February 1998

On The Street: Journal Collection Analysis

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Recommended Citation

Fennessy, Eamon T. (1998) "On The Street: Journal Collection Analysis," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 31.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3310>

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On The Street — Journal Collection Analysis

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Geane Dvorak, Marketing Director of Sage Publications, suggested a survey dealing with journal collection analysis so we generated several questions asking librarians how collection development is handled and how publishers could be more helpful in the process. Here's how you responded when we asked the following questions via cold phone calls and the good graces of **Eleanor Cook's** ACQNET:

1. What steps do you follow and with whom do you consult when establishing or analyzing your journal collection?

Todd Spires of Arkansas State (and of Southeastern Louisiana University as of February 2, 1998) had just dealt with this issue so his comments were pretty detailed. He related, "We just went through a complete journal analysis. Most of it was done by the university faculty in their specific subject areas. I sent a list to each department asking them to rate each of the titles in their discipline from 1 to 5. We also asked them to mark any titles they considered totally useless. If a title was mentioned as a cancellation we put it in a list which all faculty looked at before the final cut was made. Then the library's Collection Development Team made the final decisions." **Jill Vassilakos-Long** of Claremont reported along similar lines. She "created a list of publications by subject, collected faculty ratings, then sent these ratings to the bibliographers. Bibliographers nominated titles for cancellations and these were sent to all college faculty for comment. The returns were forwarded to those bibliographers who made the final decision cuts. (See question 2.) **Tony Ferguson** of Columbia was more succinct - the steps he takes run this way. "Use studies, look at expensive titles, look at inflation figures." At Morehead State the Periodicals Librarian is key. **Elsie Pritchard** reports, "Additions and cancellations are proposed by librarians and academic faculty. Each title is assigned to the appropriate fund (tied to an academic department or to the general fund). The Periodical Librarian evaluates each request to add or delete, and does have final authority, but if funds are available and the faculty liaison is determined to subscribe, chances are good for the title to be retained."

2. When it came to the second question we asked, "**Who is the final decision maker?**"

Most respondents answered that authority was given to a librarian, or to a commit-

tee. **Joanne Schmidt** of Emerson College in Boston reported her Serials Management Committee, consisting of the Library Director, Assistant Director, Reference Librarian, and Serials Librarian looked at use studies, costs, electronic availability, and consortial holdings. In addition, each Academic Division also used its Faculty Library Committee and the final decision "was made by the Serials Management Committee." Some libraries used other terms in this process. **Arkansas State** refers to its decision maker as the "Collection Development Team" led, appropriately enough, by the Collection Development Librarian. **Columbia University** gives its decision-making responsibility to a Library Materials Selector (not further defined). At the University of Chicago **Lorna Tang** states the real decision maker is a bibliographer who is a collection development librarian with a subject specialty.

3. Third question asked, "How do special promotions or package offers enter into journal collection changes?"

This issue was not crucial to most of the survey participants. If a title were "bundled" with others it could be retained depending upon the importance of those in the bundle. **Tony Ferguson** of Columbia put his answer this way, "Packages do count. Special one-year promotions don't." **Emerson College**, too, said special promotions "don't enter the equation, while the **University of Chicago** simply said, "Not at all." This is one question the subscription agents and publishers must inquire of each customer. Some like promotions ... others avoid them like the plague.

4. Next, we asked, "What information from the publishers do you need for your journal collection?"

Temper, temper ... one librarian said, "Not much. I don't trust publishers. I'd rather look at reviews and other literature in addition to department faculty expertise." Pricing history and title frequency were important to one librarian. To another, the concern was expressed as, "The proof is in the pudding. (A) Sample issue is very important, the rest is superfluous, (and) editors are important to a degree." "Costs for the coming year" were mentioned by another librarian while still another, who uses **EBSCO**, referred to information from **EBSCO** as important rather than any from the publisher. A final librarian offered these suggestions: Serials Management Reports, Price Change Reports, By

Subject Reports, and "access to consortial overlaps in holdings" also were mentioned as important to collection development.

5. The final question was: "How important are the publisher's reputation and your experience with a particular publisher when reviewing your collection?"

Todd Spires of Arkansas State replied, "Not real important." **Jill Vassilakos-Long** was on the other side of the discussion. She revealed these criteria were, "very important." Again, **Tony Ferguson** used those same words, "very important." Comments not for attribution and not so subtle were: "I've really never had any bad dealings with any particular publishers, unless you consider the price gouging that goes on with certain European publishers." Another librarian referred to, "rapacious pricing policies," and still another comment was, "Of course in the case of famous price gougers the name of the publisher is very important." Nuf ced.

In summary, institutions take journal collection analysis very seriously; they do want to involve faculty in collection decisions, and although publisher reputation is an issue, titles which are important to the faculty can get through the process. Price will always be a concern and even though a title is very popular, a high price can mean cancellation.

Contributors to this survey included:

Jill Vassilakos-Long, Claremont University
Lorna Tang, University of Chicago
Todd Spires, Southeastern Louisiana University
Joanne Schmidt, Emerson College
Robert Schlabach, College of New Jersey
Elsie Pritchard, Morehead State
Tony Ferguson, Columbia University
Doris Alkes, Brookhaven Laboratory
Shirley Adams, Erskine College

Year End Summary — On the Street

Another year of "On The Street" has become history and, in retrospect, the subject matter and the number of librarians participating in our surveys have made for illuminating analyses. I don't know whether we can correlate the number of participating librarians for 1997 to the subject proposed, but over

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Drinking From The Firehose from page 81

These are original illustrations Anna Belle created, they are NOT clip art. A colleague's institution has been threatened by legal action when a publisher discovered they were listed on the acquisitions department's Web page on the Library's "Caveat emptor" list. (Don't put such lists out publicly!)

It looks like chat lists and bulletin boards are being mounted on the Web these days. This makes me think it's time to abandon the comfortable but dull ASCII-formatted ACQNET issues for something colorful and Web-based. Also, Web sites now have sound and video clips in them. I looked at a university library Web site recently that showed their new library building being built in a series of pictures that flash across the scene continuously. That was pretty impressive.

So, where will we go next? I have no predictions today, but in my preparation for this column, I jotted down a few topics to devote to future columns. I invite readers of *ATG* who wish to do a guest column to consider these topics:

1. Collaborative software, "eyeball" cameras, videoconferencing
2. Internet banking and credit cards used on the Web
3. PDA's like Apple's Newton, which apparently is the latest electronic toy -- even our library director has one!
4. Gambling on the Web
5. Web TV -- is it going to happen?
6. Anything else that comes along you think librarians need to know about, especially those working in acquisitions and collection development. Please contact me if you would like to prognosticate.

Finally, I guess Windows '98 will be out soon so we can see how that works out. Have a Happy New Year!

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which they normally teach; the need for Internet training so that students can successfully carry out research assignments (it isn't enough to simply point them in the direction of an Internet browser); and the purchase and licensing of electronic content that was previously purchased for a geographically landlocked student body.

So the answer to the first question, is distance education in our future, is "yes" but not necessarily tomorrow. The answer to the second question, what will we do when the future settles down around us, is more difficult but I imagine that we will begin to hear more and more as time goes on. Perhaps we can arrange for a distance education and libraries panel at the next **Charleston Conference**.

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the course of the year we asked you about these topics.

- Online Acquisitions
- Book Vendors and Services to Libraries
- Outsourcing
- Paper versus Electronic Access, and
- The Role of Book Reviews in Collection Development.

As it happens, Paper versus Electronic Access was the most popular concern, but only slightly ahead of the role of Book Reviews in Collection Development. We surveyed *Against the Grain* readers early in 1997 to assess how librarians use book reviews and if they were used, which reviews were the most used and/or highly respected.

Maybe it was the season of the year, the temperature, the time for budget reviews, holidays, or the rise and fall of the stock market, but whatever it was, librarians were more apt to respond to surveys conducted in the months between February and July rather than between September and January. I refer to these months because we got more participation during the second semester of the school year than in the first semester.

We have to complete our surveys several weeks before the report is published in *Against the Grain*, and if 1997 is any indicator, more librarians are apt to let us know how they feel during the first half of the year, rather than the second. Is it something in the water?

Of course, subject matter has to enter into it too, as well as the workload participants face when we ask for input. The ques-

tion is, what will be the top issues for 1998 and will we be asking the right questions? Here's where readers can help. Let us know what is bugging you, as an individual, an academic institution staff member, and/or a professional librarian. And ... what are the concerns for the institution itself during the coming year? You can reach me at sefennessy@worldnet.att.net.

Before you know it we can have a report on how your colleagues feel about the issues concerning the library community. Do you want to know how other librarians are handling certain issues? We can develop appropriate questions if we know your interests.

In summary, you folks have responded best in terms of numbers of survey participants for the April, June, and September issues. The number of responding librarians tails off for the November and December/January issues and picks up again for the April issue. Perhaps it's a combination of subject matter, holidays, and the weather?

Whatever it is, when you receive a call from one of us, **Anne Jennings, Linda Albright, Kathy Miraglia**, or yours truly, **Eamon Fennessy**, we do not bite, are really pleasant; we do wait for the light to turn green before going through traffic intersections, and we do want to let your fellow librarians know how you feel on the issues.

Thanks for answering our surveys so that other colleagues can know how you feel. We look forward to your continued cooperation and to more pertinent and better surveys in the future. We cannot do it without you.

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