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Mainstreaming Media: Innovating Media Collections at the NCSU Libraries

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Abstract:

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) predicates its "Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries" on assumptions that general principles of collection management and library service apply equally to media formats (<http://ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/mediareources.cfm>). Yet, implicit in ACRL's Guidelines is the additional (and perhaps contradictory) assumption that, to be effective, academic library media collections and services must form a separately administered "program," headed by a single librarian. At The North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries, we have instead chosen to administer our many media collections and services using the same structures we use for those of other formats, interweaving media into the very fabric of the NCSU Libraries' collections and services. While they sometimes pose particular challenges, media are increasingly present and significant in our collections, and "mainstreaming" them – dealing with them as a holistic part of our already diverse portfolio of formats – has meant tremendous benefits for budget, workflow and user experience. As the unofficial "coordinator" of media collections for a decade (one of many hats!), I offer a quick review of our many collections and service points, including: a "media center" that is now integrated into the library's main circulation desk, an open-shelf circulating DVD collection, video game collections, and a vast and growing collection of online films (both vendor- and library-hosted, and many of which are not owned anywhere else in streaming format). Our media collections and approaches to providing them are equally forward-thinking.

I am and I am not a media librarian. At The NCSU Libraries, we do not have a dedicated media librarian, as do probably most of our research library peers. Instead, we have chosen to thoroughly integrate media collections and services into the core of what we do, offering videos as just other formats through which information is found and delivered. Our subject selectors are our media selectors, and we do not budget separately for media by format, any more than we would budget separately for hardcover versus paperback books.

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It is certainly important to have staff who are knowledgeable and attentive to special issues surrounding video formats, and who communicate with each other well. I am the unofficial "coordin-

ator" of media collections, and my colleague Tripp Reade, Interim Associate Head of Access & Delivery Services, coordinates the more public services end of things. Each of us brings particular ideas and expertise coming from our respective collections and access services perspectives.

For many years, we still devoted physical space to a separate media center, with a service desk manned by support staff and students, but fiscal realities, space needs, and the desire to improve services led us to dismantle it. For example, our main library stayed open 24 hours, but media services were available only until 10pm each evening. We have been able to convert the old media center spaces into a very nice lounge, study area, and reserve-able tutoring room.

The video collection itself now largely lives as a Teaching Collection, physically located behind our main circulation desk. Fulfilling our core historic mission with regard to video, the main goal of the Teaching Collection is to support course-related teaching needs. To help keep DVDs in working order and available for classroom use, circulation continues to be somewhat limited. We've retained the same circulation policies as before for instructors,

and circulating for in-house use by students. Yet now, instead of being confined to a media center room, students are free (and excited) to take these films wherever they wish in the building to watch on laptops, on a desktop computer, or to reserve one of 15 small group study rooms with a large screen for private or small group viewing. We have also strategically located VHS viewing stations and multi-region DVD players throughout the library, and even circulate portable DVD players from the circulation desk. Lastly, we have maintained one large and one small theater in the building that may be booked for classes or campus groups.

We have moved some low-use media items to off-site storage, as we have done with some low-use items in other formats. More importantly, we have created an additional, browse-able collection of Circulating DVDs. This collection includes a very wide array of DVDs, from documentaries on great engineering projects to award-winning foreign films to seasons of television shows to cult classics and more. These DVDs supplement and complement students' classroom experiences across all subject areas, including providing access to popular media that inform general cultural literacy. This collection is on open shelves near the library entrance, organized by alphabetically in broad categories (TV, feature films, documentaries), promoted via a blog run by our Director of Programming Planning and Outreach (again, yet another colleague applying her own area of library expertise to media). DVDs are locked in reusable cases that circulation staff open upon checkout.

The Circulating DVD Collection has proven tremendously popular, immediately rising to second only to our reserves textbook collection. In fact, over a sampling period of less than 10 days at the start of this semester, a staggering 25% of the collection saw use. Faculty have expressed delight that their students can now access many more popular films and television programs for individual research projects, with access beyond library walls—as everything in the Circulating DVD Collection circulates for 7 days.

At The NCSU Libraries, we've also extended beyond traditional media collections, including developing a Video Game Research Collection. The nearby Research Triangle Park (RTP) is one of the biggest hubs

in the world for video game development, interest in video games on campus runs high, and we have academic programs related to video games across three colleges at NC State. Our Learning Commons and Technology Sandbox at Hill Library include gaming spaces and consoles for on-site gaming, but the research collection includes both historic and current games for circulation outside the building (a 7 day loan period to faculty and students alike).

Challenges with video games have included cataloging and shelving. We have had to create local practice to make clear to our users the system formats of various games (for example, Wii, Xbox, PlayStation, and their various iterations). Our catalogers and access services staff have also very handily dealt with the various accessories to games. A staff favorite at The NCSU Libraries is *Babysitting Mama's baby*, cataloged as "1 plush doll." The Wii remote slides into the doll, which becomes the interface for play. The large doll is thus integral to the media, but cannot be crammed into a DVD case or shelved by call number. Access services staff have had to find ways to barcode, keep up with and circulate such accompanying materials.

In our new Hunt Library, scheduled to open in early 2013, we will have a dedicated gaming room, complete with historic consoles and a large micro-tile wall display.

In recent years, we have also moved beyond the confines of the library building in developing a strong collection of streaming films. Not only have we purchased streaming rights from educational vendors who offer hosted services, but we have set up our own streaming server, acquired rights, digitized, and host hundreds of films on our own. We began this as a means of better supporting Distance Education courses, for which streaming video is less convenience than pedagogical necessity, and in doing so, not only reclaimed our key role at the center of campus information needs, but garnered much more favorable contract terms (for example, often getting perpetual rights for the same cost as another unit had previously paid for a short-term lease).

In negotiating streaming rights, I have focused on perpetual rights rather than short-term or leased content, attempting to create a sustainable collec-

tion of titles upon which instructors can count for continued access. For practical reasons, I have sought to keep the licensing terms as straightforward as possible, successfully using the same blanket licensing statement with nearly all copyright holders: "A license for unlimited, protected by authentication, streaming in perpetuity to all registered staff, faculty, students, and patrons at North Carolina State University." I am proud to say that The NCSU Libraries was the first to acquire perpetual rights from a great many companies, we have many films that are still unavailable for streaming anywhere else, and I played a strong backstage role

in the advent and development of several vendors' streaming products. My own collection management expertise in negotiation has served The NCSU Libraries well in creating our strong and cutting-edge media collections and services in our "mainstreamed media" environment, as have contributions from my colleagues whose primary roles are in preservation, cataloging, access services, and other aspects of librarianship. The "mainstreamed" approach to media oversight may not be best for all contexts, but it constitutes a powerful and fiscally responsible alternative to the status quo that should at least be considered.