

The Electronic Resources Librarian in the Health Sciences Library: An Emerging Role

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ABSTRACT. This article will address the evolution of collection development in the age of e-resources. According to results from a survey conducted by the authors, there are some emerging “best practices” for librarians responsible for e-resources in academic health sciences libraries. This paper will present a model for managing e-resources using East Carolina University Laupus Library’s Collection Development/Electronic Resources Librarian position. A brief online survey was sent to library directors via the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) discussion list. It was designed to gather information concerning E-Resources Librarians and how e-resources are handled in this group of libraries. The article will present what has worked for Laupus Library in relation to the responses from the AAHSL survey. The E-Resources Librarian is still closely tied to the technical services functions within the library. However, there are a number of attributes of the E-Resources Librarian position that are similar to Information Service (Reference) and Public Service Librarians. It has also been found that the

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E-Resources Librarian must work closely with the library's Systems Department as well as the Information Services Department (IS) while keeping close ties with Technical Services. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

E-journals and e-books are presenting librarians with resource management challenges. Electronic resources require commitment of a significant portion of the library's budget. These resources impact the library's Web presence and may raise access issues for external clients, network infrastructure, and hardware. Budget dollars will be required at an ever-increasing rate for acquisition of e-resources. The most central component is the staff time and expertise that must be dedicated to the selection and maintenance of e-resources to provide a high quality array of e-resources for library users. The nature of electronic resources requires vigilant attention to archiving issues, access, relationships with publishers, and licensing agreements. It is often advantageous to work aggressively with consortia to purchase an optimum suite of resources at the most reasonable cost. A robust electronic resource collection results from a strong commitment from the library, collaboration between library staff and other partners, and communication with library users. This article, through the results of a survey, will examine how health sciences libraries across the country handle e-resources. It will compare the results of the survey with how Laupus Health Sciences Library has used their E-Resources Librarian position over the last five years.

THE SETTING: LAUPUS LIBRARY

The Laupus Library is a unit of the Health Sciences Division of East Carolina University (ECU). The library's clientele includes the staff and physicians of Pitt County Memorial Hospital, Brody School of Medicine (BSOM) at East Carolina University, and the Schools of

Nursing and Allied Health Sciences. Pitt County Memorial Hospital is a 650-bed regional medical and trauma center serving Eastern North Carolina and the primary teaching hospital for BSOM. The library maintains a contract to provide library services to the preceptors of the Eastern AHEC program, which serves health care educators, students, and providers in the 23 counties of Eastern North Carolina. The library is staffed by a total of 37 FTEs, including 12 faculty members.

At the Laupus Library, there is a Collection Development/E-Resources Librarian (CD/ERL) position that has existed for five years. Acquiring and managing e-resources, evaluating and processing licensing agreements, negotiating subscription costs with vendors, setting up trials and demonstrations of new e-resources, assuring access, and providing continued service for products are a large part of the e-resources side of this librarian's responsibilities.

The CD/ERL evaluates e-resources along with Technical and Information Services Librarians and staff. He is responsible for gathering statistics, comparing usage, and assessing product value. Users often play a key role in recommending e-resources for the library's consideration and evaluating new products as well as providing feedback on existing products. The CD/ERL does not make the final decision on electronic purchases; however, he is integral in the evaluation and decision-making process. He is the "front man" for all electronic resources. This is not to say that this position resides in a vacuum within the library. He has become a liaison between the IS Librarians and Systems (the Computer Department). He must communicate well with all library departments. His responsibilities include similar functions for the library's print book and serial collections. Print resources are managed by a traditional Technical Services staff under the direction of the CD/ERL and Assistant Director for Resources Management. Therefore, the management of print and electronic resources is well coordinated with the CD/ERL as the point person for both.

The CD/ERL at ECU's Laupus Library works closely with his counterpart at the university's general academic library. The CD/ERL at ECU serves on the Electronic Resources Committee at both libraries and on the University Libraries Committee. He maintains contact with the Hospital Systems Department and consults with the university attorney regarding licensing issues. It is beneficial for the CD/ERL to be involved in local and national professional associations, as well as consortia in which the library is a member.

Conversations with the Laupus Library's Director led to the examination of the CD/ERL's role and a decision to try to compare Laupus'

management of e-resources with other academic libraries. The goal was to evaluate and improve Laupus' program. To accomplish this goal, members of Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) were surveyed to learn how other academic libraries are managing these important resources. The objective of this study was to determine the current best practices for managing electronic journals and books in academic health sciences libraries.

BACKGROUND

The emergence of electronic resources has triggered changes in the way academic libraries select, acquire, manage, and provide access to materials. Electronic-based resources have precipitated a paradigm shift in libraries both operationally and strategically. A new set of skills, plus other special skill sets, is required by those who have responsibility for managing e-resources.

The unique attributes and advantages of e-resources have been responsible for their growing predominance and rapid adoption by both libraries and their users. Dr. Majorie Lazoff notes in an article in *Medical Computing Today* when discussing physicians' use of electronic library resources, "Once given an authoritative reference, . . . nothing is more important than quick, easy, and accurate access to the information contained within, and here the electronic medium shines."¹

Selection of books and journals has historically focused on choosing specific titles with the goal of building a collection owned by the library. The objective has generally been to develop a collection that represented sufficient depth, breadth, authority, and currency to meet the needs of a defined user group. Selection of print materials was primarily managed by an individual librarian with an advisory selection committee or with subject selectors. With the advent of electronic resources, the role of the individual selector has diminished. The process of selection in the electronic arena has evolved into an increasingly intellectual, collaborative, multi-disciplinary activity compared to the relatively technical process used to acquire print resources. The acquisition of an electronic resource most often has various departments involved in identifying resources, communicating and negotiating with vendors, reviewing content and scrutinizing licensing agreements, and resolving access issues.²

Aggregations that offer packages of thousands of e-resources titles have undermined the selection role of subject selectors and IS Librarians.

Large e-resources packages purchased by consortia have changed how titles are acquired for library use. The CD/ERL, and now, Systems personnel are frequently involved in the process of purchasing packages of electronic resources. Negotiations for these e-resources bundles are handled most often by either Electronic Resources or Acquisitions and Collection Development Librarians.³ Libraries have learned that electronic resource selection involves consultation with a number of library departments to achieve the best outcome. Decision-making for e-resource may employ a multi-disciplinary committee along with additional input from user groups and other library departments or institutions within and outside the university. The selection and acquisitions process is complex when dealing with e-resources. The content of the resource is critically appraised. The manner in which it is delivered along with where it can be delivered may differ from product to product depending on user definitions and different affiliation agreements. The cost of e-resources warrants thoughtful decision-making. Many aspects of the package proposed by the vendor can be negotiated, including price. An additional factor to be carefully weighed is the vendor's offer of multi-year contracts for e-resources. These contracts guarantee a set price or contain established price increases over the life of the contract.

E-resources are an increasingly important consortia priority. Packages of aggregated material may be broader than one library needs or wants, but these packages may contain a few "nuggets" that make the acquisition desirable. The cost sharing made possible by a consortia contract may make participation a cost beneficial option for libraries. Consortia arrangements for e-resources acquisitions are complex and challenging to establish, but potentially advantageous for individual libraries because the package purchased by a consortia may be considerably more robust than what an individual library could afford.⁴ The role of the E-Resources Librarian is to determine the value of such a consortia arrangement for his or her library.

The decision made by a library to acquire access to electronic resources implies a change in philosophy and strategy from collecting materials to acquiring access for users. Electronic resources, by their nature, have caused a shift from collection development to collection management. A large part of this is the management of the rights to the library's electronic resources. This evolution has caused a fusion between Technical Services and Reference Departments to manage e-resources and ensure appropriate and easy access.⁴

METHODOLOGY

A Web-based survey was developed and sent to members of AAHSL. AAHSL members are directors of academic health sciences libraries. The survey, included in the Appendix, consisted of ten questions. Questions ranged from, "Is there an E-Resources Librarian working in your library?" to "... feedback regarding the position of the E-Resources Librarian in your organization." In this survey, library directors were also asked to define the E-Resources Librarian's responsibilities and his or her reporting structure.

The Laupus Library's Director submitted the survey to the 129 members of the AAHSL discussion list during February 2003. There were 42 useable responses, with a return rate of 32.5%. The data was aggregated and reviewed for trends.

SURVEY RESULTS

Forty-eight percent of the 42 library directors responding to the survey stated that they had a "designated" E-Resources Librarian on their staff. As a follow-up question, 57% of libraries reported that they had a librarian with e-resources as a primary responsibility. That translated into an additional 5% (or 2 libraries) that had an individual responsible for electronic resources without the title of "E-Resources Librarian."

One survey question asked what the title was for the librarian responsible for e-resources. This response included libraries both with an E-Resources Librarian and those having a librarian with e-resources as a primary job responsibility. The most common job title (11 out of 24) was Electronic Resources/Services Librarian/Coordinator. The next most common job title terms were "Serials Librarian" or "Collection Development Librarian." Six of the 24 libraries had either serials or collection development as part of the job title for the librarian responsible for e-resources. Five job titles had two components, one of which was "electronic" (for example: Serials and Electronic Collections Librarian).

The survey pointed out that job titles for librarians managing electronic resources were varied. Electronic resources can be considered as both a collections function and a service function of the library, requiring expertise and effort that warrants inclusion into a librarian's job title. It was determined that this position was closely linked to acquisitions, serials management, or collection development functions.

The survey found that 50% of responding libraries had unique job descriptions for librarians managing e-resources.

The librarian at Laupus Library has the title of Collections Development/E-Resources Librarian. Print collection development combined with managing electronic resources has proven to have many advantages. This role facilitates the coordination and development of print and electronic serial collections or aggregations. This model centralizes collection development. Electronic resources and their print counterparts are often made available by the same company or vendor. The same librarian managing both print and e-resources benefits from the communication and account management of print and electronic resource vendors.

The survey asked what other substantial duties were the responsibility of the librarian who managed electronic resources. Twenty-three libraries reported that their E-Resources Librarian had other duties. A second group of 19 libraries said their E-Resources person had no other substantial duties besides the management of electronic resources. Of the 23 libraries that had additional duties, eleven libraries reported that these duties related to acquisitions or collection development. Reference and/or instruction (bibliographic instruction) were mentioned as other responsibilities for nine libraries.

This response demonstrates the alignment of the Electronic Resources Librarian position with the overall collection development and resource acquisition process. It also validates research on advertised E-Resources Librarian positions, which concluded that the E-Resources Librarian role lends itself to public services and educational functions of the library. According to a study of 17 years of advertised positions for Electronic Resources Librarians, these positions display a surprising number of public service attributes.⁵ An emphasis on bibliographic instruction for library staff emerged as part of the Electronic Resources Librarian's responsibilities during the period covered in the study, 1985 through 2001.³

At Laupus Library, the CD/ERL is part of the IS Department. The CD/ERL was moved from the Technical Services Division to IS to increase his involvement with faculty who were promoting, teaching, and using electronic resources and who had significant input regarding content in e-resources products. The disadvantage of this arrangement is that the CD/ERL is physically removed from staff in Technical Services who process acquisitions.

When asked what duties were assigned to the E-Resources Librarian, survey responses were consistent. The responses listed e-books, e-jour-

nals, databases, consortia agreements, licensing and training, along with liaison responsibilities with systems staff.

The question of how academic health sciences libraries select e-resources demonstrated that the process is not standardized. With only 11 respondents, the feedback was divided between collection development and selectors' recommendations. Other responses indicated that selection was spread among library staff. This shows that the selection process for e-resources may indeed be more disseminated among departments and librarians than the process for print materials. The lack of standardization also suggests that libraries have adapted previous traditional librarian functions with new position functions. In other cases, instead of adapting the old to the new model, whole new positions for the CD/ERL were created.

Laupus Library uses the CD/ERL as the coordinator for e-resource identification and selection. He is the single point of contact for staff and client inquiries about new e-resources, vendors, and training or demos for new e-resources. The CD/ERL also obtains feedback and information from public services librarians, library patrons, other libraries and consortia members, and the library's clinical partners (when appropriate) when preparing a recommendation to acquire an e-resource. The library maintains an E-Resources Committee, with the CD/ERL as chair. This group provides input and a final review of desired resources. The CD/ERL works closely with the Laupus Library's Director regarding budget, license negotiation, and consortia purchases for e-resources. The CD/ERL coordinates communication, e-resource assessment, product content evaluation, and the "fit or role" within the library's programs and collections, negotiation, financial, and licensing aspects of contracts. This role works well and eliminates confusion.

Once an electronic resource is purchased, it requires vigilant monitoring. Tracking electronic resources provides valuable information as to volume of use, audience, need for promotion, as well as targeting any problems concerning access. It is preferable to have library staff identify problems with an e-resource before the client experiences it. It is distressing to the library's clientele when they need to ask for help or report a problem with a library-based electronic resource. Laupus Library has also created a Computing Consultant position. This person liaises between the library's IT/Systems Department and the Information Services Department. The Computer Consultant's primary responsibilities include "manage the electronic resources available to the library and

collaborate with the Information Services Department.” The Computer Consultant and CD/ERL work closely both to initiate access to new e-resources and manage the day-to-day operations of the library’s electronic resources.

When asked what library department the E-Resources Librarian resides in, out of 31 total responses, the most frequent response was split between Technical Services and Reference (seven responses to each, including “Reference” noted in “Other” category). Collection Development and Library Administration ranked second with five responses. This demonstrates the close link for this position to both IS/Reference and Technical Services. It also points out the importance of considering the E-Resources Librarian’s need to work closely with Library Administration regarding budget and licensing issues.

The E-Resources Librarian most often reports to the Library Director, according to survey results. Out of a total of 29 responses, nine stated the position reported to the Library Director. A total of eight libraries responded that the E-Resources Librarian reports to an Assistant or Associate Director (split between the two). In five other libraries, the E-Resources Librarian reported to the Technical Services Librarian.

The E-Resources Librarian at Laupus reports to the Assistant Director for Information and Outreach Services. This type of reporting structure—reporting to a Director or Assistant Director—seems to work well. The CD/ERL needs access to the Director for quick decisions and information regarding licensing, budget, scheduling payment for resources, and partnerships or affiliation agreements that may affect access for electronic resources, all of which would be available from library administration. A close relationship with the Reference Department gives the CD/ERL valuable day-to-day input regarding content issues, needs, and feedback on the e-resources that the librarians are using and teaching everyday. This highlights the unique role of the E-Resources Librarian and his tie to the library’s public service functions.

DISCUSSION

The AAHSL survey responses demonstrated that there is a need for a librarian to have the overall management of electronic resources as a primary responsibility. One librarian made this observation: “We couldn’t live without this position; there are just too many details and glitches with e-pubs, not to mention vendor issues, not to have a person

devoted to them.” A comment from one library was that they “had an ERL and can’t live without it.” Another librarian stated that, “This is an essential position in today’s library.” There was a lament from another library that, “We feel we are behind the curve because we do not have a position like this in our library.”

Electronic resources librarians in general have broad responsibilities that impact the library as well as areas outside the library. The survey results indicate that most often the CD/ERL reports to library administration. Another finding shows that the E-Resources Librarian generally resides in the Technical Services division of the library. They are also involved with the delivery of public services at the library. Additional duties for the E-Resources Librarian include database training, serials management, other collection development functions, some reference desk duty, systems or information technology responsibilities, and cataloging.

The Electronic Resources Librarian position has emerged from the Collection Development and Serials Librarian models. It was recognized in the survey comments that this position is “still evolving.” The new skills needed to effectively manage electronic books and journals were identified as negotiating contracts, licensing agreements, working with consortia, communicating with vendors, and a good understanding of digital technology.

A final survey comment highlights the shift reflected in the Electronic Resources Librarian position.

We may be bringing print and electronic management back together as we go to electronic journal check-in and online purchases of journals and no print copies for selected titles. We are definitely in a state of change and need to be flexible with our structure as we try to manage these resources.

CONCLUSION

The success of health sciences libraries’ offerings of electronic resources to meet client needs will depend in large part on the Electronic Resources Librarian. An important aspect of this role will be the negotiating and communication skills of the CD/ERL when dealing with library administration, vendors, aggregators, library and university partners, and consortia members.

Library schools should recognize the business skills needed to effectively and proactively move the library community ahead of the technology curve. The challenge is to instruct new librarians in both the technology that sits behind the e-resources and the front-end business expertise necessary to keep the library flexible in this challenging environment.

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APPENDIX. E-Resources Librarian Survey

1. Is there a designated Electronic Resources Librarian working in your library?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Is there a librarian on your staff who has Electronic Resources as their primary responsibility?
 - Yes
 - No

If yes, what is this person's title?

3. Does the Electronic Resources Librarian have a unique job description that lists duties relating to electronic resources?
 - Yes
 - No

4. How does your library select Electronic Resources? Choose all that apply:
 - Committee System
 - Senior Management recommendations
 - Vendor demo
 - Staff demo
 - User's recommendation
 - Other

5. Does the Electronic Resources Librarian have other substantial duties besides managing electronic resources?
 - Yes
 - No

If yes, please list in dialog box below.

6. If there is not a designated Electronic Resources Librarian, who manages the day-to-day operations of your Electronic Resources?
 - Collection Development Librarian
 - Information Services Librarian/Reference Librarian
 - Technical Services Librarian
 - Systems Librarian/Computer Dept./IT Librarian
 - ILL Librarian
 - Serials Librarian
 - Cataloging Librarian
 - Other

7. In what department does the Electronic Resources Librarian position reside?
 - Collection Management
 - Acquisitions

- Technical Services
 - Systems
 - Library Administration
 - Serials
 - Cataloging
 - Other
8. Who does the Electronic Resources Librarian report to in your library?
- Director
 - Associate/Deputy Director
 - Assistant Director
 - Head/Manager for Systems/Computer Dept./IT Dept.
 - Head/Manager for Information Services/Reference Dept.
 - Head/Manager for Technical Services
 - Other
9. What are the electronic resources duties in your library? (Check all that apply)
- Selecting Databases
 - Supporting Use of Databases After Installation
 - E-books
 - E-journals
 - Licensing/Contracts
 - Consortia Agreements
 - Eresource Training
 - Liaison with Systems Dept.
 - Liaison with Faculty
 - Vendor Relations
 - Other
10. Please feel free to give feedback regarding the Electronic Resources Librarian in your organization. You may write in comments on the issue of position, placement in your organization of the Electronic Resources Librarian, or any other relative issues here.

Additional Comments

**Please forward a Job Description and Organizational Chart to: coghillj@mail.ecu.edu

Thank you for your time!