Collection Development Exercise: San Jose Public Library

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Abstract

This paper involves an exercise in collection development involving a scenario in which the author is hired by the San Jose Public Library and tasked with expanding the collection on a USD $500.00 budget against the constraints and demands of the greater San Jose community. An exploration of methodology, philosophy and rationale precedes a proposed, itemized record list.
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The reasoning to follow is based upon several assumptions provided by the instructor for purposes of this exercise, provided in a set of instructions. Such instructions inform the author on the nature of the San Jose community, including trends, constraints, development policy and expectations. These factors will not be summarized here but nevertheless inform the rationales and methodology to follow.

Philosophy

A collection is capable of furnishing knowledge on various subject areas appropriate to the institutional design of the library. A complete or well developed collection involves one which covers all subject areas and is capable of servicing the needs of the patron. Where possible a collection’s weak spots should be isolated and improved. Weak spots involve an insufficient capacity for meeting the demands of the community of patrons. Funds are wisely allocated to areas with the most use, although certain core works should always be present in a library, regardless of frequency of use. Core works are defined as those which are considered indispensable to subject study. In this regard a good collection should have the flexibility to sustain more focused subject study, but also more general and popular access; the collection must have a dynamic range, and not cater simply to the demand of the moment. For a library is more than simply a warehouse of popular books: it should also be capable of covering greater domains of knowledge and study in a systematic and exhaustive fashion. This is especially true to academic libraries, which inform and support curricula of coursework.
That being said the ultimate goal of a library is to serve the trending demands of the patrons. While a collection should strive to have a “core” collection in respective subject areas, it should also dedicate the vast majority of periodic development funds to the most pressing of patron needs. For instance, a community with a new and large influx of Hispanics might profit from the acquisition of records appropriate to and covering such a demographic. A community which recently has embraced “green” technologies would similarly profit from the purchase of records dealing with that subject area, assuming it was necessarily within the purview of the library at hand. The nature and demands of the community are central in informing development for public libraries, and without a close inspection and understanding of the region, development is filled with folly. Unlike an academic, corporate or other specialized library where a collection is task-oriented to cover specific intellectual areas of study, the public library is a more elusive creature and requires empathy and good public awareness on the part of developers.

The sort of record medium to be purchased is a vital consideration. Mass market paperbacks rarely outlive a decade, especially in humid or poorly maintained environmental conditions. Even trade paper quality books have a lackluster lifespan. As in centuries past, cloth and skin have the best prospects for avoiding the “slow fires.” Where possible these records must be selected over mass market manufactures, especially if the record will seemingly have enduring value in a collection and could be used by the upcoming generations to come. The complexities of digital preservation are also critical to consider, although far outside the scope of this paper. Ultimately digital records must enter a system which considers format vs access, obsolescence, neglect, bit rot, metadata
and findability to list a few factors. Ad-hoc digital collections, formed without a
deliberate digital preservation plan lead to disaster. The medium must be considered
against the preservation scheme and means of a library. Of course, economics has the
most glaring impact on such considerations: cloth books are often an order of magnitude
more expensive than their paperback alternatives. The durability of a medium must be
considered against the greater lapses in subject area coverage.

The content of a record should also be considered before purchase. Where
possible records should be qualified as “core” works by academic or trusted review
sources to ensure their quality. While non-core works have a place within a public
library, they should not be prioritized over core works in the domain of general
circulation development. Ultimately the content of the records in a library’s collection
will be specific to the institutional design, as well as the collection development policy.
Regardless: content should be considered, and a good developer always ensures the
viability of a record within a collection intellectually.

Rationale

Developing for San Jose Public Library, given the constraints of the scenario was
difficult. The obvious course of action would have been to purchase ESL books given the
increasing ESL demographic; however purchase of language titles is prohibited. Another
clear area which should be developed is audio-visual materials, as the current demand is
high and the collection is meager, yet here again purchase is prohibited. These two areas
are clear failings of the collection and should logically be improved upon. Given that
these areas are off limits the author has focused on developing the collection along the
lines of general usage, demand and interest, i.e. bullet paragraph four of the assignment
instructions. In sum the various patron categories were considered within the context of user age, as only 9% of the community is reported to be geriatric.

The selection criteria were overwhelmingly contextual. The author selected various records across appropriate categories of patron interest (i.e. car repair, home improvement, parenting, investments etc) and used his discretion in selecting recreational records for exploratory reading. There were no clear subject coverage gaps (other than the aforementioned ones, which are off limits) thus selection of records for purchase was done in a more discretionary rather than procedural manner. Year of publication was prioritized where possible, as subject areas of interest were exploded for consideration.

Methodology

The list to follow was constructed using Bowker’s Book Analysis tool, an online software which compiles all well-reviewed “core” records into an interactive, subject separated database. Bowker’s Book Analysis record lists are compiled from various sources: booklists, New York Time’s reviews, academic reviews and sources such as Wilson Catalog. If this tool was not availed to the author a prudent alternative would be to consider the Wilson Public Library Catalog in print, an expansive tome published every four years (last edition: 2008) which lists various core records for public libraries.

Using Bowker’s Book Analysis records were isolated for general audiences and books in print, then prioritized by year and filtered by subject under Dewey Decimal Classification. Searches were further defined by prohibiting undergraduate, graduate and faculty (academic) selections from the record list, with a preference indicated for general works. This search enabled the application of the aforementioned rationale and philosophy to be quickly and efficiently applied in the work of collection development.
The List

**Dewey 0XX:**


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The Continental Aesthetics Reader Cazeaux, Clive TAYLOR & FRANCIS GROUP 111/.85/094 USD 50.00 Trade Paper 2011

Grimoires: A History of Magic Books Davies, Owen OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INCORPORATED 133.4409 USD 29.95 Trade Cloth 2009

The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them Batuman, Elif FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX 891.7/09 USD 15.00 Trade Paper

The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson Charyn, Jerome NORTON, W. W. & COMPANY, INCORPORATED 813/.54 USD 24.95 Trade Cloth 2010

**Dewey 6XX:**


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<td>Addiction: A Disorder of Choice</td>
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