

THE APPROVAL BOOKS PROGRAM IN THE HSU LIBRARY

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For many years allocation of library materials funds by means of formulas was beset by many problems at Humboldt State University, caused principally by the failure of formulas to reflect real-life situations. Some disciplines (even within schools) received funds out of proportion to their needs, while others with greater dependence on library materials received less than adequate funding; disciplines with greater dependence on expensive serials frequently found themselves without adequate funds to purchase current monographs. In 1975 the Western Association of Schools and Colleges noted these shortcomings in its accreditation report and recommended that the formula system be thoroughly revised or "possibly abolished."¹

The library administration continued to attempt to work with the existing system while studying alternatives, principally through a subcommittee of the University Library Committee. At the same time, means were being sought to improve internal library operations (e.g., to reduce the time required for ordering and processing new books, and to smooth out highly uneven work flow caused by the natural tendency of book selectors to work against fall and spring deadlines for submitting orders). In November, 1978, the University Librarian prepared a proposal for the Academic Resource Allocation Committee designed to address these and other problems; the proposal grew out of earlier discussions of the increasing impact of the cost of serials subscriptions on the library materials budget. In summary, its goals were:

1. To discontinue the allocation of a "general" fund (30 percent of the total, administered by

the library) and to discontinue allocation of funds to the schools and divisions by formula (70 percent, administered by those schools and divisions), thereby creating a single book fund.

2. To continue selection of library materials by the faculty, while sharing responsibility for the routine selection of current publications with librarian bibliographers, with ample opportunity for review by Departmental Faculty Coordinators.
3. To inaugurate a books on an approval program, to replace the traditional method of ordering books on individual order request cards and multiple copy forms, usually long after the publication date.
4. To maintain fiscal control by more efficient internal methods, based on projections of expected publishing activity and academic support requirements as derived from the Academic Master Plan.
5. To continue review of the budgetary and selection program over a two-year trial period.

Additional recommendations concerned establishment of a core list of serials subscriptions, and review of new subscription requests. After review and discussion at various levels the proposal was endorsed by the University Library Committee, and in January, 1979, by the Academic Resource Allocation Committee.

The two-year experimental program was introduced in July, 1979. The transition to the new system was facilitated by means of seminars for Departmental Faculty Coordinators held during November for further acquaintance with actual operation of the approval plan, the single book fund, and for orientation to the newly developed *Coordinator's Manual*. A subject interest selection "profile" for each academic area was constructed and modified several times during the course of the year, and serves as the basis for fortnightly shipments of books by the vendor. All interested faculty have been invited to review books, which are on display Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 6 p.m., in Library Room 111. In addition to books, notification slips for publications of related interest are reviewed; returning the slip to the vendor brings an approval book in a subsequent shipment. Publications outside the approval plan may be requested by the traditional firm order procedure.

At the beginning of the second academic year of the program, operational efficiencies have been achieved by simplifying the traditional review of publisher announcements, catalogs and book reviews, pre-order preparation and typing, filing, and invoice processing. These benefits, however welcome, assume lesser importance than those visible to faculty: elimination of faculty and departmental clerical work associated with traditional ordering; anticipation of demand for currently published titles; opportunity to actually examine each book before making a purchase decision; elimination of arbitrary budget constraints and artificial subject distinctions; and, more immediate availability of new books.

The greatest operational hurdle posed by the approval books plan, that of adequate budgeting, was successfully met as the result of care in profiling, monitoring, and frequent consultation by participants with the Collection Development Coor-

dinator and Acquisitions Librarian. Clearly, the Library has insufficient resources to address all current research interests expressed by faculty. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the program (or any acquisitions method) has been the absolute necessity to discourage selection of specialized materials suitable for a research library. An off-setting benefit of this process is the ability of faculty to at least examine material that may be utilized, when needed, by means of interlibrary loan or visits to research libraries.

Response has been generally favorable among those faculty who have been involved in the approval plan, and within the library itself. In May, 1980, a call for comment on the plan was sent to coordinators and other faculty, in preparation for a review of the operation of the plan with the vendor's representative. A number of written responses were received, largely positive, some with questions revealing predictable misunderstandings of various operational aspects, especially profiling and processing. "Open house" question and answer sessions were provided for faculty and librarians in June; these were followed by a series of discussion meetings of librarians on collection development topics in preparation for beginning the second year of the experiment.

Thus, many of the anticipated benefits have been achieved as the end of this two-year experimental program approaches. Further refinements in the program have been achieved and reason to anticipate that the final evaluation will enable continuation of the program.

¹Report of the visiting committee for Humboldt State University to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, April 9-11, 1975: p. 17