November 2005

Biz of Acq -- Bottom Feeding For Books: A Dual Strategy for Increasing Print Acquisitions and Circulation

David S. Moore

Schenectady County Community College, mooreds@gw.sunysccc.edu

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

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moore, David S. (2005) "Biz of Acq -- Bottom Feeding For Books: A Dual Strategy for Increasing Print Acquisitions and Circulation," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 17: Iss. 5, Article 23.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4565>

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.

Biz of Acq — Bottom Feeding For Books: A Dual Strategy for Increasing Print Acquisitions and Circulation

by **David S. Moore** (Technical Services/Systems Librarian, Begley Library, Schenectady County Community College, 78 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305; Phone: 518-381-1238) <mooreds@gw.sunysccc.edu>

Column Editor: **Audrey Fenner** (Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20540-7480; Phone: 202-707-6213; Fax: 202-707-7021) <afenner@crs.loc.gov>

Column Editor's Note: *A multi-year study of print books purchased from sales catalogs and remainder houses shows how costs and circulation of these discounted copies compare with costs and circulation of books acquired more conventionally, through a book jobber. The author, David S. Moore, can supply spreadsheets identifying 1) list price and actual cost, along with annual circulation numbers and rates, by vendor and publisher, and 2) circulation numbers and rates by LC classification. — AF*

We've lived through it for so long now that librarians have passed through the shock, rage, frustration and the shame and have accepted what can be called **Dewey's Third Law of Inverse Acquisitions**. That is:

$$x/y = z$$

where x represents a static or declining book budget, y represents the ever-increasing cost of each book and z represents the ever-shrinking number of books purchased each year. Many of us are in some level of denial and some have even welcomed the advent of the Internet and eBooks as justification for abandoning the development of our print book collections outright. The problem is that many people — by gosh, even college students — still require print books to round out their education. "If you build a collection, they will come."¹ At least that was our thought here at **Begley Library of Schenectady County Community College (SCCC)**, where, like other academic libraries, total book circulation plummeted during the second half of the 1990s.

Background: The SCCC Print Book Collection and Collection Development Policy

The original collection at **Begley Library**, created from donations at the time of the college's founding in 1969, reflected the broad interests of its donors. The collection has since been built according to its mission of support-

ing the college's curriculum. This it has done well; in fact so well during the days of plenty back in the 1970s and 1980s that it reverted somewhat to resembling a traditional liberal arts collection. As book prices went up in the 1980s and 1990s and acquisitions declined, this broad collection began to age and thin out. Our initial strategy to offset this development, soon after the author's arrival as Technical Services Librarian in 1995, was to shop for better discounts from book vendors. That strategy worked so well that we decided to extend it to its illogical conclusion, that is, to shop for books where they have the ultimate discounts: remainder houses, university press sale catalogs, and direct discount offers from publishers, any place short of rummaging through dumpsters after Friends-of-the-Library book sales.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis used for the study was that the library could purchase deeply discounted, quality books that will circulate at least as often as books in the existing collection. There were many criteria used in the selection of sale books. First, books were purchased in areas of the collection that need the most help, as well as areas where increasing depth would also increase circulation, e.g., areas where one student could clean us out, leaving classmates frustrated and librarians embarrassed and possibly even clinically depressed.

Methodology

Four distinct collection criteria were used for book selection:

1. "Stick with the Winners:" maintain traditional high use areas or support curricula of large programs with a goal of comprehensive coverage. Examples include Computer Science, Music, Culinary Arts, Travel and Tourism.
2. "Instant Collection:" new program or course areas, where the collection has had little or no coverage. Examples include Aviation, Early Childhood Educa-

tion and Juvenile Literature, non-Western cultures, Environmental Science, Family Therapy.

3. "Fattening Up the Losers:" strengthen inadequately maintained traditional areas of broad scope, which have thinned and are aging, and where circulation has decreased significantly. Examples include American History, Sociology, Law, American and British Literature, Health Sciences.

4. "Librarian's Choice:" multi-disciplinary areas that do not support specific programs or courses; we should have them simply because the librarian recognizes a need, or he/she is prognosticating increased use in the future. Examples include African American religious history and music, Sports and culture, North American Indians, Racial violence/Lynching, Railroads of New York State, New York State local history, Media studies, African American military history.

Evaluating Content

Other selection criteria were also used, once a title was identified as a candidate for purchase. It is no secret that many of the books that hit the remainder houses are not alternates for the **Pulitzer Prize**, or even **Caldecott** honorees. Many books become cheap for a single reason; they're dogs that will never get dog-eared. However, some books find their way to discount bins for other reasons.² Generally, the selection criteria and a little experience decoding catalog descriptions eliminated titles of dubious quality. Reviews were regularly checked, but not for every title; many of the titles were not reviewed at all. Only two candidates were rejected because of poor reviews.

Another criterion used was that of cost-effectiveness. Net prices were compared to that of the library's primary vendor; an order had to save at least \$25.00 over the primary vendor's price in order to pay for the additional time spent creating and tracking a separate order.

Data Collection

Beginning in the spring of 1996, the first sale book order was placed and circulation data tracked. List and net prices (including freight charges) for each sale order were recorded, beginning with the first order in May 1996 and ending with August 2003. Circulation data was recorded using one-year sets for each of the first three years each book was shelved, plus a five-year total.³ Complete circulation data exists for books purchased 1996-1999, and partial data, depending on shelf age, exists for books purchased 1999-2003.

continued on page 68

In Indian Territory from page 64

Parkman for the West deserve to be made available in one volume to facilitate comparison. All of them could be reprinted in one volume of about 600 pages, and together, they would provide eyewitness assessments of representative cultures that were contacted successively from east to west in North America during the century and a half from 1700-1846. Despite their wide distribution and the differences in time, all of these groups

have much in common, and all of the conclusions about them by writers who knew them best are basically similar.

All of **Garcilaso's** earlier account is readily available and needs to be read. I know of no comparable early summary for a Southwestern group. Although the **Coronado Expedition** covered much of the Southwest at the same time, the narrative made of it is more history than ethnohistory. Many Spanish accounts of the Indians of Central and South America contain in-

continued on page 70

Results

All of the 780 sale titles purchased and added to the Circulating Collection between 1996 and 2003 are included in this study. Reference and reserve titles are excluded. Early results on cost savings were significant and immediate, as shown in Table 1 below.

List, net and primary vendor net data were recorded for the first three years of the study, and revealed a cost savings of 56.2% from list price, and 49.7% from our primary vendor's discount. For the aforementioned reason, data collection for the latter category was discontinued after 1997-98. The discount from list price for the entire study was 61.1%, as indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 1. Comparison of Discounts for Book Purchases for Academic Years 1995-96 through 1997-98

Year	No. of Books	List Price	Prim. Vendor	Sale Price
1995-96	22	\$683.20	\$611.79	\$199.45
1996-97	56	2415.39	1965.55	1188.82
1997-98	86	2973.82	2585.61	1212.35
Totals	164	\$6072.41	\$5162.95	\$2600.62

Total list and net sale prices for the entire study are encompassed in the following table:

Table 2. Comparison of Discounts for Book Purchases for Academic Years 1995-96 through 2002-03

Year	No. of Books	List Price	Sale Price
1995-96	22	\$683.20	\$199.45
1996-97	56	2415.39	1188.82
1997-98	86	2973.82	1212.35
1998-99	76	1860.36	614.95
1999-2000	95	2697.35	985.06
2000-01	164	4202.36	2082.09
2001-02	117	2987.41	947.40
2002-03	164	5491.24	1848.52
Totals	780	\$23311.13	\$9078.64

Circulation data were recorded for each year a title resided on the shelf. Circulation numbers given in Table 3 below are totals for each year's titles. Renewals were not counted. The diminishing number of books in each column reflects titles lost, or withdrawn.

Table 3. Sale Books Summary of Purchases and Circulations, by Year(s)

Circs Per 12-Months	1996-1999		1999-2001		2001-2002		2002-2003		Totals	
	Books	Circs	Books	Circs	Books	Circs	Books	Circs	Books	Circs
1st yr. on shelf	240	149	259	99	117	59	164	74	780	381
2nd yr. on shelf	239	81	259	63	116	31			616	175
3rd yr. on shelf	237	56	258	47					499	103
5 yr. total	236	411							240	411

Over forty percent of the sale books circulated within the first year of being on the shelf. Average circulations for the first year on the shelf were 0.49, with the median for those circulating at least once as being one.⁴

Circulation data were also compared to a baseline of an entire year's worth of circulating acquisitions (for academic year 2000-2001; excluding sale titles).

Table 4. Comparison of Circulation of Total Book Purchases AY 2000-2001 to Sale Purchases

Year	Total No. of Titles	Total of Titles with Zero Circulations After [x] Number of Years on Shelf					
		1st Year	Pct.*	2 Years	Pct.*	3 Years	Pct.*
Entire '00-'01	1449	976	32.7	820	43.5	702	51.6
Sale '96-'01	499	274	45.1	241	51.7	229	54.1
Sale '01-'02	117	79	32.5	63	46.2		
Sale '02-'03	164	113	31.1				
Sale Totals	780	466	40.3	304	50.7	229	54.1

— *Percentage represents those titles that circulated at least once during that year (or those years) on the shelf.

continued on page 69

Endnotes

1. Albanese, Andrew Richard. "Deserted No More." *Library Journal* 128 (April 15, 2004): 34-36. This article discusses the "post-internet bounce" upward in book circulation at academic libraries. SCCC book circulation statistics reached their nadir in 2001-2002, and have remained slightly higher since.
2. In his "E-Content" column, Paul Kobulnicky cites an article describing the relationship between scholarly book publishers and the remainder market as similar to the commodities market. One can infer that the content of individual titles is not the sole criterion for whether or not they are remaindered. Kobulnicky, Paul. "Pork Belies and Silk Purses." *EDUCAUSE Review* 39 (May/June 2004): 10-11.
3. Dinkins, Debbi. "Circulation as Assessment: Collection Development Policies Evaluated in Terms of Circulation Data at a Small Academic Library." *College & Research Libraries* 64 (January 2003): 46-53. Although the Dinkins study compared faculty vs. librarian selections, the structure of the study was used partially as a model for presenting the data in this study.
4. Klassen, Tim and Bischof, Steve. "Computer Manuals in the Academic Library Collection: Improving Accessibility." *College & Research Libraries News* 63 (July/August 2002): 506-509. Again, this article was used as a model for presenting data.

against the grain people profile

David S. Moore

Technical Services/Systems Librarian, Begley Library
Schenectady County Community College
78 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305
Phone: (518) 381-1238 <mooreds@gw.sunysccc.edu>

BORN & LIVED: Near Ithaca, N.Y.

EARLY LIFE: Not much left for me; see next answer.

FAMILY: Youngest of three boys.

EDUCATION: B.A., History, SUNY Cortland, 1977. MLS, SUNY Albany, 1984.

FIRST JOB: Project Archivist, Brooklyn Historical Society.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Cataloging Coordinator, NYS Newspaper Project, 1987-1995. Tech. Services/Systems Librarian, Schenectady County Community College, 1995-present.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Play with my five-year old daughter (whether I'd like to or not) and/or renovate my 1850's house, which leaves me no time for golf.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Any on U.S. Civil War.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Wasted resources, whether library or natural.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Finding and cataloging newspaper titles thought previously lost.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: A clean desk, if I start now.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Same place it is now: trying to maintain a relevant place in the education of our youth, only with technologies and applications we don't even know about yet.

Biz of Acq from page 68

"Losers" group than desired but circulation of the "Librarian's Choice group" was a pleasant surprise and should be a comfort to all right-thinking acquisitions librarians.

**Table 5. Sale Books Summary Circulation by Selection Criteria Group:
Circulation Data for First Year on Shelf**

Selection Criteria Group	No. Titles	Circs.	Avg. Circ.
Winners	191	119	62.3%
Instant Collection	79	26	32.9%
Fattening Losers	437	199	45.5%
Librarian's Choice	73	37	50.7%
Totals	780	381	48.8%

Conclusions

The results support the hypothesis that desirable titles can be purchased at deep discounts and can circulate at least as well as the rest of the collection. However, this approach should only supplement — not supplant — traditional collection development practices, for the following reasons. First, it is time consuming. Wading through catalogs choked with erotica

and self-help tomes to find a single academic nugget can be a test of any librarian's patience. Second, the overwhelming percentage of the sale titles purchased was selected by one librarian. Only a handful of titles were faculty selections that by happenstance had kicked around long enough to go out of print. Third, the program is not scalable, at least at this library.

continued on page 70

Eugene O'Neill Production Personnel

Madeline C. Smith and Richard Eaton.
\$55, bibliography, indexes, 0-7864-2180-0.

The Geography of Presidential Elections in the United States, 1868-2004

Albert J. Menendez. \$49.95,
maps, bibliography, index, 0-7864-2217-3.

Chicano Detective Fiction

Susan Baker Sotelo. \$32,
Notes, bibliography, index,
0-7864-2185-1.

Uniform Numbers of the NFL

John Maxymuk. \$39.95,
Tables, appendices, 0-7864-2057-X.

McFarland

Box 611 • Jefferson NC 28640
Orders 800-253-2187 • FAX 336-246-4403
www.mcfarlandpub.com

Books Are Us

by **Anne K. Robichaux** (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina) <awkr7721@sc-online.net>

Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. — people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcomed. —AR

When I told my friend, **Diane Rourke** (Director, Health Sciences Library, Baptist Health South Florida) about this column four years ago, she gave me a paperback she had just read, telling me that the book had a great main character who is a librarian. Unlike some of the stereotypes we often see in print, this librarian character is strong, smart, persistent, and determined. She is shy by her own admission and lacking in confidence, more understandable given the time frame of the novel.

Seneca Falls Inheritance (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1992; ISBN 0-425-14465-8) by **Miriam Grace Monfredo** is the first book in the *Glynis Tryon* mysteries, combining historical fiction with a murder mystery. **Monfredo**, a former librarian and American historian, includes ample notes devoted to the sources used, and the historical accuracy (or not) of events described. For example, we read about two historic events in 1848 in New York that laid the groundwork toward legal equality for women. Both events are dealt with in this novel: the Married Women's Property Act and the first Woman's (sic) Rights Convention.

Glynis Tryon is the town's independent, free-thinking librarian who is called upon by a friend to help organize the convention. Some members

of the all male library board don't think too much of their librarian's participation in political activities and suggest her job may be in jeopardy if she persists in this sort of extracurricular activity. One of the board members sternly reminds her that it is not "in keeping with your librarians' role to be promoting discord in the very town you are supposed to be assisting."

Glynis is unusual for a woman of this time in that she went to college, even though her family thought college unnatural for women. She is determined to have a career when few women had such ideas. She is living during an age when women were afraid to speak their opinions and lived in the shadow of men. She is a feminist, however, describing herself as a "spinster," not keen on the "yoke of marriage," though the town constable would like to change her mind. He thinks she is lovely. Others describe her as "fine-looking" and not looking "in the least like a librarian." When *Glynis* inquired what the speaker's idea of a librarian might be, he responded that his experience had been that "...librarians are dry old ladies with steel-framed spectacles, and hair pulled back so tightly their lips scarcely move when they talk. And they wear black, black dresses which button up over their chins."

Monfredo covers a few library issues that sound like familiar concerns in some of today's libraries: cataloging backlogs, the mixed blessing of gift books, the suitability of some titles, and dealing with a library board. But library and political issues are temporarily set aside when a body is found in the canal behind the library.

Being an amateur sleuth as well as a librarian, *Glynis* is very much involved in solving the murder, using her instincts and intelligence. One of the library's gift books helps her in sorting out the crime. She is cautious, noting that librarians aren't necessarily required to be brave, but they are required to be resourceful. She's described as someone who can think straight in an emergency. One character calls her "an old maid busybody," while another praises her for a "splendid job of detection." She certainly was credited with uncovering evidence that helped determine the murderer.

On the back jacket of *Seneca Falls Inheritance*, the review quoted from the *Syracuse Herald American* states: "The success of *Seneca Falls Inheritance* rests with the fully drawn character of the poised, plucky librarian *Glynis Tryon*."

Seneca Falls Inheritance is the first in a series of eight novels that feature *Glynis Tryon*,

town librarian. **Grant Burns** covers this title and the next two in the series in his book, *Librarians in Fiction* (1998). According to Burns, **Monfredo** expands *Glynis'* activist bent to include the rights of Native Americans in *Blackwater Spirits* (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1995). In this novel *Glynis* also writes book reviews and articles in support of women's rights for the local paper. Seneca Falls' new woman doctor describes her as "so composed, so self-possessed."

Julie Still (Reference Librarian, Paul Robeson Library, Rutgers University) includes **Miriam Grace Monfredo** in: "Reading Between the Lines: Librarians as Authors of Fiction" (http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres15n1/Still_2005_02_16.htm).

In the second title of the series, *North Star Conspiracy* (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1993), the focus is on the underground railroad and the year, 1854. The author includes literature contemporary with the time (e.g., *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), and one of the library issues covered is the definition of its users, i.e., just who may use the library, an issue also discussed in the fourth title.

A male library assistant is introduced in the third title, *Blackwater Spirits*. He favors popular novels more than *Glynis* feels appropriate for the collection. **Stills** describes an incident in the fourth book, *Through a Gold Eagle*, involving the opening of the subscription library to the public. *Glynis* returns from a long absence to find that her assistant has offered a half-price associate membership for use of the library two afternoons a week. She isn't opposed to the idea but wonders if he's cleared the plan with the board, and is concerned because "more people meant more books, more periodicals, more newspapers — paid for by whom? How? The obstacle was — always had been — money." She further discovers that her assistant has been purchasing primarily romance novels for new patrons. She expressed her displeasure and he responds: "Miss Tryon, if romantic novels are what people most want to read, why shouldn't we have more of them?" As **Stills** observes, "this is the 'should we give them what they want or what they ought to have?' question that has plagued librarians from the very first acquisition."

Author **Miriam Grace Monfredo** is an American historian and former librarian who lives in Rochester, New York. She combines her interest in history and librarianship to create a series that is an informative and entertaining blend of historical fiction and mystery novel.

Biz of Acq from page 69

Within our selection criteria, we pretty much got every book worth getting. Although we did increase the number of titles purchased as the study progressed, that was due to broadening the number of sources, not broadening our selection criteria. Last, there is the problem of currency, especially in such topical areas as computer science, as sales books averaged more than two years older than traditionally acquired titles.

The author wishes to thank **Dennis Mott**, Senior Library Technical Assistant at **Begley Library, Schenectady County Community College**, who for years has very patiently placed and tracked the sale orders.

In Indian Territory from page 66

formation of great usefulness for ethnohistory, but the cultures they recorded were too advanced to be comparable to Indian nations north of Mexico, and these accounts can be considered separately.

The most accurate and useful early illustra-

tions were made in the 16th Century by **Jacques LeMoyne** of the Indians of the South Atlantic Coast and by **John White** of the Indians of North Carolina, and the work of both artists were engraved and made widely available by **Theodore de Bry**. These illustrations and related texts were brought together in one volume by **Stephan Lorient**, whose edition deserves to be made avail-

continued on page 74