

WHAT NOW?

On her first day as a liaison librarian not so long ago, Kelly Johnson was filled with excitement but also trepidation. Core duties such as learning and teaching support were safely in her comfort zone. Collection management, however, was still more theory than practice.

My anxiety point was taking on responsibility for a subject area quite different from my educational background. This is not a horror story so I can say upfront that I didn't accidentally blow the budget. Instead, I applied my newly acquired library and information skills to the task and now confidently make decisions to improve our collection. I'd like to share my personally tested tips and strategies for others to use when faced with an inbox of new title lists, publisher blurbs, and looming deselection project deadlines.

First, the fun part – buying stuff! Imagine you are given the power of selection. Don't let it go to your head. The vast majority of organisations have some checks and balances and, as the newbie, you will not be the last person to approve a purchase.

Before starting, think strategically about your users' profile and organisation's mission. For me, that included researching the key research and teaching areas in my discipline. Next, I put on my old school librarian hat, browsed the catalogue and worked my Library of Congress Subject Headings to discover what we were already collecting. Then I listened and asked questions.

I constantly talk to my fellow librarians; I ask academics about their research areas and interests and I communicate in many forums that I am very happy to take suggestions for purchases. Trust me – if you make it clear you have money to spend you will get lots of takers. Another pro tip is to check out what libraries with similar users hold. If a comparable university has significantly more available in a subject area than we do then I think I'd better start investigating.

But the most important point is that you never stop doing all of these things. The worst kind of collection is a static collection. Even institutions focusing on historical items should be always adding and strengthening their holdings to match the needs of their users.

You are now probably saying, "Wait, where are we going to put all this stuff?" Good question. If you are working in a library that is blessed with an actual acquisitions budget then you are indeed lucky. However, you will need to think about physical space limitations unless you want to be



Kelly Johnson: starting out in collection management

featured on the next episode of *Hoarders*. Don't think you can hide the mess online either. Even though you don't see it when walking in the door, clogging up your catalogue with outdated, unused electronic resources makes it just as difficult for users to find relevant information.

I have to admit, deselection was the hardest thing to get used to. I say "was" because I have converted (almost) completely to the 'content not container' crew. I still love to hold a beautiful copy of a book or journal which was lovingly designed but my focus must always be the usefulness for the intended audience. We do have these little treasures in our collection although not necessarily in the sections that I oversee. Even though I'm a little sad to see older, superseded editions go, I try to remember that keeping them could actually be detrimental to a student's learning and also take up valuable space that can be used for study or collaboration purposes.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Library, like most organisations, has deselection plans and procedures which help me structure my thinking. Outside these guidelines I basically follow the same thought processes as selection. For example, I have to keep track of changes in teaching and research focus and deselect accordingly. This is especially important in my subject area of health. Of course, every organisation is different but the main thing to remember again is don't panic! Unless you are working in a library subject to strict regulations and collecting policies it is very unlikely anything you deselect cannot be repurchased. If there are rare no-touch items someone will surely tell you. Also, last copy issues are reduced because of shared collections such as the BONUS+ scheme in some universities, document delivery and open access repositories.

So that's it. You are now ready to manage a collection whether it is stored on bookshelves, in the cloud or who knows, someday, on a chip inserted into your brain.

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