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Collection Inventory in the Digital Age: How Can We Analyze Until We Know What We Have?

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Collection Assessment in the Digital Age *from page 1*

on OCLC's WorldCat Collection Analysis Tool, their examination also identifies important features that such assessment tools could include to be helpful in building a superb collection for their user population. Finally, **Brian Rossmann**, Government Information Specialist at **Montana State University**, has contributed a consideration of assessing government document (FDLP) collections in light of GPO's shift towards an essentially completely electronic depository model.

Rumors *from page 16*

ARL has published SPEC Kit 293 which identifies the politics and procedures that ARL member libraries are using in the external review process for candidates who are eligible for promotion, tenure, or continuing appointment. When a librarian becomes eligible for promotion to the next rank or for permanent appointment, some institutions require external reviews of the candidate by peers at another institution. These reviews become an important part of the evaluation of a librarian's potential for ongoing contributions to the position and the profession. The Spec Kit examines how external reviewers are identified and asked to participate in the review process, what instructions are given to reviewers, what materials are included in candidates portfolios, and the criteria for evaluating candidates portfolios, among other questions. The survey was distributed to the 123 ARL member libraries in February 2006. Seventy-seven libraries (63%) responded to the survey. Librarians at 35 of the responding institutions have faculty status. Forty-four institutions offer tenure or other permanent appointments (32 with faculty status and 12 without). Slightly more than half of the respondents (39 or 51%) do not require external reviews for librarians who are candidates for promotion, tenure, or continuing appointment.

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Collection Inventory in the Digital Age: How Can We Analyze Until We Know What We Have?

by **Debbi Smith** (Collection Development and Management Librarian, Adelphi University)
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In *Fundamentals of Collection Development*, **Peggy Johnson** defines collection assessment as measuring the extent to which a collection meets the institutional goals of a library and collection evaluation as examining a collection either on its own terms or in relation to outside collections and comparative tools.¹ In either case, it seems clear that any attempt to analyze a collection necessitates determining what is actually in it. In the digital age of databases, electronic journals, eBooks and digital library management systems, it is not always completely clear what constitutes a succinct library collection.

In 2005, the **Adelphi University Libraries** began a strategic planning process using **ACRL's Standards for Libraries in Higher Education** as a template. One of the areas examined was "How do/should the library's collections and online databases compare with its peers?" This led to an attempt to systematically examine **Adelphi's** inventoried collections and online databases with those of its local competitors and its national peer institutions (as determined by the **National Center for Higher Education Management Systems: NCHEMS**). As a result of this strategic planning, an inventory was begun in 2006 to document the status of our collections. This inventory as well as other strategic planning initiatives related to holdings, digital resources and consortia arrangements caused us to reconsider what should be included as part of the collection.

Since the previous inventory in 1996 there has been a major renovation and shift of the collections in the main library. In addition, the general collections were merged with those of the now closed science and fine arts satellite libraries. Technological progression since 1996 has made the inventory process much more streamlined and efficient: software functionality and wireless technology in the library stacks let us scan the barcodes in each book using a laptop, compare it to our holding records "live" and add notes and codes on the records with the book actually in hand.² We are examining all of our traditional physical holdings in this manner: circulating monographs, reference volumes, bound journal volumes, microfilm, video, and audio materials. The primary objective, as it was ten years ago, is to adjust bibliographic and item records to reflect actual holdings, both in our own bibliographic database and in **OCLC's WorldCat** database.

When the last inventory at **Adelphi University Libraries** was conducted in 1995-1996 there had been two electronic conversions of the catalog (card file to CLSI, CLSI to INNOPAC) which had never been reconciled to the shelves; this inventory was conducted primarily to clean up the database. At that time the process was conducted completely off line, without the new technology that has simplified the process.

A computer list was generated for each segment of the LC classification scheme, volumes within each segment had their bar codes scanned, and scanned records were then dumped into the computer daily to be matched against what was in the bibliographic database. This process revealed what volumes were lacking barcodes and needed to be put in the system, what books with barcodes were not in the system, and what books that were not on the shelf were actually missing. Again, the only items we were taking a count of were the traditional print items in our brick and mortar buildings.

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While the logistics of setting up and coordinating the current inventory have been a bit more complicated than what is outlined above, the basic premise is fairly straightforward: we go to the shelf and physically examine what is there, item by item. It was agreed that the inventory was necessary before we could accurately analyze how well our holdings reflect the current institutional mission and how we compare against our academic library peers. But planning for the next step of analyzing our collection became more complicated than we initially anticipated. The strategic planning process and the statistics we subsequently sought to gather led us to recognize that in 2006 the library's collection is more than what is physically contained on our shelves. It also became apparent that we were being unrealistic to assume that all academic libraries were making similar decisions about what to include in their inventoried collections, especially when bringing into account how different libraries were regarding digital holdings.

We started the process by looking at the statistics we reported for 2004 to ACRL for its *Academic Library Trends & Statistics Survey*:

- Volumes held: 465,629.
- Volumes added: 10,064.
- Current serials received: 1,904.
- E-journal subscriptions: 29,434.
- Total materials expenditures: \$1,279,096.

Then we determined through our license agreements that we had 130 database subscriptions. However, when we went to look at the holdings of our peers we found that database and e-journal counts did not seem consistent among supposedly comparable institutions. Peers who seemed to have the same material budgets and similar counts for traditional print holdings as us reported twice as many databases and many more e-journals in their collections. In one case, a reported peer that had 25% less traditional volumes in their collection reported more than twice as many databases than we did. We were perplexed by these differences until we visited the Web pages of some peers and found that their database counts included those that were provided for free by the government (e.g., PubMed and various federal and state government sites) and other open access Internet resources (e.g., Project Gutenberg, BioMedCentral, and open access journals). This is not to imply that academic libraries are inflating their counts. Rather, without consistent collection definitions, institutions appear to be adding digital resources to their bibliographic databases in an inconsistent manner.³ So, while some libraries are choosing to make free databases and Websites available through their catalogs and count them as part of their reported holdings, we at Adelphi provide such resources as links on our Website and do not catalog them or include them in our holding counts.

This initial discovery led us to further consider what conducting an inventory really meant, and what the reported statistics we use to com-

against the grain people profile

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Debbi A. Smith

BORN & LIVED: Metro New York City all my life.

EARLY LIFE: Brooklyn born and raised.

EDUCATION: B.S., State University of New York at Stony Brook; M.A. in History, Columbia University; M.B.A., New York University; M.S. in Library Science, Columbia University.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Finally realizing I should become a librarian, and loving what I do Professional Activities: Currently: Vice Chair, Collection Development Librarians of Academic Libraries Discussion Group of the Collection Management & Development Section of ALCTS.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Quilt, read, take advantage of everything in New York (museums, theatre, music, food, bookstores), spend quality time with good friends.

First Job: Working as a student assistant in the college library at Stony Brook. First professional library job was at The New York Public Library, Humanities and Social Sciences Library (the one with the lions in front). Anything I ever did apart from being a librarian doesn't seem real now

FAMILY: Husband David, also a librarian, who I met at New York Public (libraries are very conducive to romance).

FAVORITE BOOKS: The Alexandria Quartet, Brideshead Revisited, The Great Gatsby and anything by Anita Brookner, Anne Tyler or John Le Carre.

PET PEEVES: Complacency, taking the path of least resistance, and settling for being comfortable instead of being happy.

PHILOSOPHY: No one can predict the future.

CAREER GOAL I'D LIKE TO ACHIEVE IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS: Tenure, tenure, tenure...

pare holdings truly represent.⁴ Starting with traditional formats, we began to question what volume count actually signified. At Adelphi, we have always included bound periodicals as part of our volume count. This count, however, has been lowered by the availability of electronic counterparts in stable resources such as JSTOR and Project Muse. As with many libraries, we decided to rely upon these vendors for coverage of back issues of titles we currently receive because these databases contain the journal in PDF format and are representative of the actual item, and we are guaranteed perpetual access to the material. We discarded all volumes available within these databases, and as embargo periods end we have set up a policy to discard all bound periodical volumes that are available electronically through these vendors. An end result has been that our volume count has been negatively impacted. Our decision was necessitated by severe space considerations; could libraries with the luxury of more space be keeping their back runs of bound volumes even when they could rely on electronic access to the same material? If that were the case, do their holding counts reflect double counting of the same jour-

nal titles: once in their print count and then in their count of e-journal titles?

We thought of further instances where, based on individual library de-selection and retention criteria, duplicate counting of material in different formats could impact holding numbers. Our databases cover much of the same material in our traditional print and microformat reference collection of indexing and abstracting tools. Thus, if we chose to we could have the same material in a database, in print, and in microfilm (Dissertation Abstracts comes immediately to mind in this case). We also know that we duplicate holdings for our newspapers; although we subscribe to ProQuest Historical New York Times we also receive the paper in print, and we have and will continue to keep the microfilm of this paper as well. In addition, we have the New York Times available on aggregator databases, with both current and retrospective coverage (i.e., New York State Newspapers from Gale, Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe). Again, this is not to imply some institutions are attempting to inflate holding counts by holding on to all formats of the same item. Rather, dif-

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ferent institutions are making collection decisions based upon their own perceived institutional needs, budgets, space criteria, and understanding of what constitutes their collections.

The questions we had been considering were also brought to mind when we examined the special form on electronic resources in *ACRL's Academic Library Trends & Statistics Survey, 2004*. We found the questions and their definitions confusing, and thought that if we were not clear on what numbers to put in, goodness knows how other libraries were going to determine their counts. The figures subsequently reported by *ACRL* confirmed our suspicions that different libraries would interpret the questions in different manners. Starting at Question 1, the number of electronic journals purchased, we stopped short. We were not sure how to count the duplication of titles among aggregators: were we to do a complete overlap analysis and put down a unique title count, or were we to just report all the subscriptions we paid for, period? Among all institutions subsequently reporting, there was a high of 469,602, a low of 0, a mean of 10,010, and a median of 5,675 (*Adelphi* reported 37,381). Then there was Question 2, the number of electronic "full-text" journals purchased: were these direct from publisher agreements, or were we supposed to include titles here from *JSTOR* and *Project Muse* as well? Among all institutions reporting, there was a high of 341,148, a low of 0, a mean of 4,172 and a median of 641 (*Adelphi* reported 1,218). Our favorite, though, was Question 3, number of electronic journals not purchased: this seemed to reflect the discrepancies we encountered when looking at our peers' counts of electronic journal holdings: some, and not all, libraries were determining that authoritative online resources that were free and equally accessible to all should be cataloged as part of their collections. Here, there was a reported high of 7,473,074, a low of 0, a mean of 12,430 and a median of 24 (*Adelphi* reported 4).⁵ While there are always outliers when statistics are gathered, the large disparities here seem to reflect a confusion as to what was being asked for.

This led us back to examining our "paid for" electronic subscriptions. At *Adelphi* we purchase databases through two consortia: 72% of our current databases are obtained through one of these organizations, with only 18% of our databases purchased directly from vendors. Certainly there are advantages to purchasing through a library consortium, including pricing and flexibility in invoicing, and centralized license negotiations,⁶ but if all consortia members have access to the same databases and related full text holdings, what does it mean to take an inventory of them and analyze them? Such holdings are driven by bundled aggregator packages rather than any overt collection development policy of the subscribing library. At *Adelphi*, we often find titles that are out of scope for our curricula and wonder if it is relevant to even include them in our holding counts.

Ultimately, when we subscribe through a

vendor for electronic journals we are providing access to material as a proxy to actually owning it. The same can be said for providing access to eBooks in a collection. It is possible, of course, to subscribe to a vendor package and find yourself duplicating material you may already have in print. This happened to us when we subscribed to *PsycBooks* and *PEPWEB*, but we decided it was worth having this duplication because the remote access to heavily used titles was warranted by our graduate program in psychology. In order to save further space in our book stacks we could discard our print editions, which would further lower our volume count, but by weeding the physical artifact we would hold ourselves hostage to permanently subscribing to these vendors.

Access vs. ownership of material is not a new collection development issue, and it does belabor the point as to the purpose of a library collection. We at *Adelphi* have determined our mission is to supply needed material to our constituents in a timely manner and a usable format. At some point, it must be determined whether to just ignore format and consider eBooks as fully a part of the collection as are print items. But this determination can be further impacted by the eBook vendor that you choose, and whether the vendor offers a print or database licensing model.⁷ Depending on the vendor, eBooks could count more to a collection if there is unlimited, multiple access to them as opposed to single patron access and use. Some vendors can further muddy the water by stipulating that an item will be purchased and permanently added to the collection if it is rented a set amount of times. The library's "permanent" holdings can then become a moving target, driven by patrons' selection criteria rather than any overt library collection development policy.

During the strategic planning process, access rather than ownership issues, as well as cooperative collection development opportunities and space and budgetary limitations also led us to consider the opportunities presented in a consortia arrangement for interlibrary loan of traditional monographs. For example, *Connect NY* is a consortium of New York academic libraries whose members have created a digital union catalog of their collections. This consortium allows authorized users of participating libraries to initiate requests to borrow materials from other *Connect NY* libraries if the books are not owned by their home library or if their library's copy is already checked out. Do such consortia cause some member libraries to buy fewer low priced bread and butter monographs if they think a partner will do so, and thus they concentrate more on purchasing unique, high ticket items that might not have been bought in the past? Could this deflate individual library volume counts, even while making more unique material available to patrons? (Some libraries could even potentially divert material funds to other purposes and rely on the collecting activities of co-members, although at the expense of lowering their own holding figures). We pondered whether the unified holdings of consortia members count in any meaningful way to what is held by an individual library if the end goal is simply to provide needed material to patrons in a timely manner.

These are just some of the questions that were raised during our strategic planning process as to how we should inventory our collection. The digital environment we are working in, including the technology that makes it possible to share resources among institutions in a timely manner, has made the idea of a static, unique library collection seem antiquated. The further lack of standardization among libraries as to what they include as part of their holdings makes comparisons between collections in different institutions challenging at best.

Endnotes

1. **Peggy Johnson**, *Fundamentals of Collection Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2004), 291. There was also an interesting program on June 25 at the *ALA Annual Conference* in New Orleans, "Collection Assessment: Best Practices in the 21st Century," given by **Peggy Johnson**, **Lucy Lyons** (Northwestern University), **Paul Metz** (Virginia Tech University), **Bonnie Tijerina** (Georgia Institute of Technology), and **Corey Tucker** (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) that touched on different assessment methodologies. Their lectures can be found on the *ALA Website*: <http://www.ala.org/ala/alcts/alctscontd/alctsccevents/alctsannual/collassessment.htm>.
2. **Linda Ernack**, "Floating Bibs and Orphan Bar Codes: Benefits of an Inventory at a Small College," *Library Resources & Technical Service*, 49, no 3 (2005), 210-216. This is an interesting article because there are very few in the literature that cover the nuts and bolts of conducting an inventory. Happily for us, her experience validated many of the procedural choices we had made.
3. **Diane K. Kovacs** and **Kara L. Robinson**, *The Kovacs Guide to Electronic Library Collection Development: Essential Core Subject Collections, Selection Criteria, and Guideline* (New York: Neal-Schumann Publishers, Inc, 2004), 51. There is a good synopsis of why some libraries incorporate records for Web-accessible resources in their library catalog. The point remains the same: there is no consensus among libraries on adding these records to their catalogs.
4. The whole question of institutional statistics is further confused by the various ways statistics are asked for by different organizations. The *ACRL's Academic Library Trends & Statistics*, The National Center of Education Statistics' *Academic Libraries Survey* and the application for New York State Coordinated Collection Development Aid ask for holding and expenditure information in such different manners that we can't submit the same information on each form.
5. See <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/acadlibrystats/academiclibrary.htm> for the *ACRL Academic Library Statistics* for 2004, and for 1998-2003 as well. The summary data for electronic resources are reported by Carnegie classification and in total by all institutions reporting.
6. **Christine Fischer**, "Electronic Resources Pricing: A Variety of Models," *Against the Grain*, 18 no.3 (2006): 18-22.
7. **Scott Rice**, "Own or Rent? A Survey of eBook Licensing Models," *Against the Grain*, 18 no.3 (2006): 28-30.