

F3: New Horizons in Collection Development:

Approval Plans

by Rachel Pergament

JoAnn Hounshell (Northwestern University Law School Library) began the program by describing the key issues that the program would focus on: the process of establishing an approval plan and the steps involved in monitoring, refining and revising an approval plan. (An approval plan is vendor-based plan that provides a library with new books or book titles based on the library's predetermined set of guidelines that reflect the parameters of its collection. Approval plan options now also include delivery of fiscal and cataloging records.) Hounshell and **Julie R. Stauffer** (University of Chicago, D'Angelo Law Library) compiled a helpful checklist that describes how to establish and revise an approval plan. This checklist is available in the Educational Program Handout Materials. Also included in the Program Handout materials is a selective bibliography of periodical articles related to approval plans compiled by **Michael Petit** (Georgetown University Law Center, Edward Bennett Williams Library).

The program began with Michael Petit describing the process that occurs when a library establishes an approval plan. Petit, who is Head of Acquisitions at Georgetown University Law Center, currently works with six different approval plans involving Anglo-American Law, British Law, French Law, Irish Law, and Mexican Law. He briefly described the history of approval plans that were introduced in the 1960s. Approval plans are considered an early form of outsourcing. Petit explained that an approval plan should be considered a partnership between a library and a vendor.

Petit described two forms of approval plans: books and slips. Approval slips take the place of the physical book and provide, on a slip of paper, the bibliographic information of a book, a brief description of the book, the book's date of publication and price. The vendor supplies the library with books or slips based on a predetermined plan called a *profile*. A profile should be developed by librarians familiar with their libraries' collections and vendors' representatives familiar with the legal and law subject offerings of the publishers they represent.

The vendor may assist the library in drawing up its profile by providing a guide, which describes the process of developing a library profile, sample management and accounting reports and publishers' book lists. For an approval plan to work best, the library and vendor should each designate one individual as a coordinator. Petit considers library profiles to be dynamic documents that undergo modifications as library collections change.

Petit explained the process that occurs when an approval plan for books has been put in place, but before the first shipment of books is received. He recommended that the library determine whether new procedures for library personnel are necessary when an approval plan is started. New library procedures may be necessary for sorting, selecting, and reviewing books.

Once the vendor has prepared the profile and sent it to the library, the library approval plan coordinator should carefully examine the profile to ensure that, if any changes or clarifications are necessary, those modifications are made. The library may request that the vendor prepare and supply a report listing what the library would have received during the prior six months had a profile been in place. This sample list tests whether the parameters the library has set in its profile meet expectations. This test may provide an early indication of a problem with the profile.

Petit finished the first portion of his presentation by describing the procedures in place at the Georgetown University Law Center when shipments of approval plan books are received. The library reviews the books received, sorts the books to ensure that each fits into the library's collection, and returns books to the vendor that do not fit into the library's collection.

Scott Alan Smith (Blackwell's Book Services) described the benefits a library may gain by utilizing an approval plan: protection from publishers' short runs; dependence on pre-publication information; cost savings; and, timely and consistent delivery of newly published titles. He discussed several aspects of

approval plans from a vendor's viewpoint, such as pre-publication book discounts, the processes used to profile books, and how book profiles are matched against library profiles.

Smith described other support products and services available from vendors. These services may include online access to book profiles, library profiles, and various management reports. Additional outsourcing services may also be available, such as paperback binding, spine labeling, bar coding, and machine-readable acquisitions and catalog records.

The second part of the program focused on revising and refining approval plans. Michael Petit discussed the process of conducting an initial review. The initial review should take place six months after an approval plan is started. Petit stated that the industry standard for rate of returns is 5–10%. The rate of return provides a good indication of problems with a library's profile. If the rate of return falls below 5%, the library's profile may be too restrictive and the library may not be receiving books that would fit into its collection. If the rate of return is greater than 10%, the library's profile may be too broad and may need to be modified. Petit also described several factors to consider when evaluating the performance of vendors: rates of return, depth of coverage, and turn around time between ordering and receiving books.

Scott Alan Smith described several reasons why profiles may need to be revised: budget constraints, program or course offering changes, and the passage of time.

This program was a well-thought out and provided many useful and helpful suggestions about approval plans. This program was successful because it provoked additional thought and discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of approval plans compared to notification slips during the Acquisitions Roundtable held later in the day.

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