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Op Ed — Can We Integrate Electronic Resources into Our Allocation Formulas?

by **Matthew Ismail** (Head of Collection Development, American University in Cairo)
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Most of us in the collection development business are familiar with the use of formulas that help us to divide our book budgets so that we allocate funds to the various departments in an equitable manner. The formula we use at the **American University in Cairo (AUC)** allows us to understand departmental need by indicating for each department the number of faculty, the number of undergraduate majors and graduate students, undergraduate and graduate student enrollments, the number of books circulated by discipline, and the three year average cost of books. We then factor in our experience, such as the past spending habits of the departments, the emergence of new programs, consultations with departmental faculty, the fact that enormous enrollments in required undergraduate classes can inflate the numbers provided by the formula, and allocate the money based also on these factors. Allocations for print periodicals, similarly, are based on solid foundations, such as establishing that they are required for accreditation, the number of uses, a cost-per-use ratio, and periodic evaluation by the faculty. In both cases, we divide our funds for books and periodicals by well-established and reasonable criteria.

In addition to establishing criteria for the division of funds for books and periodicals, we are also well-placed to evaluate their use. We are able to use our automated system to evaluate our success in collection development by examining which book sub-collections (established by call number range) are most used; by asking how many books are borrowed by students, and how many by faculty; by asking how old our collection is in various disciplines; by asking at what rate the different sub-collections are growing; and by asking if the rate of circulation and the size of the sub-collection are in an agreeable relation to each other. Print periodicals can be evaluated as above to determine whether we are retaining the ones we most need.

We have always been able to divide our budgets into separate lines for books and periodicals with confidence because books and periodicals are used differently. Generally speaking, the scholarly monograph as a vehicle for the publication of research differs enough from the peer-reviewed journal article that the

division by format agrees with a real division of need.

It is when we introduce electronic resources into the equation that things become less clear — at least for me. When we divide our budgets into lines for books, periodicals and electronic resources, the correlation between format and function breaks down. While it makes perfect sense for us to purchase *The Oxford English Dictionary* out of the book budget and the *IEEE Transactions on Computers* out of the periodicals budget, the distinction blurs when both items are obtained electronically (sometimes duplicating the print copies) and paid for out of a budget called “electronic resources.” The division now is not one of function but of prior institutional organization. The new budget line for “electronic resources” was added to the existing structures created for dealing with books and periodicals but without the corresponding justification in the function and use of the materials. As libraries take increasingly large numbers of eBooks, full-text periodical databases, e-journal collections, electronic newspaper collections, reference works, indexes, archives, etc., we are also confronted with the fact that we cannot continue to duplicate resources across formats. The addition of electronic resources makes both the allocation of resources and their evaluation much more difficult.

Let us put the problem another way. While we have established methods and criteria for evaluating our book and periodical collections, how do we evaluate our “electronic resources?” If we have established formulas for allocating our book budget and for deciding whether to retain or purchase periodicals, how might we reasonably do the same for collections of “electronic resources?” How do we evaluate a collection which contains *Safari Tech Books Online*, *ABI-Inform*, *JSTOR*, *ASTM Standards Worldwide*, *The Classical Music Library*, *The ACM Digital Library*, *Arab-Israeli Relations*, *Compendex*, *Ebrary* and *Engnetbase*? How do we allocate money to cover books, periodicals and “electronic resources” collections with the confidence that each allocation is reasonably integrated into our collection planning and evaluation when

they meet such evidently various needs?

As things are arranged at **AUC**, the Electronic Resources Committee oversees the purchase of

these resources. When we hear about something new in electronic format, we examine it and the committee follows up on the initial examinations of usability, price, institutional need, etc., with periodic examinations of use statistics and discussions with liaisons. In and of itself, the process is fine. The problem with the work of the committee is not that it is done poorly or carelessly, but that the committee is convened in a manner which suggests that we can continue to evaluate things we take electronically separately from those we take in print format. The committee’s work suggests that if we evaluate our electronic resources, books and periodicals separately, we have examined each adequately, and it is this that indicates the larger problem.

As we buy more and more eBooks and eBook collections, can we continue to treat these and our print books as fulfilling two separate needs in our collections? If we cannot say that they differ in function, in other words, can we evaluate them by the same standards? We can use the automated system to calculate the number of books in the call number range DS 401 to DS 486, determine how many of the books circulated in each of the past three years, determine whether they were borrowed by faculty or students, and ask how many books were added to the collection in the same period of time. Yet, if we wish to examine the use of books in **Ebrary** we find that things are rather different. We can discover the number of user sessions, the number of documents viewed, the pages viewed, the pages copied and the pages printed. We can isolate a subject such as History and obtain the above statistics for it, but we cannot isolate the History of India. We cannot, for that matter, tell who was logging in, faculty or students, or whether most of the activity was in American History or Chinese History. All we know is that someone employed the search term “history.” And this is to say nothing of the fact that the **Ebrary** collection is not stable (unlike the books we buy and place on our shelves) and, thus, that we cannot be certain that having access via **Ebrary** actually means we have access to a certain book beyond the present month.

Similarly, if we employ a formula that allows us to allocate money for books, how is that formula affected by the division of books into different formats? How do we calculate into this

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formula the fact that we are spending a considerable amount of money for eBooks, such as the *Oxford Scholarship Online* and *The History E-Book Project*, out of our electronic resources budget?

Given the difficulties of allocating funds for books, periodicals and electronic resources when this division by format no longer reflects a division by function, must we abandon something as useful as the book budget allocation formula? How can we make informed decisions about the equitable division of our funds to pay for books, periodicals and electronic resources without allowing this division by format result in unwanted overlap and duplication of effort and resources? Is it not possible, for instance, to create a new formula that would guide us not only in making allocations of money for books, but to judge how well our division of funds is in accord with the needs of our users?

I put these statements as questions for the simple reason that I could no more create such a formula than I could create the code for the **Excel** sheet that holds it. Other more experienced collection development librarians have doubtless thought about this problem and come to some interesting conclusions, and it would be very useful to know more about how they are dealing with this issue. 🐼

From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilsont@cofc.edu>

ABC-CLIO recently published a set that will be eagerly received by a wide audience of both students and scholars. The *Encyclopedia of the American Revolutionary War: a Political, Social, and Military History* (2006, 1851094083, \$485) is the first major, multivolume work that focuses on the American Revolution in a number of years. Naturally, the encyclopedia covers the war's numerous personalities and battles, but these five volumes also draw attention to the political and social backdrop of the revolutionary era, as well as the international stage on which the war played out.

The set is introduced by two essays that separately discuss the "origins" and "military operations" of the war. Taken together these essays offer a strong foundation for the articles that follow. The first four volumes of the set contain more than 1,000 articles, the majority of which discuss minor military actions and major campaigns or offer biographical sketches of both well known and lesser personalities. However, there are also entries that cover issues ranging from art and music to diplomacy and trade, as well as articles discussing Native Americans, ethnic groups and the role of women. In addition, there are articles that show the impacts of the war on the individual colonies, as well as foreign nations, along with entries that discuss important legal documents and political actions. A major added feature is volume five which is entirely devoted to 154 primary sources documents.

The set is attractive and well illustrated. Each volume has eight general maps that represent the larger fields of military operation while there are nearly 50 more maps scattered throughout the alphabetical entries depicting major engagements. Numerous black and white portraits and art reproductions provide added visual "spice" to the text. There is also extensive use of "see also" references and each entry has a list of useful, further readings.

The *Encyclopedia of the American Revolutionary War: A Political, Social, and Military History* is thoughtfully edited, informed by recent scholarship, and more comprehensive than earlier works like **Garland's** *American Revolution 1775-1783: An Encyclopedia* (1993, 082405623X, \$270) or the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (1991, 0631163220, \$40). While these earlier works are still useful, this new encyclopedia is destined to become the standard reference on the American Revolution. Most academic libraries and many larger public libraries will want it in their collections. High school libraries will want to give serious consideration to the student edition of this work entitled *American Revolutionary War: A Student Encyclopedia* (2007, 1851098399, \$485). As is true with other **ABC-CLIO** reference works, these sets are also available in eBooks versions. For more information check out <http://www.abc-clio.com/products/overview.aspx?productid=108841&from=academic>.

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