OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES' COLLECTION ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Janet Webster
Guin Library
Hatfield Marine Science Center
Oregon State University
2030 Marine Science Drive
Newport, OR 97365 USA
Janet.Webster@orst.edu

ABSTRACT: Assessing the fisheries and wildlife collection at Oregon State University proved to be a useful venture. Using the WLN Conspectus framework, the librarian generated data on the collection that was used to describe its strengths and weaknesses. This glimpse at the process and some of the issues may be useful to others who are considering taking a hard look at their collections.

KEYWORDS: Collection Management; Collection Development – evaluation

Introduction:

During the 1999/2000 academic year, the librarians at Oregon State University used the WLN Conspectus as the framework for a systematic assessment of the collection (WLN Conspectus). This software tool accommodates inventory, acquisitions, and circulation information. Analysis of the information using the WLN Conspectus Guidelines made the librarians to take a hard look at the collection and summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the various parts of our collection.

Why assess the collection? The process forces you to take an objective look. It can be difficult to step back and really look at your collection. After years of purchases and the steady accumulation of journals, I thought I had a solid idea of the collection. The assessment process made me consider the age of certain parts of the collection, its gaps, its strengths, and its audience. Validating the strengths of your collection also builds a case for sustained or increased funding. Assessment helps identify gaps that can be corrected with purchases. It can also indicate purchasing shifts that reflect changes in research interests or publishing patterns. These shifts can translate into reallocation of funding. Finally, collection assessment helps identify areas that are outdated and in need of weeding. As the process forces you to physically examine the collection, second copies and under-used sections can be obvious. It helps to have others look at the collection and give their perceptions as users.

Below is a brief description of the WLN Conspectus tools followed by examples of how they were used at OSU to assess the Libraries' fisheries and wildlife collection as well as the Guin Library Collection.

WLN Conspectus Tools

Conspectus means "a general view" or "a survey." The WLN Conspectus provides a structure for doing a general survey of your collection. It divides the collection into 24 general areas that can be broken down more finely depending on the nature of the collection. The strengths of the Conspectus are the objective data you compile and the standards it provides to measure your collection against others. The tools include ones that help you compile collection, use, and comparative data.

Collection data are compiled using the online catalog. It is helpful to have staff members that are facile with various searching options in your OPAC. If significant parts of your collection are not catalogued electronically, these will be missed; manual compilation is time-consuming, so consider carefully if these parts are critical. Below are the types of information collected.

- Number of monographs and serials
- Number of audiovisual & electronic titles
- Median age of monographs
- Percentage of titles published in the last 5 and 10 years
- Acquisitions in the last 5 years

Use-oriented data includes the number of interlibrary loans borrowed, circulation statistics, and shelf walks with users. Circulation in an academic library is not the most valuable indicator of use. In large collections, the numbers may point out well-used sections or those that support the curriculum of large undergraduate departments. Such is the case with the fisheries collection at OSU where the circulation numbers are relatively high in relation to other areas of the collection. Inter-loan borrowing activity is a very general way to assess if the collection satisfies the majority of users. High levels may reflect a new research emphasis or a very real gap in holdings that should be corrected. The shelf walks provide a means for the librarian to discus the collection with selected users. The librarian walks through the collection with a faculty member discussing his or her use of the collection as well as the needs of their students. These walks often reinforce the findings of the data. The faculty point out areas that can be weeded or added to due to significant shifts in research or the curriculum.

Comparing your library holdings against standard bibliographies and serial lists derives comparative data. Finding appropriate, current bibliographies is difficult in the sciences. The Key Guide to Information series is helpful, but not comprehensive. Another way to compile a subject bibliography is using collections from other libraries in your field. Often, you can do comparable subject searches and compare holdings. Below are a few of the bibliographies used in the OSU Assessment.

- *Island Press Bibliography of the Environmental Literature* (Miller 1993)
- *Key Guide to Information Sources in Aquaculture* (Turnbull 1989)
- *Recommended List of Books and Other Information Resource for Zoo and Aquarium Libraries* (Kenyon 1996)
- *ISI: Journal Ranked by Impact Factor* (Institute for Scientific Information 1998)

Finally, the WLN Conspectus provides quantitative guidelines to convert your data into categories defining collection levels. The levels range from 1a (supports minimal inquiries) to 5 (highly specialized, comprehensive). At the OSU Libraries, we were aiming for 3c (supports masters level) to 4 (supports doctoral and independent research). Here are a few examples of how your data helps describe a collection level.

- If you have 15-20% of the titles in the major bibliographies, your collection is probably a 3a. It rises to a 3c if you have 50-70% of the titles.
- Generally, 10% of the collection should have a copyright date within the last 10 years. Science collections should be closer to 10% in the last five years.
- If you buy 10-15% of the US hardback publishing in the discipline, you would be at a 3a level. A 3c would be 25%.

Assessment Results

The final document for each discipline contains a description of the audience served as well as the findings. The introduction discusses the faculty and students from departments using the collection. It notes other sections of the collection that are related. For instance, the QLs or Zoology reinforce the holdings in the SHs or Applied Fisheries.

A general overview of the collection includes the title counts. Searching by call number ranges in the OSU Libraries online system found 19,716 titles in the Guin Collection. Not found through the system are older titles that have not been converted, most of the maps, and some of the microfiche collection; these are not included as manual counts would be too time-consuming. The counts also break down number of serials versus monographs as well as electronic titles. The Conspectus gives guidelines for collection level by size or number of titles; this is not relevant for small, specialized collections.

The age of the collection is assessed by call number ranges and is useful to identify areas of growth as well as those with depth, shifts in cataloging practices, and gaps in collecting. For example, the QA1-199s, Computer Science, should be relatively recent. The Guin Collection in this area had a median age of 1988 and with only 5% being purchases in the past 5 years. This points out a need to weed the section, and review my purchasing. I have not been buying books in this area as systems appear to change rapidly, and most users purchase their own manuals. Another example is in the SH331-337, Fisheries Processing. Here the median age is 1983 yet 32% of the tiles were

published in the last ten years. This reveals an area where older material is retained while new techniques added. This is a strength of the collection.

Comparing the collection to standard bibliographies is a classic method of identifying gaps and strengths. However, useful, contemporary bibliographies are hard to find. It seems that creating bibliographies is becoming a lost art as we quickly create temporary lists that serve a single need of the moment. This assessment process increased my appreciation for subject-specific bibliographies where time and effort were focused on collecting the best and most useful resources. I used more general bibliographies, gleaning the appropriate sections. These were searched against the collection. For example, the OSU collections had 84% of the tiles lists in the Smithsonian's *Recommended List of Books and Other Resources for Zoo and Aquarium Libraries*. The Guin Library in selected areas only had 34%. It had 89% of the marine mammal items but only 2% of the other mammals. This illustrates the problem with using general bibliographies to assess specialized collections as this bibliography covers primates to insects.

Collections at other similar libraries provide useful comparisons. I created "bibliographies" on marine mammals and fishery oceanography using the University of Washington and the Scripps Institute of Oceanography libraries' catalogues. This was fairly successful once the problems with inconsistent keyword searching and limiting methods were finagled. For example, a list of 171 titles with "marine mammals" was compiled using the advanced keyword searching in the University of Washington's Fisheries and Oceanography Library catalog. The Guin collection had 60% of the titles. Another attempt, "fisheries oceanography," was less successful, pointing to the inconsistent use of some subject headings. All in all, this specialized type of checking proves useful when assessing specialized collections.

The actual assessment document included the description of audience, numerical results, and discussion of those results. A matrix by call number provides a summary of the collection. (See Table 1.) The WLN Conspectus is a useful tool if the librarian uses it with insight and objectivity. The final assessment document becomes a means of monitoring the collection, communicating its history to others, and suggesting ways to enhance or modify it. As our collections are the foundation of our service, it behooves us to pay attention to them.

REFERENCES

Institute for Scientific Information. 1998. *SCI journal citation reports*. Philadelphia: Institute for Scientific Information.

Kenyon, Kay A. 1996. *Recommended List of Books and Other Information Resource for Zoo and Aquarium Libraries*. Washington: Smithsonian Institutions. [Online.] Available: http://www.sil.si.edu/SILPublications/zoo-aquarium/tpbib.htm [December 8, 2000].

Miller, Joseph A. (compiler) and The Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. 1993. *Island Press Bibliography of the Environmental Literature.* Washington: Island Press.

Turnbull, Dorothy A. 1989. *Keyguide to Information Sources in Aquaculture.* London; New York : Mansell Publishers.

WLN Conspectus. [Online.] Available: http://www.wln.com/wlnprods/aca/conspect.htm [December 8, 2000].

MANAGING GREAT BARRIER REEF PARK: THE LIBRARY'S ROLE

Jennifer Zadokovich
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
P.O. Box 1379
Townsville, Queensland, Australia 4810
jennyz@gbrmpa.gov.au

ABSTRACT: The Great Barrier Reef extends for over 2000 km along the Queensland coastline. The Federal Government established the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority performs its Management role in cooperation with the State of Queensland through a series of management Agreements . The Marine park is to provide for the protection, wise use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef in perpetuity through the care and development of the GBRMP. Credible management must be grounded in good information. information, together with interpretation/education are key strategies for the Authority. The Library is a key player in these strategies. Some of our strengths are our image collection, REEF database and our staff papers collection.