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ACS Scholarship to the Charleston Conference Essay

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Prompt: In this funding constrained environment, publishers and libraries are having to make tough choices. Where is YOUR library choosing to invest its funding and resources and where is it cutting back?

Like many other universities, the University of South Florida is going through a lean period, and our budget is not keeping pace with our growing demands. It's made us all reevaluate our priorities, particularly in the areas of collection development. There are certain things we've had to cut back on, but we are choosing to emphasize other areas of our collections that are shaping the future of our library, particularly online collections and repositories.

One thing we've had to cut back on is overall monograph selection. In order to do this without giving up the quality of our collection and to avoid underserving our faculty and students, we've moved to a patron-driven acquisition system to provide books "just in time rather than just in case." In addition to saving us money, it also cuts down on the people-resources needed to constantly purchase and catalog. The new system allows us to have several large packages of ebooks downloaded into our catalog; we don't actually make the purchase until our users have accessed the book a certain number of times. We've ended up buying several books through the PDA program that we probably wouldn't have otherwise realized we needed, which is an unexpected bonus. Since the books obtained this way are all ebooks, this also saves us physical space, which is at a premium in any library.

Instead of following collection development plans and considering all new books that come out, we're now trying to strategically build our "collections of distinction," which are specialized collections of relatively rare materials that other universities and libraries may not have. For example, our Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center is becoming an internationally recognized center based on the quality of its collections.

We are also carefully building and curating an institutional repository, which will help our university's researchers get more visibility for their work. Although this takes a certain amount of capital to start, it is an investment in our university's research and reputation. We believe at USF that open access journals (published through our repository) and open access content are some of the best things we can invest in; people in all different departments of the library have come together to make the new institutional repository a reality.

One area we are definitely choosing to invest people and funding into is our newly founded e-Science program. I'm currently on a new team charged with researching and determining best practices for curating data sets. This new aspect of collection development is something I've felt personally invested in since my days as a biology graduate student toting around her own personal hard drive of data. Data is now being created (in many departments, not just the sciences) at a rate faster than storage is being generated; some of it is getting lost, and there is a growing need for organized ways to store it. This is a perfect place for libraries to step in and use our information organizing skills to logically store these unwieldy datasets with appropriate metadata. This also goes hand-in-hand with the National Science Foundation's new policy that grants proposals should include a "data management plan." At the moment, the plan doesn't have to promise anything specific, but researchers are expected to at least have a plan for all that data they produce. I believe that at some point in the future, people will want to have access to scientific datasets just as they now want to have access to journal articles. If no one steps up to collect and manage all this data now, there is a very good chance it will sit on someone's computer hard drive and get thrown out when the computer is obsolete. Although it is not collection development in the traditional sense, I believe this is an area of collections that will be more and more popular in coming years, and we hope it will serve the university for many years to come.

Overall, the changes to our collection development priorities have been made with an eye not just to budgetary concerns, but also to what we will need the most in the future. Print collections are being de-emphasized, while electronic books are bought almost on demand. Our institutional repository and plans for a digital data repository are unconventional means of collection development, but we hope that by investing in repositories, we are creating something that will serve the university for many years to come.