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THE GIFT OF WORDS: ISSUES IN GIFT AND DONOR RELATIONS

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All librarians may have to face a similar problem: how to handle the "gift of words," or donated books and other printed material. Special collections libraries many times welcome these gifts of books and materials, especially if they are of historical or genealogical value. Moreover, special libraries may solicit these types of donated materials, as the acceptance of the items creates a sense of community goodwill, and can generate future contributions, both monetary and material, from other sources. Most public libraries, however, do not want these materials for their collections, but seek them for fundraising events. Many public libraries have stopped taking any donated materials for their collections, and will accept only monetary gifts that allow them to purchase new items. "Gifts of words," if not handled correctly, can create ill will and the loss of community support. The donor may perceive rejection of material as a personal rejection. What are the implications in the community if a donor finds their "precious" book in the library dumpster? Author Ed Buis cleverly notes the perils of donations as "killing us with kindness" (10). Thus, in order to ensure excellent patron relations, libraries must have clear donation and gift policies.

Donated materials present a variety of problems. These problems may include:

- Mold, mildew and water damage to binding or pages
- Brittle paper or missing pages
- Insect damage
- Mutilated pages
- Broken spines and covers detached or missing
- Excessively marked or underlined text
- Unbound or loose-leaf items.

Each item must be examined with costs of storage and care/preservation in mind. Does the value of the item outweigh these costs?

Many initial problems can be eliminated by having a statement of what the library is interested in collecting, and/or receiving as donations. This statement should be readily available with contact information. Frequently, donors drop off boxes of "stuff" Goodwill-style without speaking with a library staff member. A good gift policy states what can or cannot be accepted. Items that usually are not accepted include mass-produced magazines (*National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*), old sets of encyclopedias, *Reader's Digest* condensed books, pocket-type paperbacks, cassettes, vinyl records, textbooks, VHS tapes, books in very poor condition, periodicals, software, damaged items, and discards from other libraries. Sometimes, donations also include "homemade" materials such as illegally copied audio and video that will have copyright issues.

When a donor arrives with a potential donation, give the donor a "temporary" receipt indicating "an unconditional donation" or "to be considered for acquisition." Include on the receipt a statement about the disposition of unacceptable materials. The receipt should note that the source will pick up unwanted items, and should give the library permission to dispose of, destroy, or sell items. This type of "no-strings-attached" gift is best for the library and the donor. If the donor indicates that there is a large amount of materials, the librarians may wish to evaluate the gift beforehand.

It is helpful to review examples of existing gift policies by other libraries. The Wellesley College Library's policy reads:

Due to the high costs of managing the gift process, the Library's goal in accepting gifts is to acquire only materials which are highly relevant to the institution's needs. All potential gifts will be evaluated in terms of the collection development goals of the

Library. These include: supporting the current and evolving curriculum, supporting the basic research needs of faculty and students, maintaining older collections of depth (Gifts Policy).

Encourage potential donors to speak to a library staff member first; post signs and contact information in the library and online at the library's web site. The web site should also have a FAQ for donation guidelines. A detailed gifts policy statement aids the organization in building better collections and maintaining community support. It is much easier to say, "This does not fit with our collection/gifts policy" than to say, "We do not want that." How can a library tell if it has a good policy? Some points to consider: Is the policy brief, easily understood by both patron and staff? Was it created as a joint effort? Is it non-discriminatory, legal and readily accessible? (Gerding 274).

Before material gifts are accepted, the library should be certain that the gifts policies are codified in the gift form that the donor will sign. The library should retain the legal right to use the donated materials online or in print, or to sell them in next year's book sale. Thus, a signed gift form formalizes the relationship between the donor and the library so that there will not be any questions about the disposition of the materials.

Donations should be processed using a triage approach. A subject specialist librarian or the special collections librarian performs the initial evaluation. Then, in consultation with an accession committee or the Director, the librarian will decide whether to accept the materials or not. Gift processing procedures should follow an established standard. Most special libraries follow this mode or pattern, after the boxes or containers are opened and placed on shelves:

1. Decide which individual items will not be accepted.
2. Search the library's catalog to see if the library already owns a title or any editions.
3. Create separate shelving areas for items not in the collection or duplicate materials.
4. Order special bookplates if necessary.
5. Place a note in the book regarding its special value or significance.
6. Put materials on book trucks or leave on shelves for further evaluation by the accession committee or director.
7. Rebox items not accepted and prepare them

for disposition, sale or return to the donor.
8. Accession and store for processing, arrangement, and cataloging by the staff.

Processing donations involves multiple expenses. Staff time is needed for cataloging, detailed bibliographic description and the creation of online access. Materials such as bar code stickers, spine labels and protective covers or special housing must be purchased. Even obtaining the materials can cost time and resources. (One donation recently processed by the authors involved 54 boxes of books and serials. Though such a gift added to our holdings, the procurement and processing costs were significant.)

Librarians should be aware that some people use gifts to libraries to promote their own political or moral agenda. Decisions about these types of gifts should be made according to an established gifts policy statement. Also, the donor should know that items accepted will be added to the general collection and not maintained as a separate "named" collection unless it is a unique, rare or extensive subject collection.

Some libraries choose not to take any donated items for their collections because of the costs, and prefer "shelf-ready" materials. These "shelf-ready" materials are a cost-effective way to make use of limited time and resources. "Shelf-ready" refers to the physical enhancements (barcodes stickers, protective covers, spine labels, security devices) that the vendor or publisher makes to the purchased product. These enhancements make the item available to the patron almost immediately.

Most donors are pleased that their donation has been accepted and that the items are being housed, maintained and preserved in a special collections library. The library must tread lightly with certain donors and have good, detailed collection and gift policy statements so that library staff can deal effectively with donors who pressure them. Author Lucy Caswell writes that donors can suffer levels of anger or depression, and may try bargaining to get their way. She highlights donors' emotional attachment to the items or collections because they have "put time, intellectual effort, and money into building their collection" (195).

According to Steven Cox, "our job as librarians, archivists, and curators is an important one and a role many people do not fully

understand nor appreciate. A donor's hidden agenda or best intention may start us on a road we do not wish to travel, and we must be cautious where we step. Nevertheless, many of our repositories are full of priceless items from generous donors. They function as a result of the good graces of local philanthropists. Without such generosity, our collections would not be as bountiful as they are" (35).

Potential donors should know that their support through gifts is always welcome. With a well-defined donation/gift policy statement

(see Appendix) available in print and online, saying "no" to unwanted gifts becomes easier. Donors can clearly see the organization's reasoning and look elsewhere to place their donations. In this way, no matter the type of library, staff can deal effectively with the gift of words.

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Washington University Libraries
Department of Special Collections
Manuscript Division

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I, _____, (hereinafter referred to as the Donor), hereby donate the papers and other materials (hereinafter referred to as Materials) described in the attached Preliminary Inventory to Washington University of St. Louis (hereinafter referred to as the University) for inclusion in its Olin Library Department of Special Collections. As sole owner of these Materials, Donor gives physical ownership of them to the University. Title to the Materials shall pass to the University upon their delivery to the University's authorized representative.

Donor gives and assigns to the University all rights of copyright in (a) the Materials and (b) in such of Donor's works as may be found among any collections of Materials received by the University from others, with the following exceptions (use attached sheet if necessary):

These donated Materials shall be preserved, organized, and made available for education and research in accordance with the University Department of Special Collections access and use policies. At any time thereafter, the donor shall be permitted to examine any of the Materials during the regular business hours of the University's Department of Special Collections. The University is authorized to display any donated Materials in non-profit exhibitions both on and off campus. Materials may also be used to illustrate exhibition catalogs and University publications.

The University is authorized to dispose of any Materials in the collection that the Department of Special Collections, in its sole discretion, determines are no longer necessary to the collection. In such event the Materials specified below will be returned to Donor or to Donor's heirs if Donor is no longer living (use attached sheet if necessary) :

In the event that Donor may, from time to time, hereafter give, donate, and convey to the University, for inclusion in its Department of Special Collections, additional Materials, title to such additional Materials shall pass to the University upon their delivery, and all the provisions of this instrument of gift shall be applicable to such additional historical Materials. A description of the additional Materials so donated and delivered shall be prepared and attached hereto and incorporated herein.

DONOR

By: _____ Dated: _____

Address, City, State, Zip Code and Telephone

The foregoing gift of Materials of the Donor is accepted on behalf of the University, subject to the terms and conditions heretofore set forth.

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