O’Shea, Reflection Standard 4.1

Artifacts
- Collection Development Policy (ISTC 615, Fall 2009)
- Censorship wiki (ISTC 615, Fall 2009)
- Banned Books Week wiki (ISTC 601, Spring 2010)
- Book evaluations (SLM 504, Summer 2010)
  - The Storm in the Barn
  - Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice
- Project-based browsing displays, Catonsville Middle School (ISTC 789, Fall 2010)

Building and maintaining a collection that meets the needs of library users is a major component of program administration. A collection development policy guides this process. In ISTC 615, all assignments addressed a librarian’s administrative and management responsibilities. Additional coursework and experiences in my placements enabled me to put Standard 4.1 into practice.

For the signature assignment in ISTC 615, I selected, analyzed, and compared the collection development policies of two Maryland public school systems, Somerset County and Howard County. I selected these systems because I viewed them as opposites: rural versus suburban, economically poor versus economically wealthy, and small versus large with very different demographics and population figures. Despite these differences, their collection development policies were similar, as I hoped they would be. I wanted to prove to myself that size does not matter when it comes to collection development. The same rules and guidelines apply. An effective collection development policy and related documentation should contain similar elements regardless of the size of the system that created it and uses it.

For the project, I looked at components of each collection development policy and identified strengths and weaknesses. For example, neither system’s policy included a community and school analyses. Because a policy should reflect users’ needs, it would be helpful to describe the users. Howard County’s policy lacked sections such as acquisition, processing, and cataloging of materials; maintaining materials and equipment; inventory of materials; collection evaluation; weeding; circulation policies; and intellectual freedom. Somerset County’s policy contained all these sections and more. I searched Howard County’s school system website and eventually found content relevant to the missing sections. I recommended that Howard County consolidate the collection development policy documentation in a single area of the website, such as the library office. Somerset County’s policy had much to recommend it. I particularly liked that it included an operations manual/administrative handbook for librarians.

The policy evaluation assignment drove home the importance of having a current, accessible collection development policy. Such a policy informs all stakeholders about how collection decisions—additions and removals—are made. If I follow the policy, collection decisions are not arbitrary; they are reasoned and supported. For example, circulation data and copyright dates can be useful when weeding. While it is possible that rarely circulating books deserve a space in the collection, data will support the selection decisions I make. Similarly, a
A computer book in the 000s section with a copyright date more than three years old could be a good candidate for removal because of outdated content. Bishop (2007) states that careful weeding “is as important as the process of selection” (p. 121). I weeded the 000s and 100s sections of the Catonsville Middle School (CMS) library. Then I added appropriate, newer titles to a consideration file in Titlewave (Follett). Like selection, weeding involves item-by-item consideration, examination, and evaluation.

A collection development policy defends intellectual freedom and equal access to information. A thorough collection development policy also informs school stakeholders that they have a say in the collection process. Community members may request reconsideration of material. Related to selection and intellectual freedom, I co-authored a wiki about censorship. This directly relates to Standard 4.1: ensuring “a balanced collection that reflects diversity of format and content, reflecting our multicultural society” and “flexible and equitable access to facilities and resources.” I administered and organized the wiki, and I created content for pages about Self-Censorship and Internet Filters and Filtering. For me, investigating censorship reinforced the importance of a current and publicly accessible policy. Later in ISTC 601, I used my knowledge of censorship issues to guide the development of a group wiki to market and promote Banned Books Week.

Book evaluations that I wrote in SLM 504 and in ISTC 615 have practical applications to selection decisions and to my continuing ability to recommend books to students. In SLM 504, I evaluated 25 books suitable for middle school or high school students. Books represented a variety of genres, including graphic novels, and had to meet other criteria such as specific award-winners, i.e. YALSA non-fiction, Alex Award, and Printz award. Per the assignment, evaluations included a personal reaction, identification of the target audience, recommendations for using the book in content areas, book pairings, and potentially controversial elements. For book evaluations in ISTC 615, selection criteria included authority, currency, size, durability, and perceived appeal of the layout and front covers.

Once in place, a library collection must be organized and accessible. During my placement at Catonsville Middle School, I frequently pulled and displayed books for specific teachers and lessons. With a volunteer, for example, I pulled more than 300 historical fiction books in the collection for an eighth grade social studies project. I then sorted, organized, and displayed them by time period for easier access and browsing by students. I also created time period resource lists in Destiny to facilitate sorting in future years. Similarly, I pulled and displayed books for a seventh grade biography project and an eighth grade Health unit. Throughout my two placements, I also ran the circulation desk and shelved returns. Altogether, my actions aligned with Standard 4.1 to help me meet students’ and teachers’ needs.