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Competencies for Bibliographers: A Process for Writing a Collection Development Competencies Document

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Competency statements for librarians are one way of measuring performance against a set standard. The Iowa State University Library established a task force to develop a collection development competencies document for its subject bibliographers. The literature review revealed that while there were many examples of competency documents, little had been written about the process of developing a competencies document. This article details the process used to write the competencies document at Iowa State University. The completed document is a blend of existing standards and local practice that can be adapted to any library.

Disciplines
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Competencies for Bibliographers: A Process for Writing a

Collection Development Competencies Document

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Competencies for Bibliographers: A Process for Writing a

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Introduction

Competency statements for librarians are one way of measuring performance against a set standard. A number of professional library organizations, including the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association, and the Special Libraries Association, have developed and published competency standards for information professionals. The Collections Officer at the Iowa State University Library, realizing that the role of bibliographer is more complex than just ordering materials for the library's collections, concluded that it would be advantageous to use competencies not only to measure performance, but more importantly to assist in training both new and more experienced bibliographers. A Bibliographer Competencies Task Force, formed in Fall 2001, was charged with developing a set of competency statements "broad and flexible enough to apply to all bibliographers, but specific enough to direct faculty development plans for individual bibliographers and their supervisors." This article describes and discusses the process used by the Task Force to develop and write collection development competency statements for the bibliographers at Iowa State University. This is a process that other academic libraries also might want to use to develop competencies. The resulting document, *Collection Development Competencies for the Iowa State University Library*, could be used as a starting place for other academic libraries.

History of the Competencies Project

There are currently eighteen bibliographers at the Iowa State University Library who represent the library to fifty-nine academic departments and sixty-nine research centers. These librarians provide reference service, classroom instruction sessions and collection development

expertise for the students, faculty and staff at the university as well as to the citizens of Iowa. The bibliographers' level of experience ranges from the relatively inexperienced to those individuals who have spent over twenty years working in collection development. During the fall of 2001, a four-member task force was appointed for the purpose of creating a broad list of competency statements that would describe the collection development competencies and skills bibliographers should master. Representation on the Bibliographer Competencies Task Force included two bibliographers from each of the Subject Departments (Science & Technology and Social Sciences & Humanities Departments). Although there was a certain level of concern about a possible hidden administrative agenda that might be inherent in the project, the goals of the Task Force were that the final document could be used in a variety of ways: to plan and measure the skill development of new librarians; to serve as a yardstick to measure the progress of continuing librarians; and to serve as an indicator of need for additional training and guidance for individual bibliographer growth.

Several university and library-wide activities that bear on the relevance and outcome of these competencies preceded the establishment of the Task Force. During the spring semester of 2000, the university mandated that each member of the faculty create a "position description" that could be used to describe their specific position and be used to compare workloads for evaluation and department responsibility issues. In the Library these position descriptions became part of each individual faculty member's personnel file to be used both for development of annual work plans and evaluation. Next, each bibliographer was directed by the Collections Officer to create a separate collection development policy for each of their academic departments or areas of responsibility, using a standardized format. These were completed by October 2000. During January 2001 a task force was created for the purpose of writing a new Library Collection Development Policy that would provide a philosophical umbrella for the separate

policies. By the fall of 2001 this group had completed its work, and both the Collection Development Council and the Dean of the Library Services had approved the new policy. At the same time, another task force was appointed and charged with collecting Library policies and procedures pertaining to collection development activities into an electronically available manual. As of this writing, work continues on the creation of this manual. It is the intent of the Collections Officer that the manual will include policy statements for use by the public as well as working documents available to only the bibliographers and collections staff.

All of these activities culminated with the creation of the Bibliographer Competencies Task Force in the fall of 2001. This project was undertaken in order to provide bibliographers and administrators with a framework to define, support, and evaluate the work of collection development. The Task Force began its work by examining existing competency statements that had been used as the basis for training new librarians in the Iowa State University Library. The Task Force also performed a literature review to identify existing lists of competencies and their measures. It analyzed competency statements written by other institutions and library organizations, and discussed how those statements might be used to structure the writing of its own document. After researching the literature on bibliographer competencies, the Task Force recognized that while useful, the existing competencies created by other library groups did not adequately address the work done by the Iowa State University bibliographers. In planning to write a competencies document, the Task Force sought to take advantage of the related work done by others, but also to create a document that reflected one library's culture, tradition, and environment.

Literature Review

        In reviewing the literature on bibliographer competencies, the Task Force found that there is relatively little written on the process of developing competency documents. Most of the studies the Task Force found were descriptive of responsibilities or programs. Robert Sorgenfrei and Christopher Hooper-Lane examined the challenges faced by reference librarians when collection development activities are included in their responsibilities.[1] They concluded that because of their close working relationships with the library's users, reference librarians are in a unique position to provide leadership in the development of the library's collections.   Issues concerning the organization of collection development activities are addressed in Cheryl R.S. Grossman's summary of papers presented at a conference "Between Chaos and Clockwork: Organizing Academic Libraries for Collection Development."[2]   One presenter, Roger Darbin, discussed the issues involved with combining collection development responsibilities with reference work and pointed out the importance of librarians working in partnership with the teaching faculty rather than serving as gatekeepers to information. The concluding session of the conference discussed how collection development librarians balance the demands of collection development activities, maintaining the collection, reference work, class instruction, committee work, and professional organization activities.

        Speaking from the point of view of a library director, Maureen Pastine's article emphasized the importance for collections officers to be "more conversant in how scholars communicate and in emerging technologies (hardware and software), site licensing and intellectual property and copyright issues, analytical reporting, benchmarking and rethinking methods of assessment and value."[3] Peggy Johnson described how, in the absence of a competency document, individual librarians can devise a program to develop their skills and

competencies.[4] The Task Force incorporated several of the activities outlined in her article in its competencies document.

Bibliographers are often referred to as "library liaisons" in the literature and in practice are assigned to a particular academic department or group of related subject areas. Cynthia C. Ryans, Raghini S. Suresh and Wei-Ping Zhang described the essential elements of a well-designed library liaison program including expectations of the participants, and definitions of the responsibilities of all concerned.[5] Actual implementation of a liaison program is outlined in a second article by the same authors.[6]

Individual libraries have also written guidelines for selectors' activities that could serve as competencies. "Collaborative Collection Development: Building Bridges with Faculty and Academic Departments," from Penn State University Libraries is an example.[7] Underlying these studies and the expectations for liaison work are the "RUSA Guidelines for Liaison Work in Managing Collections and Services" and the earlier edition of the guidelines developed by RASD, "RASD Guidelines for Liaison Work.[8]

The Task Force found several collection development competency documents promulgated by other professional library organizations particularly helpful. The Special Libraries Association issued its "Competencies for Special Librarians for the 21st Century" in 1996 that can be applied to research librarians practicing in a variety of library settings. The Special Libraries Association defines *"competencies"* as a combination of skills, knowledge and behaviors important for organizational success, personal performance, and career development and distinguishes between *"professional competencies"* and "personal competencies." [9] "Professional competencies" relate to a librarian's knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research, as well as the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services. "Personal

competencies" represent a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently, be good communicators, focus on continuing learning throughout their careers, demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions, and survive in the new world of work**.**

The Education Committee of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries developed a document "Competencies for Research Librarians," that outlines basic competencies by which to measure all research librarians.[10] The *Guide for Training Collection Development Librarians,* published by the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services Division of the American Library Association was very useful to the Task Force in the development of competency statements.[11] It presents a logical, organized approach to training and suggests competencies to be used to measure the accomplishments of collection development librarians. The Task Force consulted this document extensively in the early stages of this project.

Process

Task Force Charge

The Task Force appointed to develop bibliographer competencies for the Iowa State University Library began work in September 2001. The initial charge and expected outcome statement to the Task Force were as follows:

> **Charge:** Establish a set of basic competency statements for bibliographers. The competencies should be broad and flexible enough to apply to all bibliographers, but specific enough to direct faculty development plans for individual bibliographers and their supervisors. The bibliographers should have opportunities in this process to give input and feedback as you develop these competency statements.

Outcome: A written document consisting of basic competency

statements, explanatory or descriptive text as needed for each, and

standards for assessing performance on each competency. This must be

completed in time for finalization of faculty work plans for calendar 2002.

The Task Force was instructed to focus attention only on competencies dealing

specifically with collection development issues, though most bibliographers at Iowa State also

have instruction and reference responsibilities. If all aspects of bibliographers' position

descriptions had been considered at once, a more unified set of competencies would have been

the result. However, developing competencies for a more inclusive set of activities would have

required more time than the Task Force was allotted.

Competency Development

The Task Force began by performing a literature review, brainstorming about key areas

of collection development responsibilities at Iowa State University, and discussing how theories

found in the literature dovetailed with local practice. *Guide for Training Collection*

Development Librarians was a key resource for the early draft of competencies. The *Guide*

covers a range of collection development responsibilities, and it groups competencies for training

into meaningful categories. It also had been used as the basis for organizing a series of training

sessions for new Iowa State bibliographers. The Task Force used the major categories in the

Guide, shown in Table 1, as a starting point for developing bibliographer competencies.

[Insert Table 1]

Early drafts of the competency statements included fourteen categories adapted from the training sessions and from the *Guide.* The first complete draft of the competencies document comprised ninety-two competencies listed in fifteen categories; Table 2 shows an example of one category with its associated competency statements. This draft was distributed to the bibliographers to obtain their input and subsequently was discussed at a meeting of the Collection Development Council (all bibliographers and the Collections Officer). Based on the comments received at this meeting, the Task Force realized that the list was too long and detailed to serve its intended purpose as a way to direct bibliographers' professional development.

[Insert Table 2]

The initial format of the competencies also caused concern among the bibliographers as to the ultimate purpose and intended use of the competencies. They perceived the list of competencies as a list of tasks to be performed by each bibliographer, each with a measurable outcome and a possible negative impact on performance evaluations. At this point the Task Force was in a quandary; the original charge asked for measurable goals, yet bibliographers were hesitant to be given a "checklist" for their collection development activities. After meeting with the Collections Officer, the Task Force negotiated a change in the outcomes portion of the charge that proved to be less threatening to the bibliographers.

Outcome: A written document consisting of basic competency statements with explanatory or descriptive text as needed for each, as well as examples of activities for developing and demonstrating

each competency. This must be completed in time for finalization

of faculty work plans for calendar 2002.

With this change in the outcome statement, revisions to the competencies draft began in earnest. The greatest change to the document came by structuring it more like the Special Libraries Association's *Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century,* where each broad competency statement is followed by examples of skills and specific work activities. The activities that we had previously labeled "competencies" were more usefully described as *examples* of competencies. The revised document defined a competency as a broad skill rather than as a specific work activity. The number of broad competency statements was compressed from fifteen to nine by merging related competencies. Table 3 lists the nine competencies used in the final document. Elements of both professional and personal competencies are included in the examples for the competency statements. In place of prescriptive competency statements reflecting work activities, the Task Force articulated the nine broad competencies and then provided four to thirteen examples of skills and activities that could fulfill each competency. The breadth of the basic statements resulted in a document that clearly applied to each bibliographer, regardless of subject assignment.

[Insert Table 3]

The bibliographers and the Collection Development Council gave this version of the document a much warmer reception, and the additional changes suggested were minor. The Collection Development Competencies document passed administrative

review in mid-December 2001, and was used in developing faculty workplans for 2002. It will be updated as the need arises.

Conclusion

Collection development remains one of the most critical activities performed by librarians. Bibliographers striving for excellence can use statements of collection development competencies to aid their efforts. The set of skills that a bibliographer draws on for high-quality work takes time to acquire, and will change to reflect new developments, technological and otherwise, in the library and in the community served.

With guidance from administrators and extensive input from peers, the Bibliographer Competencies Task Force considered various approaches to competency statements and wrote a document well suited to local practice. The newly adopted document is now being used to assist in bibliographers' professional development at the Iowa State University Library.

The collegial process outlined in this article was critical to the successful development of the final document. The Task Force was able to work efficiently as a small group, but frequent feedback from colleagues kept the process of writing competencies from becoming a dictatorial exercise. Bibliographers gave the document close attention in order to provide meaningful input, and made sure they understood the competencies thoroughly--or pointed out cases where the Task Force's writing needed clarification. Although the Task Force had limited time in which to work, and could have progressed faster if the initial charge had allowed for a more flexible document, feedback from peers led the group to request the revised charge that was more acceptable to all

concerned. Ultimately, the collegial process used to write *Collection Development Competencies for the ISU Library* led to greater acceptance of the final document.

The competency statements in *Collection Development Competencies for the ISU Library* are general enough to be of use to any bibliographer seeking to improve skills in collection development, or to any Collections administrator creating an appropriate staff development program for bibliographers. Clearly some of the examples cited for developing and demonstrating competencies, and many of the examples given, are relevant to all collection development professionals. This document provides a set of competencies and examples that can be readily adapted to serve those who undertake collection development responsibilities at other libraries.

Appendix: Collection Development Competencies

for the Iowa State University Library

This document outlines a set of basic competency statements for bibliographers. Examples of activities for developing and demonstrating each competency are included. The competencies listed here are general enough to apply to all bibliographers of the Iowa State University Library, but are specific enough to direct faculty development plans for individual bibliographers and their supervisors. They represent a baseline for untenured faculty bibliographers to move toward in the collection development portion of their professional practice; tenured faculty bibliographers are expected to continue to develop their skills beyond this level. Many of the practical examples given would apply to any bibliographer in an academic library; others are specific to the context of collection development at the Iowa State University Library.

This set of competencies and examples was developed during Fall Semester 2001 by the members of the Bibliographer Competencies Task Force: *Insert names of Task Force members here.* Some of the practical examples given are specific to the context of the time and should be updated regularly.

Competencies for Each Iowa State University Library Bibliographer:

I. **Internalizes the ethical, legal and cultural issues affecting the Library as a community and organization.**

Practical Examples:
   1. Is knowledgeable of the Library's position within the university governance structure.

2. Knows the role of collection development activities in relation to the mission and values of the Library.

3. Knows the Library's organizational goals and objectives and the role of collection development activities in accomplishing these ends.

4. Is able to verbalize the place of collection development in the Library's organizational structure.

5. Is knowledgeable of the principles concerning censorship as they relate to collection development.

6. Applies the principles of intellectual freedom to collection development activities as the need arises.

7. Is aware of the legal and ethical implications of copyright.

8. Is cognizant of the implications of the Library Code of Ethics in collection development activities.

II. **Engages in planning that facilitates effective time management and skill development.**

Practical Examples:
1. Sets priorities, creates plans, and establishes a schedule for collection development activities.

2. Reevaluates levels of competency as a bibliographer and learns or develops new skills as needed.

3. Develops an annual plan for each subject area that identifies major activities to be accomplished.

III. **Uses relevant Library collection development policies and strategic plans as criteria for selecting library materials.**

Practical Examples:
1. Is able to apply the portions of the University and Library strategic plans that affect collection development in assigned subject areas.

2. Recognizes the general strengths and weaknesses of the Library's collection.

3. Anticipates changes to the University's curriculum and programs that might affect collection development.

4. Understands and is able to employ the Library's general collection development policy as well as individual policies for assigned subject areas.

5. Writes and updates relevant subject-based collection development policies as needed to accommodate curriculum revisions and other changes.

6. Knows the call number ranges for assigned subject funds and adapts these when appropriate.

7. Is cognizant of cooperative collection agreements between the Iowa State University Library and other libraries.

IV. Updates and applies knowledge of assigned subject areas on a continual basis.

Practical Examples:

1. Masters the subject knowledge needed to critically evaluate materials and resources.

2. Stays up to date on issues related to scholarly communication in relevant discipline(s).

3. Keeps informed of new library resources available on the market.

4. Knows sources in the discipline(s) that are useful to selection decisions.

5. Demonstrates knowledge of major research methodologies within the field(s).

6. Is proficient in the use of electronic products in the relevant discipline(s).

7. Uses opportunities for networking to share and expand knowledge.

V. Demonstrates knowledge of the Library's processes for selection and review of new materials, review of approval books, deselection and weeding of obsolete materials, and conservation and preservation of the Library's collections.

Practical Examples:

1. Follows established procedures for adding tangible works to the collection including gifts, serials, etc.

2. Is able to follow the procedures for evaluating, selecting, and acquiring new electronic products.

3. Uses appropriate selection tools, e.g. GOBI, EBSCONET, Horizon Sunrise, Ulrich's, and publisher's catalogs, to identify and verify works to be added to the collection.

4. Develops a regular pattern for reviewing new materials.

5. Makes selection decisions that reflect the most appropriate choice of format.

6. Masters the skills needed to review serial holdings and to cancel or add subscriptions as appropriate.

7. Is conversant with the Library's deselection/weeding policy and procedures.

8. Demonstrates knowledge of the interdependence of selection and deselection.

9. Includes deselection activities in long-term plans.

10. Is able to articulate the preservation policies and priorities of the Library.

11. Is cognizant of the role collection evaluation plays in the preservation cycle.

12. Is aware of the options for making preservation decisions.

13. Knows and understands the patrons' needs for access to the collections.

VI. **Understands and works within the budgeting process for collection development in the Library.**

Practical Examples:

1. Uses GOBI to monitor approval spending and determine availability of monographs for purchase.

2. Uses EBSCONET to track costs of serials and format alternatives.

3. Uses Horizon Sunrise reports to monitor budget lines and adjust spending patterns.

4. Works cooperatively with other bibliographers where budget issues for respective collecting areas coincide.

5. Is aware of the processes by which budget lines are allocated at various levels, i.e. University, Library and Bibliographers.

6. Is aware of the areas that affect budget disbursements, e.g. requests for adjustments, gifts, special project allocations, and deadlines.

VII. Works with the Library's internal organization to accomplish common goals and objectives.

Practical Examples:

1. Learns about other units in the organization and how they interact.
2. Uses contacts in the other library departments/units to facilitate materials acquisitions, e.g. purchases, gifts, transfers, and ILL.
3. Follows established Library procedures and protocols, e.g., those for ordering, acquiring and transferring library materials.
4. Identifies gaps in own knowledge of the library organization and asks questions!
5. Cooperates with other bibliographers, reading rooms and branches on campus.
6. Employs the services of the Collections Office staff to maximize productivity in collection development activities.

VIII. Communicates effectively with liaisons, departmental faculty, other patrons and potential patrons, and others within the Library.

Practical Examples:

1. Maintains regular contact with liaisons and departmental faculty.
2. Involves departmental faculty in collection management projects, e.g. solicits their input for materials purchases, weeding projects, and serials subscriptions.
3. Is aware of new courses or programs in subject areas.
4. Contacts faculty regarding their research interests.
5. Addresses user concerns and conveys them to the Collections Officer when appropriate.
6. Understands the boundaries of what is communicated within the Library and outside the Library.
7. Informs users (Library staff, students, faculty, University staff) of new products and services.
8. Uses appropriate technology to acquire, organize and disseminate information.
9. Consult, consult, consult!

IX. **Assesses and evaluates existing collections to guide collection development and management decisions.**

Practical Examples:

1. Grasps the importance of representing all sides of information issues.
2. Is able to evaluate potential transfers between sections of the collection, including transfers to Special Collections.
3. Demonstrates knowledge of collection tools and standards available to evaluate the current collection.
4. Masters the skills needed to conduct a collection assessment.
5. Is able to articulate how assessments can provide information to refine a collection.
6. Updates collecting practices when indicated by the results of collection assessments.

References

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6. Raghini S. Suresh, Cynthia C. Ryans, and Wei-Ping Zhang, "The Library-Faculty Connection: Starting a Liaison Programme in an Academic Setting." *Library Review* 44 no. 1 (1995): 7-13.

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9. *Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century*, ed. Barbara M. Spiegelman. (Washington, DC: Special Libraries Association, 1997), ix.

10. Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, Education Committee, "Competencies for Research Librarians." Approved by ASERL members November 10, 2000, <http://www.aserl.org/statements/competencies/competencies.htm> (Accessed March 25, 2002).

11. *Guide for Training Collection Development Librarians*, ed. Susan L. Fales. Collection Management and Development Guides, no. 8. (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1996).

Table 1: Categories included in
Guide for Training Collection Development Librarians

1. Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Considerations
2. Planning

3. Collection Development Policies
4. Selection and Review Process
5. Approval Profiles
6. Budget Process
7. Library Department Operations
8. Marketing, Outreach, and Communications with Constituencies
9. Selector's Knowledge Base
10. Navigating the Network or Electronic Resources for Collection
       Management and Development
11. Overview of Collection Assessments and Evaluations
12. Deselection/Weeding
13. Conservation/Preservation
14. Fund-Raising and Donor Relations

Guide for Training Collection Development Librarians, ed. Susan L. Fales. Collection

Management and Development Guides, no. 8. (Chicago and London: American Library

Association, 1996).

Table 2: Sample Section,
Draft Competency Statement (October 2001)

I. Ethical, Legal and Cultural Considerations

   1.Understand the centrality of collection development to other library functions
   2.Understand the organization's structures and values
   3.Understand the library's governance position within the university
   4.Understand the libraries professional code of ethics
   5.Understand the ethics of collection development
   6.Understand the legal and ethical implications of copyright

Table 3: Categories used in

Collection Development Competencies for the ISU Library

    X.   Internalizes the ethical, legal and cultural issues affecting the Library as a community and organization.

   XI.   Engages in planning that facilitates effective time management and skill development.

  XII.   Uses relevant Library collection development policies and strategic plans as criteria for selecting library materials.

 XIII.   Updates and applies knowledge of assigned subject areas on a continual basis.

 XIV.   Demonstrates knowledge of the Library's processes for selection and review of new materials, review of approval books, deselection and weeding of obsolete materials, and conservation and preservation of the Library's collections.

  XV.   Understands and works within the budgeting process for collection development in the Library.

 XVI.   Works with the Library's internal organization to accomplish common goals and objectives.

 XVII.   Communicates effectively with liaisons, departmental faculty, other patrons and potential patrons, and others within the Library.

XVIII.   Assesses and evaluates existing collections to guide collection development and management decisions.