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Facts and Figures / Trueswell's 80/20 Rule

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New Feature — FACTS & FIGURES

Trueswell's 80/20 Rule

Column Editor: **Anne Jennings** (Librarian, Sinkler & Boyd, P.A.)

*Consider this ATG's version of Ann Landers. We are interested in y'all — yes, that's YOU — writing or emailing or faxing us particular facts & figures that you are interested in knowing. We don't have to identify you unless you want us to. Send questions, issues, etc. to — **Facts & Figures, c/o Anne Jennings, 348 Spoonbill Lane, Mt. Pleasant, SC 29424. Email: Jenningsa@cofc.edu***

When searching for a topic for this issue's "Facts & Figures" column, I found that I did not have to do a great deal of contemplation or research in order to find my subject matter. I found something that piqued my interest, and hopefully yours as well, in the September issue of *Against the Grain*. In Katina's interview with **John von Knorring** of **Routledge**, he happened to mention the 1960's research by **Richard Trueswell** regarding the "80/20 Rule." Trueswell, who was head of the Department of Engineering at the University of Massachusetts and became well known for his research in library systems analysis, was able to demonstrate that approximately 80 percent of monographic circulation was satisfied by 20 percent of the holdings. He later applied these same figures to other areas of librarianship; it was Trueswell's opinion that these figures should be used to weed existing collections, assist in future core collection development, to help determine multiple copy purchases and as an indicator for the optimal size of a particular library's holdings (Trueswell, 158,161). Later research applied the rule to storage, new vs. older materials and to the library community.

The reason I found Mr. von Knorring's reference intriguing was that, as a recent library school graduate, these figures had been drilled into my head in my 701 Introduction to Library and Information Programs class as though they were part of the Ten Commandments of Librarianship. I questioned whether the figures continued to apply, particularly with regard to circulation, and set out to search the literature for current information. To my surprise, I could not find any real or recent data on Trueswell's theory.

Aside from Mr. Trueswell's own papers, there was only one challenge, by **Stephen J. Turner** in 1980. The fault found by Mr. Turner was not specifically directed at Mr. Trueswell, but rather toward librarians, administrators and researchers whom he said misunderstood, misinterpreted and mishandled the figures. Most important, in Turner's opinion, was the fact that Trueswell's method addressed circulation **usage** rather than age. For that reason, he felt there had not been practical application of the Trueswell rule (Turner, 134-138).

Mr. von Knorring's observation with regard to the poor circulation of monographs was that the statistics were probably a result of inaccessibility. While we have an "overload of information" he said, most researchers are successful in meeting their information needs only after a relentless and time-consuming pursuit of the data. The crux of the problem seems to be that there is no real or appropriate index to what is actually located inside a book (*Against the Grain*, 48).

I tend to agree. But, then what is a librarian to do? What **do** librarians do? Or publishers? In my experience, I have been able to retrieve literally hundreds of citations on a particular subject, but I have no way of knowing if any of those actually apply to my research. It then

takes, literally, hours of combing through the material (that to which I have access) to decide if a book or an article is applicable. While I am continually amazed with the technology, it seems that we have forgotten the end-user and how to make his or her job less tedious and more successful. Therefore, should we weed the volumes upon volumes of unused monographs and then purchase multiple copies of more reliable and/or proven texts? We would like to have your thoughts regarding this situation. Do you see it as a problem? Who's to blame? Can the problem be eliminated? Please send us your comments, questions, suggestions and/or solutions with regard to this puzzling issue. ☛

Reference List

Trueswell, Richard L. 1969. Some behavioral patterns of library users: the 80/20 rule. **Wilson Library Bulletin** 43 (January): 458-61.

Turner, Stephen J. 1980. Trueswell's weeding technique: the facts. **College and Research Libraries** 41 (March): 134-38.

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