(Re)Connecting (with) the Research and Teaching Needs of Social Sciences Faculty through Collections

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Abstract:

Significant collection budget cuts created the opportunity to reengineer the way the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) Library managed its collection development. The library leveraged its membership in the University of California Consortium, adopted Demand Driven Acquisitions, and moved to a divisional (discipline) based approach to collection management and outreach. Further, the Social Sciences Divisional Collections Team capitalized on the opportunity presented by the reorganization of collections management and raised the level of engagement with the faculty. This, in turn, improved the ability to support divisional faculty collection needs. Methodologies and general findings are outlined. While the budgetary and consortial circumstances are specific to the UCSC campus, several of the individual elements of the UCSC situation are highly adaptable to other libraries. DDA can be implemented in whole or in part to help alleviate pressures on budget and/or staffing levels. Similarly, a divisional approach to collections can be implemented anywhere. Even without the benefit of a large consortial partner, these approaches can be executed to ensure campus collection needs are met effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: needs assessment, interviews, collections, social sciences faculty, demand driven acquisitions, consortium

Introduction

The University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) is one of ten campuses that comprise the University of California (UC) System. In addition to licensing and purchasing on individual campuses, the libraries in the UC system cooperatively license and acquire online resources through the California Digital Library (CDL). The CDL manages the licensing, coordinates

payments to vendors, and is responsible for the Shared Cataloging Program for the system's shared acquisitions.

The UCSC Library supports 16,000 undergraduate and 1500 graduate students [http://www.ucop.edu/operating-budget/_files/documents/2014-15.pdf]. In Fiscal Year 15/16, the Library's collection budget, excluding restricted funds, was $2.8 million dollars. The library commits approximately 72% of its collection budget to CDL-licensed resources. The remaining funds support three small European language approval profiles, one small Chinese language print Demand Driven Acquisitions plan (DDA), two small art approval profiles, local journal subscriptions, and an English language DDA profile.

Collections support falls under the Library's Research Support Services (RSS) Department. RSS is comprised of four librarians, three staff people, and one Department Head. RSS librarians manage the research and teaching support needs of the upper division undergraduates, graduate students and faculty. Additionally, RSS librarians are responsible for overseeing non-DDA collection requests for all UCSC faculty, students and staff and for spending subject-specific endowment funds. The RSS department manages its teaching, research and collections support responsibilities through divisional teams: the Science & Engineering team and the Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences Team. The Department Head manages local and system-wide acquisitions, the approval profiles, the DDA plan, and represents the UCSC campus on system-wide collections and licensing committees.

As a result of the economic downturn, between 2009 and 2012, the library's collection budget was reduced by $1.6 million dollars (no adjustments for inflation included) - or about half. Consequently, the UCSC Library made two decisions about its collection development policies:

1. To reduce costs and ensure access at the point of patron need, the English language approval profile would become a DDA plan
2. The majority of the collection budget would continue to be committed to the CDL-negotiated large journal and society publisher packages.

In order to ensure that patrons were provided the broadest possible selection of resources, the entire approval plan (both books, auto-shipped and books slipped for librarian action) was loaded into the catalog. The option of print or electronic versions of the same title were made available. If a book had both an electronic and a print discovery record, both records were loaded into the catalog. Patrons could select the title of need and at the point of invoicing the duplicative record was removed from the catalog.

A comparison of the library's approval spend from FY 2010/2011 to FY 2014/2015 revealed a reduction in spending on monographs of 65%. DDA did what was anticipated: it allowed the library to keep content accessible to the community at the point of need and it relieved pressure on the collection budget. Further, it presented new opportunities for librarians with collections responsibilities to connect with their user populations. In 2014, in response to staffing reductions and a hiring freeze, the library moved away from the one librarian to several departments model of collection support. RSS librarians were charged with conducting division-level and department-level needs assessments. The goal was to move the remaining RSS librarians to a divisional approach to collections support. The Social Sciences Team's efforts and the opportunities created through their needs assessment work are described below.

Needs Assessment Project

At the same time the collections budget and the collection management model were being redefined, the library's staffing levels were also evolving. Through general attrition and retirements—positions lost during the economic downturn—and a series of reorganizations, a smaller RSS Department was formed from the remaining Collection Development staff and staff reassigned from general Reference and Instruction. The two librarians in the Social Sciences Team, who were previously responsible for a small number of department-level collections but primarily focused on reference and instruction, were now overseeing collections support for the entire Social Sciences Division.

To address the transition from working with individual departments, the Social Sciences Team spent time determining how to ensure individual departments could be effectively represented in a divisional approach. The team was particularly interested in determining how unique or similar the collection needs of the departments were. The team selected semi-structured interviews as their methodology and in order to ensure breadth of representation and to keep the process manageable, the team selected the Social Sciences Department Chairs as the interview subjects.

Anecdotal data implied, and local campus Ithaka survey results later confirmed, that faculty viewed the library's primary function as a purchaser of needed content. This made it clear that faculty would be receptive to discussions about collection needs. Using the subject line "Invitation: Coffee with Librarians," each Social Sciences Chair was invited to a meeting. All eight chairs accepted and a separate meeting with each chair was scheduled. Interviews were held at different locations: the library café, the university café, and the office of the chair. Both team members were in attendance; one librarian was in charge of asking questions, while both took notes. Interviews were approximately one hour. The team used a prepared set of questions and asked follow up questions as needed.

The team asked the following questions:

1. How do UCSC [fill in department] faculty use academic journals and books in their research? What other material types fill this role? How might this vary across your department?
2. What types of resources (i.e. Data Sets, media) do you see faculty in [your department] needing in their research? How might this vary your across department?
3. Would these be different from sources/resources you expect students to use in courses you're teaching? Follow up: How well do student comprehend literature in your academic field?
4. Do [fill in department] faculty use outside funding to purchase research materials the library doesn't currently provide? Follow up: If funding is obtained from grants, where do materials end up?
5. When we receive requests for on-going journal subscriptions or resources (such as data sets or online archives) we often suggest co-funding to offset costs. Would your department be able to co-fund these? Follow up: How would this question, addressed to faculty from the library, be perceived?
6. Do you maintain personal subscriptions to subject specific academic journals the library does not have? Follow up: If so, did you check if the library already had a copy?

7. We endeavor to purchase materials that a wide number of researchers can use. We're interested in your suggestions on how to obtain broader input on a request for purchase that seems specific to one professor or project.
8. What's the best way to communicate with your department to learn more about their research needs?
9. To better communicate with faculty, we're trying to determine an appropriate term to describe our department's version of petty cash *"the money provided by campus (savings/non permanent) that is meant for one-time/ spend-within-the-year purchases."* Does your department have a term for these funds that we can use in our messaging?

The first interview was conducted in winter 2014. The team debriefed with the RSS department head, and made minor refinements to the questions. The team then conducted the remaining seven interviews, debriefing after each meeting and transcribing notes using a shared Google Drive document. The final interview was conducted in spring 2014. The team conducted interviews with all eight Social Sciences Departments. Three of the eight chairs were new to their department, one had changed affiliation; two were in interim roles. One of the three referred the team to a senior faculty member from the department to interview.

Despite the small sample size, department chairs proved to be valuable subjects for their perspectives as both faculty and administrators. They spoke about their specific research, but also generalized to the faculty in their departments, including differences among new and senior faculty.

A UCSC psychology graduate student was consulted about qualitative interviews and approaches to analyzing the data during the summer of 2014. The interview process provided the team with a more comprehensive understanding of Social Sciences faculty needs which were similar across the departments.

General findings from the interviews:

- Departmental chairs, who manage with budgets and small staff, appreciated to the library's funding and staffing predicament.
- Library budget reductions and cuts to journals impacted faculty perceptions about requesting materials (two chairs reported avoiding asking the library to purchase new titles)
- They relied heavily on journal articles, books, and edited books (working papers and conference proceedings were specific to disciplines). Online journals were preferred, as were printed books.
- Several described their work as humanities-like, utilizing history and theory in their essays and writings.
- Some faculty gathered their own data, reused government data; newer faculty were interested in proprietary data sets; video as data/source material was also mentioned.
- Video use in teaching was prevalent
- Student use of sources was an area of concern (two chairs were concerned with evaluating skills need; others described workarounds such as lowered expectations or easier readings)
- Few grants in general, with the exception of two departments
- Departmental funds are not as readily available for co-funding opportunities with the library (three of the eight departments were in a position to co-fund)

- Each academic quarter is devoted to specific activities that result in faculty being busier some quarters more than others.

As a result of this engagement the team is able to make better, more holistic, and informed decisions about how collections are managed. The following are a few examples of how the project impacted the team's work:

- By taking a divisional view the team is able to support the departments more consistently and evenly with purchases than when the collection model supported individual departments separately. Understanding is now broader than one department.
- The interviews opened new channels of communication with faculty through consultations and by creating new opportunities for faculty to provide input. Consultations with faculty have included orienting them to local collection practices, consortial agreements and privileges as well as to the team's teaching support services - specifically how they may enhance their teaching goals. To gather their feedback, the team has enabled input about new resources by increasing the number of trials offered and by increasing the level of promotion around trials. The team also added a feedback mechanism, providing an online survey to formally assess the trialed resources.
- In the area of teaching support, the needs assessment results became central to re-imagining teaching support. By focusing on how faculty viewed the role of collection in their courses, and their perceptions of how students interacted with the materials, the team understood better how to message with and work with faculty in their courses.

Conclusion

Three circumstances converged to create the opportunity for UCSC to refocus its collections approach: the economic downturn of 2009, our participation in the UC consortium, and the adoption of Demand Driven Acquisitions. The budget cuts and staff attrition forced a pragmatic review of our collections policy and practice. Membership in the UC system afforded the chance to hold onto the majority of journal subscriptions under the most affordable and best terms. DDA allowed the library to radically reduce spending on approval plan purchases. Further, and most significantly, DDA created the time and space needed for the collections librarians to connect more broadly and evenly with faculty. Finally, the divisional approach to collections support allowed a small staff of librarians to engage beyond the department-to-department level and expand their understanding of the broader campus collection needs. While the budgetary and consortial circumstances are specific to the UCSC campus, several of the individual elements of this situation are highly adaptable to other libraries. DDA can be implemented in whole or in part to help alleviate pressures on budget and/or staffing levels. Similarly, a divisional approach to collections can be implemented anywhere. Even without the benefit of a large consortial partner, these approaches can these approaches can be implemented to ensure campus collection needs are met effectively and efficiently.

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