2006

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Recommended Citation

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5018

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While the logistics of setting up and coordinating the current inventory have been a bit more complicated than what is outlined above, the basic premise is fairly straightforward: we go to the shelf and physically examine what is there, item by item. It was agreed that the inventory was necessary before we could accurately analyze how well our holdings reflect the current institutional mission and how we compare against our academic library peers. But planning for the next step of analyzing our collection became more complicated than we initially anticipated. The strategic planning process and the statistics we subsequently sought to gather led us to recognize that in 2006 the library's collection is more than what is physically contained on our shelves. It also became apparent that we were being unrealistic to assume that all academic libraries were making similar decisions about what to include in their inventoried collections, especially when bringing into account how different libraries were regarding digital holdings.

We started the process by looking at the statistics we reported for 2004 to ACRL for its Academic Library Trends & Statistics Survey:

- Volumes held: 465,629.
- Volumes added: 10,064.
- Current serials received: 1,904.
- E-journal subscriptions: 29,434.
- Total materials expenditures: $1,279,096.

Then we determined through our license agreements that we had 130 database subscriptions. However, when we went to look at the holdings of our peers we found that database and e-journal counts did not seem consistent among supposedly comparable institutions. Peers who seemed to have the same material budgets and similar counts for traditional print holdings as us reported twice as many databases and many more e-journals in their collections. In one case, a reported peer that had 25% less traditional volumes in their collection reported more than twice as many databases than we did. We were perplexed by these differences until we visited the Web pages of some peers and found that their database counts included those that were provided for free by the government (e.g., PubMed and various federal and state government sites) and other open access Internet resources (e.g., Project Gutenberg, BioMedCentral, and open access journals). This is not to imply that academic libraries are inflating their counts. Rather, without consistent collection definitions, institutions appear to be adding digital resources to their bibliographic databases in an inconsistent manner. So, while some libraries are choosing to make free databases and Websites available through their catalogs and count them as part of their reported holdings, we at Adelphi provide such resources as links on our Website and do not catalog them or include them in our holding counts.

This initial discovery led us to further consider what conducting an inventory really meant, and what the reported statistics we use to compare holdings truly represent. Starting with traditional formats, we began to question how volume count actually signified. At Adelphi, we have always included bound periodicals as part of our volume count. This count, however, has been lowered by the availability of electronic counterparts in stable resources such as JSTOR and Project Muse. As with many libraries, we decided to rely upon these vendors for coverage of back issues of titles we currently receive because these databases contain the journal in PDF format and are representative of the actual item, and we are guaranteed perpetual access to the material. We discarded all volumes available within these databases, and as embargo periods end we have set up a policy to discard bound periodical volumes that are available electronically through these vendors. An end result has been that our volume count has been negatively impacted. Our decision was necessitated by severe space considerations; could libraries with the luxury of more space be keeping their back runs of bound volumes even when they could rely on electronic access to the same material? If that were the case, do their holding counts reflect double counting of the same journal titles: once in their print count and then in their count of e-journal titles?

We thought of further instances where, based on individual library de-selection and retention criteria, duplicate counting of material in different formats could impact holding numbers. Our databases cover much of the same material in our traditional print and microformat reference collection of indexing and abstracting tools. Thus, if we chose to we could have the same material in a database, in print, and in microfilm (Dissertation Abstracts comes immediately to mind in this case). We also know that we duplicate holdings for our newspapers; although we subscribe to ProQuest Historical New York Times we also receive the paper in print, and we have and will continue to keep the microfilm of this paper as well. In addition, we have the New York Times available on aggregator databases, with both current and retrospective coverage (i.e., New York State Newspapers from Gale, Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe). Again, this is not to imply some institutions are attempting to inflate holding counts by holding on to all formats of the same item. Rather, diff...