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## Everything Counts Toward Book Collection Development

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# Everything Counts Toward Book Collection Development



**Terry Kennedy, Library Director  
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The development of the institution's library book collection is one of the most important and fulfilling roles of the academic librarian. This task has become even more complex and difficult with the addition of e-book collections, but in almost all libraries the physical book collection is still of importance. Foundational to development of any book collection, whether in electronic or physical format, is the establishment of a collection development policy. The policy should delineate the academic level at which publications in various subject areas will be purchased, the comprehensiveness of the collection, formats, price levels, treatment of donations, and allowance for challenges to items that individual library users are not comfortable having in the collection. We all need to re-visit our collection development policy annually as publishing, curricular, and technology issues will necessitate an update.

Collection development can be challenging for beginner librarians. The late Allen Smith, Simmons Library School instructor, offered this advice: "In order to be really good as a librarian, everything counts towards your work, every play you go see, every concert you hear, every trip you take, everything you read, everything you know. The more you know, the better you're going to be" (Allen Smith Quotes, n. d.). With the foundation of the collection development policy in mind, the librarian doing acquisitions applies all of her/his life experience to identify potential materials to add to the book collection.

To assist me in collection development, I glance through all the book reviews in all of the academic journals to which our library subscribes and make notes of titles I consider potential additions. However, my approach does not end with academic book reviews. As an example of my methods, for one month I kept track of the additional sources I used for collection development. They included: following up on an author's work after hearing him being interviewed on the radio, looking through a publisher's catalog, checking our collection against the list of a well-known author's works listed in his obituary, a suggestion from an alumnus of our institution, looking at the titles in stock in the bookstore of another institution, and book reviews in news magazines and newspapers. Additionally, I attended a student presentation at which I was made aware of a subject area in which library

holdings were not strong and I followed up with the major author to whom the student referred. I also received an email from a former colleague in which he recommended a book. I saw several titles referred to in articles in a major literary and cultural magazine. While reading a business magazine, I saw a bookshelf in a picture and followed through on titles on the shelves!

As time and necessity allow, I follow through with finding book reviews of the above titles. Further selection is determined by the book budget. While some librarians do not prefer to divide the collection budget into subject areas, I do so as I do not trust that my personal preferences or selections from faculty will not skew the collection balance. At the beginning of each budget cycle, I ask faculty for recommended titles and ask them to select from the titles I have brought together in their subject areas throughout the year. This assists the faculty in keeping up with current publications in their subject area and encourages cooperation between the faculty and the librarian. Additionally, the faculty will become aware that the librarian is bringing a level of expertise to shaping the library collection. Checking the faculty bibliographies in syllabi is always worthwhile, but it cannot be guaranteed that the library budget will permit purchasing all of the titles found therein. The smaller the budget, the more difficult the selection process.

What is the result of careful acquisition of books for your library? Over time, your library collection will grow and develop. It is very rewarding to hear a patron say, "I can't believe you have this book. It's *exactly* what I need." When working with students on their research, it is very fulfilling to see them using books you have added to the collection. Assessment of usage can show the effectiveness of your selections.

In summary, a good collection development policy is foundational to selecting materials for your library collection. Use other life experiences and reading to add potential titles. Consult with faculty, as they are subject specialists. Careful, resourceful, and continuous book selection will result in a useful, effective, and productive book collection. †

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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