossed your mind, you are not alone! No one can know everything about every academic discipline. There are people who know, however, who can help us develop a more complete library collection. But guess what? They do not know everything either! It takes the collective effort of many to truly provide a well-rounded collection that supports your degree programs. Collaboration is key, especially for solo librarians with limited time and resources, but this applies to all librarians.

The information in this article is the collaborative result of five of the Association of Christian Librarian's (ACL's) solo librarians and was presented to the Solo Librarian Interest Group at the 2021 ACL Conference. Some of the comments from other solos during the presentation discussion are also included.

By using resources already at your disposal and by building a rapport with experts in their field, you can share the collection development responsibility and maintain a robust and relevant library.

LibGuides

Springshare describes a LibGuide as “an easy-to-use content management system deployed at thousands of libraries worldwide. Librarians use it to curate knowledge and share information, organize class and subject specific resources, and to create and manage websites” (Springshare, 2020). A dedicated librarian has already put in the

hours to formulate lists of their best resources and has made those lists public. Using other LibGuides to help formulate our collections falls under the “work smarter, not harder” category.

Please note librarians use other platforms which are classified as open source. SubjectsPlus is likely the best example of an open source alternative to LibGuides. Some libraries use website options such as WordPress or Weebly. This information concerns finding guides on the internet that you can borrow from. It may be worth doing searches that include “Library guide AND Your Subject” as well as the specifics listed below.

How can we be sure that their resources line up with what our institution teaches? Jon has a few valuable suggestions.

- If you are in biblical higher education, think of other colleges, universities, and seminaries that theologically line up with yours and look at their sites. The same can be true for liberal arts colleges.
- Search ‘LibGuide AND Bible’ or whatever area you are pursuing. Basic Google searches in the areas you are developing may yield positive results.
- Consider LibGuides Community (n.d.). This allows you to search through guides, institutions, librarians, and ‘Springy Picks’ that feature some Springshare favorites.
- Consider colleges close to you geographically. Baptist Bible College, is Springfield, Missouri (an institution represented among the authors) is close to another college that, although they do not have the same denominational base, has many similar textbooks and resources.
- *The Christian Librarian* offers book reviews reviewed by your fellow ACL librarians.
- And, of course, our own ACL website has various LibGuides available under Resources and within the Sections (Bible Core, Liberal Arts, etc.)

Using resources from available LibGuides can greatly reduce your research hours and help develop your collection based on the recommendations of like-minded professionals.

Faculty, your local experts

It only makes sense that those whom your institution has hired to teach are the best ones to offer resources for their courses. But not all institutions are blessed with faculty who fully support the efforts of their librarians. Developing relationships and rapport with even just a few key faculty members may turn the collaborative tide.

If you have never tried asking your faculty for help developing your collection or have struggled to gain their attention, Jim Mancuso (from Northeastern Baptist College) has a few do's and don'ts to consider. Not all institutions are the same, but there are a few methods that he has experienced that you may want to avoid.

- Oftentimes, blind general emails do not elicit responses. If your finely-crafted email is even read, it may still end up in delete folders by the end of the day.
- Announcements in faculty meetings may generate enthusiasm, but they, too, may be pushed down the priority list of our well-meaning faculty.
- Likewise, recommendations at professional development programs tend to be politely ignored because they may feel that the general 'ask' does not really apply to them.

There are a few methods, however, that may give you more faculty involvement in developing your resources. You may find the personal approach far more effective.

- Drop into a colleague's office or send an email specifically to them or sit with someone at a school event to build a casual rapport. This can benefit you not only as individuals, but it can open doors for conversations such as collection development. And we can never underestimate those perhaps unplanned God-given opportunities that create a sincere enthusiasm that may lead to a collaborative relationship!
- Consider specific requests with closure. For example, you may ask a faculty member for specific books by a certain period to use a specific portion of your budget. Jim has found that this has sometimes led professors to come to the library to see what is available to provide better recommendations. Letting them know that you are willing to spend your budget dollars on their area can be a great motivator.
- Request their bibliography. Although it may be posted in their syllabi, it may be an abbreviated version or something specific to just that course. There may be other books within their broader field that would be beneficial. Request a time that you can get together to find out what they need. (We will expand this idea later in the article.)
- Communicate stories of student needs. Let the instructor know that their students are presently working on an assignment dealing with X, but you only have a limited number of resources in that area, and you want to know what you should be buying. The instructor may then know books off the top of his/her head that were used to prepare for that class or are most used in that field.

Engaging the faculty not only builds your library, but it also creates ongoing relationships that can prove valuable for both you and your students.

Using a form

Faculty, like students and librarians, respond to different things. Some may respond to open conversations. Those who cross their t's and dot their i's may respond better to a fillable form that is more concrete. Grace Andrews from Wesley Biblical Seminary designed a form that allows the instructor to give his/her individual course needs. This doubles as a 'how can I help you and your students' instructional tool and a 'hey, remember there is a library here and if you send your students to me, I can help' marketing tool.

In Andrews' Library Support Form, designed per semester per course, the instructor provides the required and recommended texts. It also gives space for assignments with their due dates and comment section, which gives you a heads-up on assignments so you can be better prepared when students come in for help. This also gives you topics for in-class orientation opportunities designed specifically for those assignments. By providing space for additional resource suggestions and general comments, Andrews has found that the more boxes she includes on the form, the more information they are inclined to provide.

Even for those who are less likely to use the form, the faculty are aware of the request for suggestions, which may create useful conversations if the professor drops by or has a book from their personal collection that they want the library to purchase. For a workable copy of that form, contact Andrews at the email provided.

The Librarian's Manual

ACL has worked tirelessly to provide resources for librarians, whether you are new to librarianship or seasoned with experience. Deborah McConkey has found *The Librarian's Manual* to be a valuable resource for many different areas pertaining to being a librarian and library development.

Under Publications on the ACL (n.d.) website, you will find *The Librarian's Manual*, which is described as follows: "*The Librarian's Manual* is a text for beginning librarians, especially those with little or no training. The goal of this manual is to teach a high standard of library practice yet be usable by people who know little about libraries, worked in less than ideal situations, and may or may not have a fluent knowledge of English. It has been used in training workshops in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe." This is also available in Spanish.

The table of contents provided shows several pages regarding collection development that cover book selections and acquisition, as well as tips for cataloging, serials, library services, etc. You can check this out or order one for yourself (physical or .pdf) at ACL's web-site: <http://www.acl.org/index.cfm/publications/librarians-manual/>.

Alongside of *The Librarian's Manual*, McConkey also suggests that a mentor who can help your areas of need, such as collection development. ACL also provides mentoring.

Don't reinvent the wheel

There is information already available in our institutions that can be used as collection development resources. Renee Carey has identified two ways to use what you have to gain faculty buy-in while effectively growing your collection.

First, all courses require a syllabus. Most institutions require that each syllabus include a suggested reading list for students to use for further study. It would make sense that this list would include the best books on that subject. The syllabus can be, then, an automatic acquisitions wish list. As a caution, for instructors who have been teaching the same class for 30 years, their list may be somewhat outdated. This process may bring this to the instructor's mind and help your students in the long run.

Consider going through each suggested/recommended reading list to see what you already have in the library (this is a good student worker project). Then let that instructor know which titles of their suggested reading books the library has and which titles the library does not currently have and ask them for their top five or however many you are likely to purchase. This conversation does several things:

- It lets the instructor know that you are paying attention to their class.
- As already mentioned, you are giving them credibility as the expert in that subject area and that you need and want their help.
- You are directly supporting that class, which gives evidence to your accreditation agency that you are supporting your degree programs.
- You may get not only resources from the syllabus, but you may also get recommendations that were not listed.

Using a syllabus can also simplify the paperwork. Just highlight your wish list resources or write on it the instructor's suggestions and put it in a file until you are ready to purchase. When purchased, you know which instructor to notify to let them know that those resources are now available for their students in that course. Mancuso has also developed an Amazon wish list for donors who would like to contribute. Donors can choose from the list and have the resources sent directly to your library.

Second, let your faculty help sort your donations. We all spot books that we know we do not want. We can get rid of those by giving away or selling them, using myemptyshelves.com, betterworldbooks.com, finding a local person who wants to

sell books to support their organization, giving to a prison or homeless shelter, etc. But after the initial sort, you may still question whether the remaining sources are the best ones to keep. Consider grouping the books by subject matter, then having an instructor who teaches in that field go through the box(es) to identify what should be kept. This can be done with adjunct professors as well. As long as there are not too many at a time, many instructors enjoy going through books and are willing to help. The conversation usually lends itself to, 'well, this is good, but this other book or newer edition is better.' You can then add that book to your wish list.

Conclusion

Developing your library collection takes time, but you do not have to be an expert in every subject, nor do you have to do it alone. In addition to improving faculty relationships and student instruction, distributing your efforts between resources and colleagues both on and off your campus may help you use your time wisely and can result in a more robust, intentional collection. †

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Grace Andrews is Director of Library Services at Wesley Biblical Seminary. She can be contacted at gandrews@wbs.edu.

Renee Carey is Librarian at Faith Bible College. She can be contacted at rcarey@faithbiblecollege.edu.

Jon Jones is Director of Library and Academic Services at Baptist Bible College. He can be contacted at jjones@gobbc.edu.

J. James Mancuso is Head Librarian at Northeastern Baptist College. He can be contacted at j.mancuso@nebcvt.org.

Deborah H. McConkey is Library Director at Epic Bible College. She can be contacted at mcconkeyd@gmail.com.

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