Monographic Musings from 53 Degrees North Latitude

Ila D. Scott
University of Alberta, Ila.Scott@ualberta.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4064

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Monograph Musings from 53 Degrees North Latitude

by Ila D. Scott (Reference/Collections Librarian, Herbert T. Coutts Education and Physical Education Library, University of Alberta) <Ila.Scott@ualberta.ca> and Fred Ziegler (Collection Development Librarian, Rutherford Humanities and Social Sciences Library, University of Alberta) <Fred.Ziegler@ualberta.ca>

The University of Alberta (U of A), situated in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, is a full service university comprising fifteen faculties offering degrees that range from the undergraduate to the doctoral level. Professional faculties include medicine and dentistry, engineering, law, pharmacy, nursing, education, rehabilitation medicine and a library school. The University has an enrollment of over 32,000 students and approximately 1600 full time professors. It has the second largest library in Canada after the University of Toronto.

The U of A currently has six major libraries that serve the campus: Humanities and Social Sciences, Science/Technology, Health Sciences, Education, Law and a French collection at the Bibliothèque St. Jean. Administration of the six libraries is divided along STM and Liberal Arts lines. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) records that the U of A Library holds in total 5,924,003 volumes. In addition the University subscribes to 18,665 current serials and periodicals, and has 3,083,888 microforms. Although Acquisition is a central department, each library has budgetary rights and responsibilities and is accorded a budget within their own locus of control. Monograph and serials allocations remain separate lines within the individual library budgets. Control is overseen through a system-wide collection development committee which reports to the library senior administrative team for final approval of allocations.

In the past few years, it has been well established that almost every academic library in North America has lamented the stresses and strains on library budgets due to the increasing demands and costs of periodicals. However, at the U of A we feel that we have been very fortunate. Although the U of A is under the same pressures as everyone else to provide the necessary and expensive periodicals and “Big Deal” electronic journal packages, we have continued to protect the monograph side of the budget. The library has not allocated monograph monies into periodicals budgets simply to fill what sometimes seem like the black hole of serials inflation. Historically, the library has strived for a budget expenditure target system-wide of about 70% periodicals and 30% monographic purchases. The Science/Technology and Health Sciences libraries, of course, favor the purchase of periodicals, while the liberal arts libraries purchase more monographs. When circumstances have pressured the serials budget, the University central administration has provided funds to help the collection development committee right the balance again.

The University’s enlightened administration has also actively helped to protect the total library budget from cuts. Every year for the past several years, the Library has received additional support for collections with significant increases to the base library budget and, when possible, small dollars. Any cuts made to the library budget (‘taxes’) have always come from the operating side. Another significant reason that U of A has managed as well is the careful fiscal management that has been carried on within the unit libraries themselves. While providing the types of materials that the faculty and students want, i.e., more electronic journals and databases, the Library still manages to do that on the serials side of the budget. Print journals are cancelled where there is a viable electronic option. Not all the print holdings are bound in order to reduce binding costs and older runs of periodical issues are sent to a remote storage facility to save shelving costs and space in campus libraries.

Careful financial management of resources is imperative, but it is almost impossible to do long range budget planning. The greatest problem for any Canadian university library is the purchasing power of the Canadian dollar. Our dollar has been as low as US $ 0.64 and as high as US $ 0.78 in the past few years. Lately, our “loony” seems to have settled in the US mid-severities cents range. Since over 90% of the materials purchased for the U of A Library are published outside of Canada, the relative strength or weakness of the dollar has a significant impact on the library’s budget. The good news is that in the past couple of years with the strengthening of the Canadian dollar we have been able to purchase more materials in relative terms. Every one penny rise in the value of the Canadian dollar results in a net gain of CDN $65,000 to the library budget’s purchasing power.

Many of our serials are published by large European corporations. With the ascendency of the Euro against the American dollar and concurrently the Canadian dollar, serial purchases have been challenging to manage. It has been a struggle to satisfy the increasing demands of users. While consortial purchasing of electronic serials packages has really been of benefit, it is clear that economic forces beyond our control have a significant impact on collections budgets.

Although serials are getting most of the attention in library circles due to their proliferation and rapacious cost increases, it is perhaps too soon to predict the demise of the book collection. Researchers want and need print monographs as evidenced in the results of a recent British study by the Research Support Libraries Group (RSLG). Commissioned by the British Library, four UK higher education funding bodies, and the national libraries of Scotland and Wales, this group makes recommendations for the provision of information to British researchers. In the RSLG Final Report 2002 section entitled “What do Researchers Need?” findings strongly support a hybrid mix of journals, both print and electronic, and printed books as essential resources. With regard to the fundamental need for a book collection the researchers state that “Sixty percent of medical and biological science researchers, seventy-seven percent in the physical sciences and engineering regard printed books as an essential resource... Ninety-two percent of researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences regard printed books as essential resources.”

Endnotes
2. Kyriilidou and Young, p. 13.

continued on page 36

http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Monograph Musings from 53...
from page 34

While scholars at the U of A support an increase in electronic and print access to periodical holdings, strong demand remains for the diversity and strength of the monograph collection. Initiatives have been undertaken not merely to maintain, but to increase these holdings. The first initiative is and will remain the protection of the monograph budget. The second initiative is an ambitious donations program which at the U of A has historically been termed the "Free and Gift" Program. Pursued under the auspices of Dr. Merrill Distad, Associate Director of Libraries for Bibliographic Services and with the support of Mr. Ernie Ingles, Associate Vice President and Chief Librarian, this donations program has resulted in accessions of gift materials which equally matched monographic purchases over the past two years. The library has acquired over 60,000 volumes in each year, approximately half are purchased and half are donated. Tax-receipted donations of materials amounted to well over CDN $3 million dollars during the same time period.

"Free and Gift" is one of the most cost effective methods of building fine retrospective collections and the efforts of Dr. Distad and his staff have enabled the U of A to acquire several notable donations. These include a huge array of materials in major collections such as the Sarjeant Collection (geology, natural history, genre fiction), the Schluss Collection (rich in modern literature and history), and the Bryant-Gruhn Collection (anthropology, archaeology). Each collection carries an appraised value of over CDN $1 million. We also have obtained numerous focused collections of special interest such as the Chapman Collection of circus materials, and the Alloway Connoisseurship Collection, which covers enology (the study of wine) and the history of ceramics. The "Free and Gift" program at the U of A does not replace the purchase of new monographs nor is it intended to make up for any shortfall in the monograph budget. It is clear, however, that these donated resources which strengthen and enrich the collection could not have been acquired in any other way.

This has also proven to be a remarkably good time for the pursuit of donations. The aging professoriate as they retire often remembers the library when clearing out their offices. The baby boomers, a generation of book lovers, have also started to donate their collections to the library. Acceptance of donated materials, most of which are books, wins friendships and promotes library relationships in other ways. It soon becomes well known within the wider academic and geographic community that the U of A Library is more than willing to accept and tax-receipt gifts-in-kind. The good will that this activity generates often leads later to further bequests of collections or money.

How can such an enormous influx of material be handled during the calendar year? The Book and Record Depository, a large off-campus storage facility opened in 1994 and fondly known as the BARD, has allowed the U of A library system to accept donations that many other Canadian academic libraries can only wish for. The BARD is a high-density, temperature and humidity controlled storage facility equipped to handle the serious preservation issues that affect many library collections. Most of the materials assigned to the BARD are fully accessible and retrievable to patrons upon short notice. Since the items stored at the BARD are lesser used, this use of library space and staff effort is quite efficient and cost effective.

So how is the U of A library doing? Not too badly, considering the results of the annual survey of universities in Canada done by Maclean’s, a major Canadian newsmagazine. Although the survey considers many aspects of the various universities across this country, one significant finding for us is the ranking of the libraries. The most recent survey, done in the fall of 2003, ranked the U of A Library second in Canada, between the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia. The standings are determined by consideration of the holdings per student, the proportion of the library budget dedicated to the improvement of the library collection, electronic access, and the proportion of the total university budget allocated to the library.

Another important survey is the ARL annual statistical ranking where in 2003, the U of A ranked 22nd out of the 114 ARL libraries, second in Canada to the University of Toronto which ranked 4th overall. In volume holdings the ARL ranks the University of Alberta Library as 17th. Rankings reports such as these are extremely important in garnering goodwill and financial support from central university administrations.

What is the need for book collections in our libraries? Northrop Frye, the famous Canadian literary critic and philosopher, is quoted in New Canadian Quotations as having once said, "The book is the most technological instrument for learning that has ever been devised by the human mind. It stays around and always says the same thing, no matter how often you consult it."

Although technology is constantly presenting new opportunities and new temptations, librarians need confidence that the record of human endeavour will be preserved. To date the technological advances which we have seen have not given the assurance that this can be achieved more effectively by any means other than the printed book. Book collections, for the foreseeable future, will remain an essential scholarly resource not only at the U of A, but also in all of the best academic libraries. Nolens vults, we face a future of increasing competition between the demands of the electronic versus the print worlds. While eager to provide the best and most current resources for users, permanence and retrievability can still be most effectively and assuredly attained within the pages of the printed code.
We were preparing this paper on what future there is for books just when this year’s celebration for “Bloomsday” took place in Dublin. The timing seems ironic because Joyce would have been helped enormously by computers in the editing process (he wrote *Ulysses* by hand in school copy books, rewriting the entire text of a chapter whenever he revised). No doubt, the concept of reading *Ulysses* in digital form would have seemed to Joyce to be ludicrous, at best.

Returning to Brown’s notion of the future by looking around, we will focus much of our discussion on what we see happening around us – within Blackwell’s and the market we serve. As many of you are aware, Blackwell’s Book Services is an academic library bookseller. While we still sell a few “test prints” now and then, the dynamics of our business and the library market are changing. Like libraries, we’ve been making books business for a long time and will continue that tenure regardless of whether the definition of a book changes to include not only a print edition but also an edition in electronic format.

When Blackwell’s first started discussing eBooks at library conferences, the most common questions we were asked were “Where are your eBooks? Can I look at one?” People equated eBooks with an eReader, an eBook reader, and seemed confused when we pointed to the computer saying that we can show one online. There is now another generation of readers out there. They are entering institutions of higher learning able not only to play “Lord of the Rings” on their GameBoys, but willing, you can bet, to read it on their Pocket PC’s.

So, what is an eBook? What better way in this world of the “worldwide Web” to get an answer to this question than to do an online search. One search resulted in this definition: “An eBook is a book published in electronic form, similar to a word document, which can be delivered to any computer that is connected to the Internet from anywhere in the world.” Another search defined an eBook as an electronic book to be read digitally on a computer, laptop screen or on devices called eBook readers. Other searches came up with similar definitions.

The online search led to the conclusion that most of us, at this point, are now on the same page of the definition of an eBook; that most of us have moved away from the misperception of an eBook as the appliance itself. We are adding to our vocabulary eBook terms and products such as electronic resources, digital reference, and online journals. These latter two terms have definitions similar to eBook: a digital reference or online journal incorporating already existing accredited, fact-filled print material, making it available online for easier access and researching ability. Print is no longer the only reliable vehicle for acquiring information. We need to embrace what lies around us and welcome the unfolding of the future. “Both books on paper and electronic books exhibit distinguishing characteristics. No matter how popular electronic books become, they will not replace books on paper. The two media will coexist — each settling into its own niche.”

In a 1994 symposium on the future of the book, Umberto Eco, author and historian, relating the fears of an ever changing world in which it is believed that new technology makes the “old ways” obsolete, stated “The idea that something will kill something else is a very ancient one” (“Ceci n’est pas une pipe!” “This isn’t a pipe!”) Eco believes these fears are overblown, as we at Blackwell’s do. We believe that the expansion of the definition of a book to include eBooks, digital reference, and online journals will not make the need for or the use of printed material obsolete. The print book still has a large role in providing access to the discourse of the field. A book is still the medium best suited to reading in long segments, if not actually read from front to back. The first time one reads *Ulysses* (notice we said the first time), one reads it from start to finish. That, at least, was Joyce’s intent. One cannot read from page one to the last page (circa 700). If you are a true Joyce devotee, you have, undoubtedly, read *Ulysses* at least once from start to finish to really get a sense of the changing narrative over a single day in time. Joyce wrote his novel for the medium of print, a book in print. It’s safe to say, that very few people would be happy sitting down to read *Ulysses* from start to finish using a PDA.

One of the most studied novels of all time, *Ulysses* almost needs to be read with a concordance in hand. The value gained by a researcher — sophisticated searching to discover complex relationships and references — would make the study of *Ulysses*, not easy, but easier. Here is where reference materials in electronic format aid the scholar. Reference materials, such as concordances, are designed to pick up pieces of information from larger texts, such as a print book. This is where the expansion of print into electronic format continues.

---

**Monograph Musings from 53 ... from page 56**

So, the U of A Libraries are managing quite well for now, with the beneficence and protection of the University central administration, strong faculty support, and prudent fiscal management by the Library’s Administration. Still, we recognize that we must adapt to changes in the academic while continuing to build our book collection strengths. Only by so doing can we maintain our place in Canadian academic rankings and attract the kind of scholars that define a world-class university.

**Endnotes**

5. Ibid., p.16

---

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>