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Library Profile: Erskine College and Theological Seminary

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ERSKINE COLLEGE AND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

by John Kennerly (Erskine College) <kennerly@erskine.edu>

About Erskine College: Erskine College (EC) was founded by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1839. Prior to this time the church had established in Due West, SC, an academy for men in 1835. Erskine Theological Seminary (ETS) was founded in 1837. EC offers the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Science degrees. ETS offers the Doctor of Ministry degree as well as six masters level degrees: Master of Divinity, M.A. in Christian Education, M.A. in Counseling Ministry, M.A. in Pastoral Ministry, M.A. in Theological Studies, and Master of Church Music. The combined FTE enrollment for the fall of 2001 was 777 (582, College / 195, Seminary).

About McCain Library, its staff and organization: McCain Library was built in 1949 and named in honor of Dr. J. I. McCain, head of the English Department at Erskine College for forty-nine years. In 1973, an addition was made, more than doubling library space to 22,500 square feet and creating the facility that you see today. McCain Library serves both the College and the Seminary. The library participates in the Federal Depository Library Program, serving as a selective depository for U.S. government documents. The archive consists of materials relating to the College, the Seminary, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Abbeville County (S.C.), and genealogical records. The library also maintains special collections of materials with special significance to the institution or to the historical preservation of unique information and items. [More info available at www.erskine.edu/library/aboutml.htm]

Library Staff:

Shirley Adams, Acquisitions and Office Manager
Dallas Ashley, Technical Services Assistant (part-time)
Edith Brawley, Cataloger and Archivist (part-time)
Fred Guyette, Reference and Government Documents Librarian
John Kennerly, Library Director
Sara Morrison, ILL and Cataloging Librarian
Beth Smith, Circulation and Serials Manager
Brian Smith, Systems Manager and Webmaster

About Acquisitions and Collection Development at McCain Library: Number of books, journals, electronic resources

Books: 156,800 vols.

Journals: 892 total subscriptions (483 print, 218 microform, 191 electronic)

[In addition, over 7,000 full-text titles available through online databases]

Electronic Resources: 102 databases (84 online, 18 CD-ROM)

Budget for materials: \$165,500 (2001/02)
 \$201,800 (approved for 2002/03)

Staff in the department(s): The three professional librarians serve as departmental liaisons to the teaching faculty in assigned departments for consultation on collection development efforts. One non-professional staff member handles the ordering of materials.

Vendors used for books and journals and electronic resources:

Primary vendors: Baker & Taylor, EBSCO, Gale, OCLC

Secondary vendors: Ambassador, Amazon.com, Brodart, Out-of-print Dealers online (i.e. Advanced Book Exchange, Bibliofind, etc.)

ILS system: Voyager (Endeavor Information Systems) since the summer of 2000

Future plans: Coordinate the move of archives and special collections into the soon-to-be-completed library annex.

See through an approved plan to increase the library's materials budget for print monographs by 14% per year over the next five years.

Seek further opportunities to subscribe to electronic journals.

Seek new subscriptions to at least one key database in the disciplines of history and psychology, with preference given to full-text databases.

Decline of the Poultry Selector from page 32

tion of supplementing what — traditional electronic slips?). While the frequent and occasionally plaintive comments I receive are admittedly anecdotal, it is nevertheless instructive to note that it is common for other expensive supplemental online review media, such as **Choice Online**, to go begging in many libraries.

It is true that the elimination of returns, if viewed myopically, could save both the library and the vendor time and money. The library would not have to pay to return unwanted monographs to the vendor and the vendor could ship fewer books to the library. However, shipping fewer books will not necessarily gladden the hearts of vendors if they suspect it will reduce sales. In any case, the savings would be marginal when compared with library materials budgets or the cost to the vendor in the production or purchase of virtual notification slips. For the growing number of shelf-ready libraries (where books are supplied fully cataloged and end-processed) the question of returns has already been rendered moot. On the international side, the traditional approval plan with a large component of automatic books scarcely exists (the exceptions include, most notably, Hong Kong). Most profiles are confined to notification slips and consequently the return of rejected titles is not an issue.

Another sobering consideration for the vendor is the timeliness of the metadata supporting the virtual approval plan. From the callow debut of the modern approval plan in the golden age of the 1960s and 70s, one of its chief features (and biggest selling points) has been its timeliness — books are shipped or notification slips made available almost immediately upon publication. How swiftly can the metadata required be created, assembled, linked and made available? Who will pay for this process and who will do the work — the vendor, the publishers, the ILS vendors, the bibliographic utilities? Can it be created in time for the vendor to incorporate it in the buying or profiling processes?

The best argument for a virtual approval plan is not that it would save money, but that it would improve the quality of profiles for shelf-ready libraries. The best profiles are ever-changing organisms, surgically crafted and under constant review. In the end, profiles are just sophisticated tools and tools must be kept sharp. Vendors are now capable of capturing an astonishing array of data on approval plan activity. Reports can be effortlessly produced that parse profile activity more ways than a Ronco Vegematic. However, the most useful information in evaluating a profile remains data on rejected titles. I vividly remember toiling long and hard with a number of libraries to reduce return rates to an acceptable level in advance of shelf-ready implementation. As soon as implementation occurred and return privileges were eliminated, we were flying blind. Although urged to report what they would have rejected if they were able to do so, librarians, lacking an immediate incentive, have not been quick to take up the practice. Collecting data on titles not purchased (therefore rejected) could be accomplished rather simply in a virtual environment and would restore the primary analytical tool in amending profiles.

Finally, the idea of a virtual approval plan has some merit, some major drawbacks and a good deal of promise. Discussion and speculation should continue informed by four basic questions:

- Is it cost-effective?
- Is it timely?
- Does it support a viable professional activity?
- Will it be used?