ACQUISITION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
IN A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Discusses the acquisition policy and procedures of a technical university library. The role of the library committee and the faculty in book selection, tools of book selection, other direct methods of acquisition, etc. are also discussed.

Introduction

The acquisition of reading materials of a modern technical university library with its large faculty, its tremendous enrollment, and its non-too generous financial resources is not a small or simple task. In this era of knowledge explosion especially in science and technology, the world of books has grown very complex indeed, for there are more books than man can use or possibly need and still more are being published than any single library, no matter how vast its resources are, can afford to buy or accommodate or find use for.

It therefore demands on the part of the acquisitions librarian, bibliographical expertise and business acumen on the one hand and a clear perspective of the pertinent book-needs of the institution he is expected to fill. In other words to acquire most effectively books and other reading materials needed for the instructional and research purposes of the faculty and students in a technical university library demands a bird's-eye view of all phases of the institution's activities in general and a detailed comprehension of the various branches of study in the university, their coverage, areas of specialization and particular fields of research in progress.

Acquisition Policy

The formulation of an acquisition policy that will ensure the adequate development of library materials depends basically on the objectives of the institution of which it forms an integral part. The objectives of technical university may be stated in a nutshell:

- conservation of technical know-how and ideas
- teaching
- research
- publication, and
- extension and service

The library's acquisition policy should therefore be directed towards the support of the above university's aims in general and of its greatest educational effectiveness.

Methodology

Firstly the acquisitions librarian has to take into reckoning the nature of the course offerings of the Technical University like Applied Sciences, different branches of Engineering, etc. the types of research performed and planned at the various faculties, the number and kinds of students in each of these faculties and strength and sorts of faculty members.

Next he has the task of tailoring their book needs to the total budget made available for the purpose.

Also, as new courses are announced or anticipated, or changes in the curriculum occur or any extensive new programme of investigation is planned, the library should involve itself with these and provide the necessary bibliographical apparatus towards their support and fulfilment.

Organisation

The organisation of an acquisition division of a technical university library depends upon the variable factors such as quantity and complexity of materials acquired, personnel or types of materials received (books, pamphlets, serials, periodicals, etc.), while others are arranged by methods of acquisition (purchase, exchange or gifts).
In a technical university library large, medium or small, one convenient mode of organization would be by the type of materials acquired, namely books and periodicals broadly. If the intake of audio-visual materials warrant, they could also form a separate unit. (Incidentally it may be mentioned here that it is proposed to discuss in this article the acquisition of books only).

Book Selection

The largest quantum of book selection in a Technical University Library originates with the faculty members. The Librarian besides assisting them in selection processes with bibliographical aids and literature surveys also participates in it. Indeed he should, as ultimately he is responsible for seeing that a well-co-ordinated and balanced collection of reading materials is built up.

Library Committee

In some of the major Technical University Libraries, as in the IITs of our country, there may be Library Committees comprising of faculty members.

These Library Committees in co-operation with the Librarian concern themselves particularly with

a) Formulating a library policy in relation to the development of resources for instruction and research;

b) Advising in the allocation of books funds to the Library and its sub-allocation among the University’s different Departments; and

c) Developing a general programme of Library service for the University as a whole.

The Library Committees could also have an active hand in book selection if they so desired and evince interest.

As an aside, it is suggested that representatives from the student body also may be on the Library Committees as in the Montana State University, USA and in our own country at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

This would enable the student community in obtaining prompt recognition of their specific problems. But whatever may be the composition of the Library Committees, their function should be informative and advisory rather than administrative and executive!

Responsibility for Book Selection

In common, members of the faculty are usually charged with the responsibility for selecting reading and other materials in support of various courses run by the different departments of the University. While the Librarian and his staff are responsible for selecting general reference books and bibliographical apparatus, basic text books for the various courses offered at the University, non-curricular books and periodicals and other materials intended for general, cultural and recreational reading. The students and research scholars and other members of the Library staff may also participate in book selection if they so wish.

Tools of Book Selection

Of the two kinds of book selection tools, viz. (i) Detection aids, and (ii) Evaluative aids, the former are not of much utility in book selection as they only make the Acquisition Librarian aware of the existence and whereabouts of new publications (e.g. Cumulative Book Index) but do not throw any light on the contents of books.

Evaluative aids on the other hand make appraisals and/or recommendation either in the form of an annotation or a critical review. This helps one to decide confidently whether a book is worth buying or not. Here are a few examples:

1) Aslib Book List
2) Chemical & Engineering News
3) New Technical Book Review

Besides the above, the Book Trade, Learned Academies and Societies, Educational Agencies & Authors provide the acquisition department of a Technical University Library with the entire range of technical literature available in print. Further, every publisher and bookseller would be eager to furnish on request his catalogue of books.
These Catalogues and publishers' blurbs contain descriptive notes and titles of current publications useful for book selection.

Assisting the Faculty in Book Selection

Now the Acquisitions Librarian should systematically scan both the evaluative tools and the publishers Catalogues and hand-outs and bring all the worthwhile announcements of publications to the notice of the faculty members, for their information and recommendation.

Also, the booksellers often send their lists of publications in ready stock. These also be circulated among the Heads of the Departments and other faculty members for consideration.

But a word of caution may be sounded here. What the booksellers often pass on as "In Ready Stock" are not generally latest publications which count in a Technical University Library but only old stock of books which they want to dump on the Libraries under the cloak of catering to the immediate needs of Libraries. The Acquisition Librarian should therefore exercise great care in examining the publications sent by the booksellers as to their recency, their publishers' repute, author's standing, etc. before suggesting them to the faculty members for purchase.

Some booksellers also send their latest books themselves on approval to the Library. The Acquisitions Librarian should intimate the faculty members of these books' arrival and get their recommendations for procurement of any of them.

Dealer-Library Plan

Recently some enterprising Libraries like the IIT, Madras have evolved a plan called Dealer-Library Plan (also called Automatic Shipment Plan or Standing Order Plan) with foreign publishers to get their latest publications to the Library directly.

Under this plan, the publishers would send all their latest publications automatically on the pre-determined specific subject areas immediately upon publication on approval, for an agreed period of time, say one month from the date of receipt of the publications. The Library reserves the right to accept or reject any of the so received publications. The accepted publications could be purchased and paid for through a local bookseller who cooperates with the Library for operating this Plan. The rejected items also could be returned to him which he would either try to sell to other Libraries or return them to the publishers.

Significance of Dealer-Library Plan

This plan provides the faculty members with the facility of examining the latest publications themselves as they arrive hot from the press, for their suitability or otherwise for the Library.

As soon as these publications arrive, the Acquisition Librarian should circulate copies of the lists among faculty members and invite them to the Library for perusing them and recommending their purchase.

Visit to Book-stalls

The Librarian, the Acquisition Librarian and the faculty may also periodically visit the leading local bookstalls and select publications.

Readers' Suggestions

Suggestions of students and research scholars may also be elicited from time to time in regard to book selection.

Procurement

Quotations for supply of books should be called for periodically through tender notice in the newspapers. After approving and appointing booksellers for regular supply and fixing up of rates, orders could be sent to them.

These book orders should be distributed by and large among those approved booksellers depending upon their efficiency of execution of them. However, if any of the publications are urgently needed and they are known to be readily available with say, an authorised supplier, stockist or publisher, the same could be procured directly from them.

Dealers suggested by faculty members are sometimes to be sought for unusual materials.
ACQUISITION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Rare and Out of Print Publications

Rare or out of print publications located in second-hand or auction catalogues should be ordered directly, sometimes by telegram or cable, from the Dealers offering the aforesaid materials.

Non-trade Publications

Apart from the above, in a number of other instances also, it would be necessary to order directly from the publishers as in the cases of societal and organisational publications. In all these cases of non-trade publications, the Unesco Book Coupons would come in handy for arranging payment and in obviating foreign exchange difficulties.

Hence, setting aside a sizable portion of the Library’s budget for procurement of the Unesco Book Coupons should be deemed a ‘must’ in a Technical University Library.

Gifts

Gifts also provide a good source of acquiring materials in most libraries. In fact, many of the older University Libraries in our Country and elsewhere owe their great collections to the gifts of individuals.

Gifts may come in the form of books or money. While the bread-and-butter books required for teaching and research in Technical University Libraries may be acquired from the annual grants, it would be a worthwhile proposition to build up the general and special book collections out of benefactions.

Gift Policy

Acceptance of gifts should be given a definite place in the administrative organisation of the Library. But the gift policy should not only be flexible but discriminative. Technical University Libraries generally should not accept gifts of unsuitable or outdated books unless they are rare ones. Secondly, gifts with strings attached to them should be weighed carefully as they would result in administrative problems like shelving, special location, separate catalogues, etc. If, however, a gift collection offered has a high monetary value like art and ornamental books or approximate completeness, it may justify separate location and shelving with special catalogues. Also, if the collection consists of rare and out of print items, the Librarian as well as the donor may reasonably think of restricting their use. However, no gifts should be objectably refused as possible future gifts may find their way elsewhere.

Exchange

Like gifts, exchange of publications also provide a valuable source of enriching a library. This mode of acquisition must be used in a Technical University Library to secure items which are not available in the regular book trade or are not for sale or where is scope for conserving funds by obtaining certain publication through exchange. Often many libraries do not have sufficient funds to purchase books that are desirable for the instructional or research purposes themselves.

Exchange Materials

The University’s official publications like, Annual Reports, Dissertations, Lecture notes, Laboratory reports, Seminar proceedings, reprints of articles by the faculty members, library publications, etc. may be used for exchange purposes. Duplicates in the library collection also represent a source of materials useful for exchange. But they would present administrative problems like writing them off in the accession registers, satisfying the auditor, etc. which make it rather a difficult proposition.

En-block Acquisitions

Building libraries through enblock acquisitions of private collections may also be profitably employed in Technical University Libraries. Many a valuable library of books which have been built up over a period of years by a scientist or technologist become available for sale. Also, reputed engineering concerns which sometimes unfortunately get liquidated auction their collections. Purchasing these collections ‘en block would go a long way in enriching technical University Libraries as they include books, periodicals, bibliographies and supplementary source materials. In some cases, of course, they may result in duplication of certain titles already acquired by the Library, but the minor disadvantages of duplication would be far outweighed by the major advantages of acquiring a body of materials at one time which may have taken the lifetime of a specialist or an organization to assemble.

Conclusion

In brief, the above are the general acquisition policies and procedures in present day Technical University Library.