

# Academic BRASS

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## **Learning from One Another: Collection Development in Central Academic and Academic Business Libraries**

Collection development, a functional area common to most libraries, often takes on different forms depending on the type of library in which a collection is being developed. For example, the staff at a central academic library often views collection development somewhat differently than does the staff at a departmental library supporting individual academic units such as the business school. Yet both units – the central academic library and the departmental business library – encounter similar challenges in collection development, but not always at the same time or with the same group of users. These challenges are similar enough that both library units can learn from one another; collection development programs and policies that have been developed in one unit can be applied in the other. A brief comparison of these issues can be made and parallels between the two types of libraries can be drawn by exploring some of the factors impacting library collections today – external pressures on physical space, questions about collection size, the debate over licensing versus purchasing digital information, and the increasing need to make resources available to remote users. Central academic libraries as well as academic business libraries have encountered some of these factors to varying degrees and the efforts of each type of library to work through these factors may influence the work of the other type.

### **Impact of Physical Space**

Libraries in general continue to face pressures on their physical space. Central academic libraries often occupy prime real estate in the heart of campus and the space occupied by

academic business libraries is often just part of the entire “portfolio” of space utilized by the business schools they support. Campus administrators have begun to ask serious questions about the underutilization of space on campus, whether it is unused classroom space or a several hundred thousand square foot library used for “book storage.” Individual academic units such as business schools develop new programs for which they need to find additional space. Libraries have responded to these pressures in at least a couple of different ways. They have looked at reducing the size of their collections on the central campus by moving volumes to offsite storage, but this doesn’t really address the question of constructing buildings to store books. Another development has been the decision by some libraries to collaborate with one another to share responsibility for collecting physical items; for example, the libraries at Columbia and Cornell University have partnered together to share coordination for collection development in the fields of Slavic and East European studies. The stated purpose of this arrangement is to allow the “libraries to acquire significantly more material across the two campuses” (Cornell University Library), but other libraries could use agreements like this to reduce the size of their collections to save space. Academic business libraries could follow this model by agreeing to share responsibility for storing different runs of corporate directories, often needed for historical access to this data. In fact, it may be easier for smaller units like academic business libraries to enter into these types of agreements because they will only need to focus on shared collection development for a single subject. Senior managers in the central library administration can look to these “pilot” projects in single subject based collaborative collection development for guidance in broader, more wide-ranging projects like these.

### **Impact of Collection Size**

Libraries have also begun to question the need to maintain extremely large collections to serve the “just in case” needs of current and future users. The practice of providing access to a historical back file of information is particularly pronounced in the social sciences and humanities, while many professional programs, like business, rely more on current information. Business school students are often more interested in the *current* state of an industry, how a company has performed in the last quarter, and what the near-term prospects are for an industry or company. In addition, academic business libraries serve patrons working in a much more specific subject area. These factors of currency and specificity force – allow – academic business libraries to focus their collections much more dramatically than a central academic library can. One metric of this focus is the stark contrast in the size of an academic business library’s collection when compared with the collection size of a central academic library. For example, although the combined collections of the libraries at the University of Michigan number about eight million volumes, the collection of the Kresge Business Administration Library at the University of Michigan’s business school includes only about one hundred twenty-five thousand volumes. As libraries’ physical collections shrink across campus, central academic libraries can look to academic business for guidance because of their experience working with significantly smaller collections.

### **Impact of Digital Ownership Models**

Academic libraries are also engaged in a debate over whether the digital resources they make available to their users should be licensed or purchased. Large central libraries have historically seen the archival function as central to their core mission, and this is often reflected in their negotiations with vendors of digital information. In the past, the cost of purchasing a print monograph or serial was the same whether the library intended to keep the resource for a year or one hundred years. Vendors of digital information now distinguish between licensing a resource for a year and purchasing the resource for a longer period of time, and this difference

is often seen in the premium price they charge for purchasing the resource. On the other hand, academic business libraries work with many vendors who do not make their digital information available for purchase, but instead *only* license the information. As central academic libraries look more closely at the need to purchase or license digital resources, they can turn their attention to academic business libraries which have already developed experience in providing their users with access to resources that can only be licensed, not purchased.

### **Impact of Remote Users**

Finally, both central academic and academic business libraries are increasingly called upon to provide access to their collections, both print and electronic, to remote users. Academic business librarians assist students who are enrolled in programs situated in a different geographical setting than the business school's main campus, traveling for job interviews, or working on team-based consulting projects based in foreign countries. For example, the University of Michigan's Stephen M. Ross School of Business recently announced that one cohort of its Executive MBA program would convene in Los Angeles beginning in August 2012 (Stephen M. Ross School of Business). Similarly, a number of central academic libraries also support remote learners through programs such as the Global Campus Library Services program at Central Michigan University (Central Michigan University Library). Librarians in both settings must deal with various types of issues relating to providing access to library resources to remote users, from providing "secure" access to library resources that is both seamless to library users and satisfies vendors that their intellectual property is secure to making print materials available to remote users via document delivery through interlibrary loan and courier services. Librarians from central academic libraries and academic business libraries can learn from one another through these shared experiences to improve access to library collections for remote users.

Central academic libraries and departmental academic libraries often have different missions, serve different types of clientele, and collect different types of resources, but some of the challenges they face in collection development are very similar. Solutions created by one type of library may be appropriate for the other type. In some cases, solutions to collection development challenges can be tested in one type of library before being rolled out to the other type. In others, the challenges being faced by one type of library are not yet faced by the other type but soon will be. By working together, central academic libraries and departmental academic libraries can design creative solutions to problems in collection development that both types of libraries face.

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