Intercepting Departmental Fumbles and Running with the Ball

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Academic libraries may find themselves drawn into inter-departmental partnerships with diverse campus units whose goals often run counter to the libraries' mission statement. Inter-departmental cooperation—while perceived as an ideal scenario—can be the source of disruption when fueled by conflicting research agendas or customer service goals. The challenge is to ensure that the partnership will be mutually advantageous to all concerned. This becomes increasingly complex when shrinking budgets and space considerations are the prime motivators for establishing a partnership. The library should not become an academic black hole for products or projects that have become inconvenient for other departments to handle. The objective of this paper is to outline steps to turn a potentially disadvantageous alliance into a win-win solution.

Recently, two departmental fumbles were intercepted by staff members of the Mary Couts Burnett Library at Texas Christian University (TCU). The first involved the selection, by the School of Business, of the electronic product Compustat. The second concerned the creation of a new non-library computer lab by the Intensive English Program. Via these examples, we intend to illustrate effective ways of handling politically charged situations which, at the outset, do not appear to be in the library's best interest. Following the "fumbles" and "interceptions" overview, is a solutions framework that may be adapted by any library to successfully negotiate potential academic minefields.

Compustat

Compustat is a [family of] CD-ROM product(s) produced by Standard and Poor's, a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies. Compustat is non-bibliographic in nature; it is used to generate statistical reports using raw financial data. As a data series product, its format is more appropriate as an instructional aid and/or laboratory application than as a library reference product. Furthermore, practitioners in the field of Finance—not students doing financial research—are Compustat's intended search audience. The product is also math intensive in its application and requires a math co-processor chip to perform the statistical calculations.

Although the library recommended against its purchase in 1993, the School of Business made a financial commitment to the product. After realizing that the prod-

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uct was going to take much more support in the Business computer lab than was previously anticipated, the School essentially unloaded the product onto the library since, in their words: the library "handles CD-ROMs." In effect, the School of Business determined that the product was appropriate for the library with no regard to its content, only its format. This last action was undertaken with no library staff consultation. The lack of library input resulted in improper planning and improper product implementation that took many years to resolve. Although they did not want to be involved in the maintenance, training, and upkeep of the CD-ROM, the School of Business continued to finance the product from their budget.

Departmental Fumbles

Product did not fit the selection criteria/policy document, employed by the Collection Development Department, used in purchasing electronic data products.

Professors, and library staff, were unaware that the purchased subscription was an **academic**, not a corporate subscription; resulting in mass confusion when professors demanded to know why certain data was not available for their calculations.

Once the School of Business realized it did not have the resources to appropriately accommodate the product, the library was put in a position to assume the ongoing upkeep, maintenance, product check-in and routing. To further complicate matters, the library lacked the proper electronic equipment required to effectively run Compustat since, in 1993, the Reference area PCs lacked math co-processors.

A specific point of service was not established. Guidelines for the routing of archival discs were either unclear or ignored, resulting in staff confusion and delays. Miscommunication between campus units, (Information Services/School of Business/Library), downgraded user support and increased end-user frustration.

Of the three departments involved (Information Services/School of Business/Library), not one wanted to endorse a "product champion" or "product troubleshooter." The lack of a product expert resulted in poor training procedures. All reference staff were now required (theoretically) to have extensive knowledge in the fields of finance, statistics, and the Compustat product with absolutely no training from Standard and Poor's.

Library staff became "couriers" or intermediaries between the Business faculty and Information Services.

Faculty wanted certain disks loaded and available at the drop of a hat and any available Reference staff was expected to expediently deliver the product for quick loading onto the network CD-ROM tower.

Faculty had unrealistic expectations for the type of services Library staff could, and should, provide to users. For example, professors would encourage their undergraduate students to consult the product with no training, instruction or usage guidelines, assuming librarians could properly direct students in the product's use.

Library Interceptions

The list of challenges facing the Library staff provided an opportunity to strengthen the Library's position on the campus, while ensuring that Compustat found the most effective "home" for its user base. The first priority was establishing a clear communication link among the three campus entities previously mentioned. Since communication had broken down from the very beginning— with the library's initial rejection of Compustat as a Library database—a committee of concerned departmental representatives was established to spotlight problems. The library took the initiative by inviting both Business and Information Services to a procedural brainstorming meeting. The problems faced by library staff in effectively implementing Compustat were outlined. The suggestion was to continue meeting to devise a policy manual, for non-bibliographic electronic products, whereby all concerned departments would have input into the procedural document.

An effective communication process finally began after five years of miscommunication between the School of Business, the Library and Information Services. This amount of time should not have elapsed before the problem was identified and tackled by staff members. One of the reasons for this alarming time lapse in cementing a policy stemmed from the atmosphere of intimidation the library and Information Services perceived to be coming from the School of Business. Only when this fear was overcome and the key library staff committed themselves to an empowering role did the situation begin to improve. After many years of a frustrating situation, the library finally realized that the only way to pursue a solution was to be proactive, by taking a leadership role in forcing the other departments to face up to their fumbles and miscalculations.

The Compustat documentation that developed in the inter-departmental meetings became a detailed guide-

line, not only for Compustat implementation, but for future non-bibliographic electronic products as well. This policy and procedures document—after many drafts—became the guiding instrument which clearly delineated the commitments and responsibilities to which each department must adhere. In this complicated scenario, the Library was instrumental as the guiding force in strengthening cooperation between departments with antagonistic agendas.

Intensive English Lab

After many attempts, the Intensive English Program at Texas Christian University received a grant dedicated to the construction of a language learning lab on campus. The lab would house state-of-the-art computer equipment geared to facilitating instruction to non-English speakers. Campus Administration decided the best location for the Lab would be the library.

Departmental Fumbles

• The library space selected for the Intensive English Lab housed the graduate study carrels.

• The library was already very limited on space, having established an off-site storage facility the previous year.

• The loss of precious library space caused an immediate negative reaction from the staff, heightened by the fact that the location was to house another university department's program.

• The Intensive English Program had done very little planning beyond writing the grant. Implementation and the impact on the library and its staff had not been considered in detail.

• The library's instruction program, under-equipped and desperate for space, had suggested the graduate carrels as a location for future growth.

• Lab maintenance guidelines had not been established, causing concern over who would be responsible for the technology: Information Services or the Library.

• Many library staff members were concerned about how much staff time would be required in implementing a lab in which their role, or its benefits, were not clearly defined.

Library Interceptions

Once it became evident the Intensive English Lab would be housed in the library, staff attitudes, not surprisingly, were uniformly negative. Disbelief and anger with the campus administration's commandeering of library space was the norm. How could they take the building space, when they must know how much we needed and deserved it? Polite protest to the contrary, this is where University Administration felt the Intensive English Lab should go. When the charge came to the library's Instruction Committee to help in implementing the project, this negative attitude was the first hurdle.

Was gaining a lab with state-of-the-art equipment geared toward instruction really a negative? True, it was paid for and would be run by another campus department, but they were very grateful for the space. Also, beyond the classes scheduled by the Intensive English Program, the lab had many vacant time slots available. Why not work out an agreement where the library gained access to the lab for instruction purposes during these windows of availability? As soon as the Instruction committee began perceiving the forced intrusion of the lab as an opportunity, rather than as a threat, negative attitudes began changing. Since a new library instruction facility, with hands-on capabilities, was not in the library's foreseeable future, this was a golden opportunity to quickly gain access to a fully stocked instruction facility: an opportunity not to be missed.

As communication between the Intensive English Program and the library began, it became increasingly clear that much of the necessary planning required to bring the lab into existence had not been initiated. Intensive English had primarily focused on obtaining the grant, not on what would be done once the money was available. This became the logical place for the library staff to step in, offering assistance and guidance. If the new lab was to benefit the library, staff members needed a voice in the all important implementation phase. Librarians must be diplomatic, calm, and clear headed in this process. They needed to confront the often troublesome and time-consuming task of bringing a project into viable existence. The library was willing to compromise by supplying staff, time, and expertise in return for access.

The focus, as stated throughout this paper, is how to turn a potentially bad situation into a positive one. How to pick up another department's fumble and run with it to a successful outcome. This may sound like an "us-against-them" scenario, but, unlike football, the goal is a win-win outcome. By agreeing to play ball with the Intensive English program, versus passively sitting on

the sidelines, the library gained an enhanced campus image. The library avoided becoming a victim of campus politics, by remaining proactive in a potentially disadvantageous situation.

The library, often considered a passive player in campus politics, can become a valuable intermediary in the negotiating process. Frequently, the library's nebulous status in the university can work to its advantage when conflicts develop. The ability to step back, then find the core of the problem, and spearhead the solution is a enviable position to have. Using the following steps as guidelines, successful inter-departmental resolutions can be negotiated and implemented.

Solutions Framework

When conflicting campus agendas collide, we offer these basic steps in developing a potential win-win solution for your library:

1. Communication
2. Negotiation
3. Planning
4. Documentation
5. Implementation
6. Maintenance

These six basic steps form a solutions framework that will enable you to accomplish positive results. The initial negative attitude of librarians can be a major stumbling block; possibly stemming from fear of risk-taking as well as a sense of powerlessness. We may not be in control of all outside forces impacting the library, but we can become empowered risk takers when we decide to become players, not spectators, in the problem-solving arena. Creative solutions can be explored when we walk onto the playing field. Sitting on the sidelines will only result in watching the other players further their agendas without valuable library input.

Naturally, the first step is communication. Zero in on the specifics of the issues and begin a dialog with the other campus unit(s) involved. In the discussion phase, become the mediator or the facilitator. Whenever possible, take the initiative to direct the proceedings. In taking this first step you will open the doors, illuminating the issues at hand. In many situations, the willingness to start the ball in motion may help strengthen your bargaining position.

With the relevant goals and agendas identified, you can move on to negotiation. What steps need to be taken and who will be responsible for seeing them through?

And, how will the project be implemented to the satisfaction of all involved? For a tense and potentially political situation to begin moving to a resolution, compromise must happen. Once again, do not be afraid to take the first step. By being willing to negotiate initially, you will gain in the long run. The library has demonstrated a willingness to lead combined with a desire to negotiate.

When compromises have been committed to, a natural bridge to the planning phase has been constructed. Planning will move the project toward a smoother implementation. When developing a plan of action, you begin crystallizing the project's goals and objectives. A well-devised plan provides a solid implementation framework; a framework that will become the basis for creating accurate documentation. A properly devised plan irons out any remaining issues left unresolved in the negotiation phase. The communication that began the entire process is now beginning to gel into solutions.

It is imperative to properly document the entire project life to reduce, if not eliminate, future disparities. Via a written agreement, record all the processes involved in the development and upkeep of the project. Additionally, identify and gain commitment from designated "project champions." A "project champion" is the responsible party overseeing all aspects of the project's implementation, documentation, and maintenance. The champion will insure that policies and procedures are followed. He, or she, functions as an inter-departmental arbitrator when future questions arise and require resolution. The need for a "project champion," combined with good documentation, was recently reinforced when a business professor at TCU attempted to sidestep the policy document inspired by Compustat. The written procedures outlining database selection underscored the library's position, ensuring that the previous pitfalls encountered with Compustat were not repeated.

Now that the documentation and people are in place, it is time to proceed with project implementation. If the communication and planning phases have been effective, implementation will fall into place. The framework for solving new pitfalls has been established. Smooth implementation, and successful maintenance, are the rewards of a productive partnership.

This process need not be a power struggle between two departments. It should be a willing partnership with a common goal. The building blocks of a successful

partnership are accomplished via the planning stage dialogue, where guidelines and policies are mutually agreed upon by all parties. Concerns and problems are brought to the table, ensuring solutions that will be beneficial to all sides. Involvement in the planning process helps ease negative feelings at the project's end. By working together in a spirit of good will, positive results are realized. A proactive mindset is always preferable to a reactive one.

While the two examples described in the paper are unique to the Mary Couts Burnett Library, the solutions framework can be universally applied. Each potentially volatile campus partnership will require a unique set of solutions. The goal is to think globally while exploring out-of-the-box solutions, ignoring artificial boundaries inhibiting successful progress. By utilizing the basic concepts detailed in our solutions framework, campus partnerships can flourish. Intercepting departmental fumbles will enhance customer service, strengthen campus cooperation, and reduce end-user frustration. A secondary benefit is a subtle reinforcement of the library's importance in the overall campus environment. Take the ball, run with it, and win.