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Annotated Bibliography: Collection Development in Archives

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Introduction: This paper consists of an annotated bibliography on the topic of collection development in archives. For this assignment, an emphasis was placed on including those 10 articles which offered relevant perspectives on this topic. All publications have been verified as scholarly journal publications and/or publications suitable for this paper. All listed articles have been copied and are available upon request.


This article referenced collection development concepts from Jutta Reed-Scott and Faye Phillips. The author suggested that documentation strategy could help the archive better articulate and refine its collecting scope. This refined collecting scope would extend to both the type and subject matter of the archival materials collected. The author emphasized the importance of establishing a comprehensive collection acquisition policy. This policy would include collection analysis, acquisition planning, and knowledge of other repository holdings. Documentation strategy was introduced as a method to help archives avoid duplicating collections held by other institutions. The author stressed the importance of analyzing institutional holdings, creating a written collection development plan, and having a coherent appraisal policy. This article was determined to be of excellent quality and very relevant to the topic of collection development as it introduced the documentation strategy model as a tool for collection analysis. The appropriate audience would be a novice or an archival professional with experience.

A research study was conducted in 1983 at the Washington State University Library. This library houses manuscripts, archives and special collections. The study was initiated by the university to identify the best method to deal with the growing backlog of unprocessed collections. The study undertook a numerical analysis of the processing of manuscript and archival materials. A methodology based on retrospective analysis, was utilized. The goal was to ascertain the time required to complete the necessary processing to making primary sources available for research use. The study analysis proved useful in planning staff responsibilities, processor assignments, budgets, and other management data. Despite the dated nature of this study, the study illustrated the usefulness of engaging in a materials survey. The article was of excellent quality as well as very relevant to collection development. The appropriate audience would be an archival professional with experience or an archival administrator.


The author addressed budgetary problems faced by archives. Due to budgetary issues, institutions have had limited resources for collection acquisition and development. The author asserted that due to shrinking budget, archives have had problems in managing existing collections and processing new accessions. The author suggested that a market-oriented approach to collection development would be desirable as it would align archives with researcher needs. This approach would
place priorities on the selection and acquisition of materials based on the popularity of the collection. The author defended this theory by asserting that archives and their collections are archives of the people, not the property of the archive. The author's approach to collection decision-making appeared to be unique. The article was of excellent quality as well as highly relevant to collection development. It demonstrated an alternative viewpoint for the prioritizing of archival resources. The appropriate audience would be a novice or an archival professional with experience.


This paper is from a lecture presented at the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries. The author was appointed as the director of the American Heritage Center (AHC) archive in 2002. His lecture detailed efforts by the AHC to create a formal collecting and collection management policy. The author was faced with an archive which had only 34% of its collections processed and only 20% cataloged online. This necessitated comprehensive planning and the re-organization of staff responsibilities. A collection management policy was developed in 2002. Collection development was addressed by reviewing collections based on category, topical area, and patron usage. Some collections were earmarked for de-accessioning or significant reduction. Appraisal guidelines were adopted for existing and future collections. This article is of superior quality and very relevant to the topic of collection development as the author documented his on-site collection management efforts. The appropriate audience would range from a novice to an archival administrator.

Collections held by the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC), University of Minnesota, were examined. Two surveys were conducted on their holdings. Based on the survey results, the author noted that collection policies could be too general and indiscriminate to make full use of the institution’s resources. Collection development policies could vary from archive to archive. The author suggested that collection relevancy should be based on a collection policy which draws a boundary between relevant and non-relevant materials. Also, archives should strive to ensure that future collections compliment existing ones in areas of ethnicity, geography, topical and chronological relevancy. Despite the dated nature of this paper, the surveys illustrated the usefulness of analyzing collection weaknesses to ensure core collection focus. The article was of excellent quality and very relevant to collection development as it provided a method to gauge the appropriateness of collection acquisitions. The appropriate audience would be a novice or an archival professional with experience.


This paper examined two case studies in archival collections: the Amelia Earhart collection at Purdue University and organizational labor records at the Georgia State University Library. The question faced by both archives was how to make additions to existing collections without making access confusing for researchers. Purdue’s Earhart collection was small, so reprocessing of the entire collection was
chosen. In contrast, Georgia’s labor records were part of a much larger collection. It received newly retired records on a regular basis. The Georgia library elected to tag the records as they arrived and update the series information in the catalog. The two case studies are examples of intellectual and physical control. The article was found to be of excellent quality. It was extremely relevant to the topic of collection development as it demonstrated how two institutions analyzed their collections and utilized different methods to incorporate new materials. The appropriate audience would be an archival professional with experience or an archival administrator.


This paper presented the results of a pilot study conducted on university archival collecting policies. The framework of this study was proposed by Faye Phillips in 1984. The study utilized a content analysis of collection policies as available on the websites of university archives. The goal was to determine how many archival institutions had established collection policies. The survey found 38 archives with written collection policies, but only 5 had provisions for monitoring their collections and reviewing collection developmental guidelines. The results of this study indicated limited prospects for institutions seeking to avoid collection duplication. And, many university archives would be limited in their ability to engage in cooperative collecting agreements due to their lack of established lending policies. This article was determined to be of excellent quality and very relevant to the topic of collection development. The appropriate audience would be an archival professional with experience or an archival administrator.

This paper focused on retired congressional papers held by the Center for Legislative Archives, at the National Archives. These records are typically transferred after the person leaves office. The author cited the documentation strategy as a tool to assist in determining which records are pertinent for retention. This strategy employed a policy statement which articulated the archive’s collection objectives and plans. The policy statements were deemed to be crucial as they helped define a specific plan for collection retention and development. The author presented a collection management plan which incorporated collection development. This plan could be modified and applied to any repository or archive. The records management plan would typically include the following criteria: appraisal, arrangement and description, and the facilitation of collection access for research use. The article was of excellent quality and highly relevant to collection development. The appropriate audience would be an archival professional with experience, or a records administrator.


This paper focused on the need for effective collection management as a tool for managing accessioned materials. The author highlighted four essential areas of collection management: collection planning, selection and acquisition of relevant collections, evaluation and analysis of existing collections, and cooperative collection development. The author noted the challenge of improving the public’s
access to papers and records. The study found a low percentage of researcher accessible, catalogued manuscript records. It also found the need for adequate financial incentives to foster the exchange of catalog data between archives. The enhancement of regional cooperatives was suggested as a method to reduce duplicating activities, limit fragmented collections, and decrease budgetary and staff constraints. Despite the dated nature of this article, the collection strategies make it extremely relevant for collection development. The quality of this article was very good. The appropriate audience would be an archival professional with experience or a records administrator.


In 1986 the Bentley Historical Library conducted a collections analysis project to study the strengths and weaknesses of its manuscript collection. The purpose of the project was to review the library’s collecting efforts with the objective of streamlining its collection development policies. The project sought to improve the library’s collecting efforts, as well as the effectiveness of the library’s limited field resources. One result of the project was the identification by staff of collections with incomplete holdings. The findings also reaffirmed the importance of controlling collection growth by enacting a revised set of guidelines for collecting decisions. I found the article to be extremely relevant to collection development as it demonstrated how an archive utilized survey data to improve the focus of it’s core holdings. The article was found to be of excellent quality due to the survey analysis. The appropriate audience for this paper would be an archival professional with experience or a records administrator.