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## Collection Development: Current Options and Future Concerns

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# Collection Development: Current Options and Future Concerns

by **Cory Tucker** (Head of Collection Management, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Phone: 702-895-2133; Fax: 702-895-2284) <cory.tucker@unlv.edu>



## Introduction

In the world of collection management, there comes a time when a collection assessment project must be undertaken. There are various reasons for conducting a collection assessment and there are many ways to complete the assessment project. Using a review of the literature and personal experience with collection assessments at the **University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Libraries**, the article will discuss the basic concepts behind conducting a collection assessment project in an academic library. The article will identify common procedures and methods that have been used in previous collection assessments. These include the types of assessment and the various tools and statistics that can be used. In addition, the article will look at the future of collection assessment and highlight concerns and specific collection areas that need to be addressed.

## Why Conduct a Collection Assessment?

From a review of the existing literature and from my experience with collection assessment projects at **UNLV Libraries**, there are many reasons for conducting a collection assessment project. These may include:

- To measure the strengths and weaknesses of the collection. This may include real gaps or perceived gaps.
- To analyze university or curriculum growth in a specific discipline(s).
- Analyze the use of the entire collection or measure use of a specific type of resource, such as online databases.
- Measure faculty satisfaction with the library collection in regards to scholarship and teaching.
- Student satisfaction with the library collection in regards to research.
- Identify user behavior and needs, including access, preferences, and information seeking behavior.
- Updating the collection development policy.
- Analyze current budget allocation of collection.
- Assess outreach and marketing activities.
- Library strategic planning.

## How to Conduct a Collection Assessment

Whatever the reason for starting an assessment project, planning and organization are vital to the success of the project. When planning for an assessment project, there are many steps in the process. These include:

1. Establish mission and goals for the project

2. Establish Timeline
3. Describe existing collections
4. Identify Type of Assessment to be used
5. Identify tools and/or statistics to be used in the evaluation
6. Data collection
7. Interpretation of data
8. Identify weaknesses and strengths of the collection
9. Develop recommendations
10. Develop strategies to meet recommendations
11. Recommend new policies, procedures and further areas of assessment
12. Evaluate assessment project
13. Write a project report

Considering the factors listed above, one can understand that collection assessment involves many steps and can be a time consuming project. From my experiences with collection assessment projects at **UNLV**, it cannot be emphasized enough that planning and organization are definite keys to the success of assessment projects. When planning a project, it is important to list out each step and consider how much time it will take to complete the step. A detailed and practical timeline will help you establish realistic timeframes for each step in the process. Depending on the scale of the assessment project, a library should consider creating an assessment team or committee. This will help provide enough staff to complete the project in a timely manner and will allow specific tasks to be divided up and assigned to those with certain skill sets. Members of an assessment team should be carefully selected and should include a good representation of subject librarians/liaisons. Subject librarians, even ones not on the project team, will play an important role throughout the assessment process because they have direct contact with the primary library users: faculty and students.

## Types of Collection Assessment

During the planning process, the goals of the project will be defined. It is necessary to analyze the goals and ask what type of information or data is needed to help meet the goals? This exercise will help the library choose the appropriate type of assessment. There are two main types of collection assessment methods. They are client-centered (user-centered) assessments and collection-centered assessments. Some assessments use one method or the other and in some cases, both methods are applied.

The main focus of client-centered assessments is on evaluating library users. First, the library user groups are identified. Next, you will need to consider what aspects about the user

that you want to

evaluate. Aspects to consider include:

1. Research needs
2. Teaching needs
3. User behavior
4. Access to the collection ("discoverability")
5. Identify future needs
6. Format preference (print versus electronic)
7. Research trends in disciplines

## Research needs

With collection assessment, one of the most common aspects to assess is the research needs of the library user, which for academic libraries is mainly faculty and students. For faculty, the assessment is concerned with supplying material to assist faculty with their scholarship. For students, the assessment is concerned with making certain that library materials are available so students can complete assignments and projects.

## Teaching needs

This area is focused on faculty and graduate students who are teaching classes at the university. Collection assessment in this area can concentrate on a few things including providing library materials that faculty and graduate students may use to assist them with their teaching, provide materials for class assignments and provide library materials that can foster partnerships between the library and teaching faculty and graduate students using assignment design. This area is also concerned with assessing how the collection supports University learning outcomes.

## User Behavior

A study of user behavior considers the information seeking habits of library users. Assessment in this area can cover a variety of items including where do library users begin their research, how do they find information, etc. Assessment relating to user behavior may also include accessing information, format preference, etc.

## Access to the Collection

Related to user behavior, assessment for this element involves how the library user gains access to the collection. Does the user access the collection through the library's Website? Once on the Website, how do they locate journal articles? With locating journal articles, do they browse, search the catalog or use **Serials Solutions**? Do users access materials off-campus? Another concern is the "discoverability" of the collection. How do users find resources that they did not know the library has?

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### Identify Future Needs & Research Trends in Disciplines

An important part of any assessment is to find the future needs of the library users. This is vital because new programs and classes are added each year and the library will need to have materials to support these programs and classes. It is also important to obtain information regarding future research needs of faculty and also identify trends in disciplines. These trends may affect future research and curricular needs.

### Format Preference

In many cases, one component of a collection assessment is to identify what format (print or electronic) users prefer. This allows the library to possibly change formats for materials and to potentially change budget allocations for materials and disciplines.

In regards to collection-centered assessment, the main focus is on the collection. For collection-centered evaluations, the types of assessment may include:

1. Describing what the library currently has in the collection, including number of books, journals, databases, etc.
2. Age analysis of the collection.
3. Strengths and weaknesses of the collection. Where are the gaps in the collection? Gaps may include real and perceived gaps in the collection.
4. Determine usage levels by resource type and subject.
5. Allocation of funding (spending by resource type, discipline, etc.).

### Tools used in collection assessment

The data collection portion of the assessment is the most time-consuming aspect of the project. For each type of assessment, there are several tools and/or statistics that can be used to gather information.

For client-centered assessment, tools include interviews, surveys and focus groups. Other types of materials may include departmental, college or university strategic documents. For client-centered assessment, these tools are used to document the opinions, attitudes, experiences and abilities regarding the library resources by sampling a population of current users. In order to conduct surveys, interviews and focus groups, it is important to perform a literature review to see how they have been used in other collection assessments and it is also recommended to gather background information on how to design and use these tools. For each of these tools, one of the most important factors is creating effective and appropriate questions. In collection assessment projects, one or more of these tools may be used. Surveys are great tools to use because of the ability to gather information from a large group of users. With the increase and availability of survey software, such as **SurveyMonkey** (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), surveys can be designed and distributed very efficiently.

## against the grain people profile

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### Cory Tucker

**BORN & LIVED:** Born in Lawrence, Kansas. Have lived in Wichita, Kansas; Knoxville, Tennessee; Frankfort, Kentucky; Tampa, Florida and now Las Vegas, NV.

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor of Science in Finance from the **University of Tennessee**, Knoxville. Master of Arts in Library and Information Science from the **University of South Florida**.

**FIRST JOB:** Dishwasher in my father's restaurant.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Member of **American Library Association**, Business Reference and Services Section, **ACRL** (University Libraries Section) and **ALCTS**.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Hike, travel, exercise.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *The Alchemist*, *On the Road*, *The Stranger*.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Obtaining tenure at **UNLV**.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** Interesting question. From a collection management perspective, I think the library resources need to have better discoverability in the user's space, not on the library's Website. I also see a big step in the movement of books from print to electronic...space issues, book prices, publishing costs and user preferences will affect this. 🐼

Online surveys allow the email delivery of a URL and the survey can be accessed with the click of a mouse! Additionally, online survey software makes data collection very easy and most of the software allows the exporting of reports into **Excel**.

Concerning content, the survey will need to consist of mostly close-ended questions. Some examples of survey questions can be found in the Appendix. Keep in mind that a survey should not take too much time to complete. A survey that takes more than twenty minutes can cause "survey fatigue." Another fact to consider is the timing of the survey. It is important that the survey is not sent out during busy times of the semester (finals) or during a time of year when faculty or students are not on campus (during summer sessions).

Interviews are another option for user-centered assessment. Interviews are very time consuming, but can provide detailed information in a one-on-one environment. One potential difficulty of the interview process is dealing with the schedules of the person to be interviewed.

Focus groups are a wonderful tool to use in collection assessment. Focus groups provide an opportunity for the library user to provide in-depth information and generally take up to one or two hours. Focus groups are a good tool to use to obtain detailed information from a few sources in a reasonable amount of time. As far as potential problems with focus groups, these may include participant influence over other members, experience of focus group leader, interpreting comments and group interaction.

In addition to the above tools, another type of information that is useful is compiling a

bibliography of faculty publications and identifying where faculty are publishing and what resources they are citing in their research. A bibliography can easily be created by using citation tools such as **RefWorks**. Other tools that may be used may include university demographic data such as number of faculty, new programs and classes, strategic documents, syllabi, grants received and student/faculty growth by discipline. University demographic data is a great resource to use to identify trends on campus. The demographic data can be a key component in an analysis because it provides specific information on library users such as number of new faculty and growth in student population by level (undergraduate and graduate). Monitoring statistics for new classes and new programs provide information on what departments and colleges are adding as far as new areas of study or research and will identify library resources that may need to be added to the collection. Strategic documents of departments and colleges can provide information on both short and long-term strategies and may provide information on future areas of study or research.

Grants received is another statistic that can provide valuable information. By obtaining figures for grants applied for and received, the library can identify specific disciplines that are more research intensive and these disciplines may need new library resources. Syllabi, in most cases, identify the types of research projects and assignments students are being asked to complete and the library may want to add resources to help student learning. From my experience with collection assessment projects, I would suggest collecting the last

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five years of data for these statistics because of the time involved in compiling and interpreting the data.

The tools most commonly used in collection-centered assessment projects are:

1. An inventory of the collection
2. Statistical information:
  - Circulation statistics
  - Interlibrary loan stats
  - Use statistics for journals and other electronic resources
  - Link resolver statistics and queries (SFX, etc)
  - **Serials Solutions** statistics
3. **OCLC's Collection Analysis** and **Ulrich's Serials Analysis System** to compare holdings with other libraries. If a library does not subscribe to these services, they can use **WorldCat** to compare their holdings or search an individual library's catalog. These options would be extremely time-consuming.
4. Check subject areas against standard bibliographic tools and other resources
5. Budget figures (spending by resource type, discipline, etc.)
6. Use data from other assessments, such as a previous collection assessments or **LibQual**

### Inventory the collection

An important aspect of a collection assessment is to find out what exactly is in the library's collection. An inventory helps provide a baseline for a library to identify strengths and weaknesses and is necessary for comparisons to other libraries. To complete this inventory, libraries can run lists of books, journals and databases in their catalog systems and export the data into **Access** or **Excel**. In addition, services like **Serials Solutions** can help run lists of journals. Depending on the type of assessment, the library can run lists by call number for books and journals. Sometimes journal lists can be completed using the ISSN instead of the call number.

### Obtain Statistical Information

Gathering statistical data for an assessment is one of the most time-consuming portions of the project, if not the most time-consuming. It is necessary to discuss and list all of the data that might be important for the project. Monograph circulation statistics are a great source that help illustrate how books are being used (or not). Interlibrary loan (ILL) statistics are useful in providing data that can identify journals, books or other resources that have been requested numerous times and should be added to the collection. These statistics may also indicate that particular disciplines are heavy ILL users and may need more funding for resources. Link resolver statistics are extremely useful in that they can show how users are accessing information and may also provide information on journal use. Services such as **Serials Solutions** have many features

that are useful in assessment including the ability to provide database holdings and journal usage statistics.

Usage statistics are important for assessment projects because libraries can obtain number of visits to a database and in some cases statistics for full-text views and downloads. Usage statistics can be combined with price to provide cost-per-use. Monitoring usage statistics for recently added materials are a useful measure to ensure the appropriate materials have been added to the collection and can help refocus collection building. An important aspect to keep in mind is that data takes time to be gathered and an appropriate amount of time is needed for the data to be interpreted. It is important to note that not all the data will be useful, nor will it always provide trends or specific answers.

### Collection Comparison Tools

If you are interested in comparing your library holdings to other libraries, there are tools that can help you complete the analysis. Collection comparisons can be a good way to identify strengths and weaknesses (gaps) and are also useful when building a collection in a specific discipline. The **OCLC Collection Analysis** allows a library to compare their holdings to peer institutions and discover gaps in the collection. The analysis allows the user to compare its holdings and find unique titles and overlaps as well. The analysis can be done for the entire collection or by a specific subject area. **Ulrich's Serials Analysis System** is similar to the **OCLC** product, but it is specifically for serials. The subscribing library needs to enter their holdings into the system and then can compare their library holdings to online databases, peer institutions and core and subject lists prepared by **Ulrich's**. The comparison allows a library to identify gaps, unique titles and overlap.

### Bibliographic Tools

Bibliographies can be compared to a library's collection and help identify specific resources that may be historically important (and current resources) and can be particularly useful when starting a collection in a new subject.

### Budget Figures

Collecting budget figures, both past and recent, will help illustrate how much money has been spent by resource and by subject. Budget figures, along with other statistics, may help a library reallocate funds to particular subjects or resources.

### Other Assessment Reports

**LibQual** and other assessments conducted previously may provide data or other information that can be used in the collection assessment. These previous reports may have historical data and can help identify trends or patterns that have occurred over time.

### Areas for Future Consideration

Reviewing the literature, collection assessments have been conducted for an entire collection, specific subjects or for certain resources. What is important is to identify future

concerns or collection areas that need to be improved and addressed. One example in the area of collections is establishing a better way to assess and evaluate electronic databases. In most cases, electronic databases have been evaluated through usage statistics or through database evaluation involving user interface, content, currency, cost, etc. There needs to be a better process or system to evaluate resources in electronic format. Potential solutions might be value engineering matrices or scoring systems similar to the ratings from *The Charleston Advisor*. Another example for future consideration is how to evaluate the collection's impact in regards to learning outcomes or specific university educational (curricular) goals. In an article related to this topic, the comment was that libraries are moving toward managing a collection that meets the learning outcomes of the curriculum (**Bodi and Maier-O'Shea** 2005, 144-145). Learning outcomes can also relate to information literacy and educational goals of the University and these may need to be assessed. One option for this might be to conduct a longitudinal study of a group of students and measure the impact the library collection had in achieving learning outcomes.

### Conclusion

The collection assessment project is a time-consuming process that takes careful planning and organization. Although there are lots of variables and processes involved in the project, it is a necessary project to help a library refocus and build the most useful and cost-effective collection for library users. Collection assessments also assist a library with implementing structural or policy changes that help the library become better at providing materials for research and teaching. In addition, collection assessments can be extremely beneficial with strategic planning; helping identify gaps in the collection and possibly assist the library in obtaining desperately needed funding.

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# Print to Electronic: Managing Electronic Resources

## Is it Time the Library had an Extreme Makeover?

by **Dan Tonkery** (VP of Business Development, EBSCO Information Services)  
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### Appendix — Example Survey Questions

How important are library resources (print and electronic) to your research?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important

The library has adequate resources for faculty to conduct scholarship?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree 🐼

One are the days of dusty print books and tattered magazine stands. They're still there, of course, but just like the houses and participants on the popular ABC TV show **Extreme Makeover**, library management systems shaped around print resources are in desperate need of host **Ty Pennington's** infamous "Good morning!" wakeup call.

Indeed, times have changed — with the debut and impending domination of e-journals in the market, new processes await librarians tasked with acquiring, registering and managing collections. A boom of information must be administered, supported, updated and monitored, as librarians consider the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring multiple content format types (online, print + online, etc.).

Managing electronic resources in today's library is not an easy task, and the stress is beginning to take its toll on the library infrastructure. At every library meeting or conference I have been to in the past two years, publishers are showing off the latest and greatest in new content.

Everywhere I go, I continually see hosting services releasing the next generation of software designed to manage e-journals and eBooks, sophisticated searching applications, including federated searching systems, and integrated library system vendors promoting their standalone **Electronic Resources Management (ERM)**

systems, which in theory are supposed to help a library manage its growing e-resources collection. In reality, the overhead to keep one of these **ERM** systems alive takes almost as much staff time as the management of the e-resource itself. So now a library has to devote precious little staff time to keep the **ERM** system alive as well as access to the growing collection of e-content.

When will it ever end?! How many libraries have bought the magic bullet only to leave it unwrapped in the closet hoping for a better solution that requires less work?

The e-volution has changed what users expect from a resource

and what separates average libraries from those with superior collections. There is no question that content is king, queen and princess, as commercial and society publishers around the world have shifted their publications to an electronic format. In fact, the uptake of electronic resources is so successful that many publishers are planning for the day when the only format published will be electronic.

How big is the boom? One only has to look at the major e-journal hosting services to see how quickly the world has gone to electronic content. **HighWire Press, MetaPress, Ingenta, Wiley Interscience and Elsevier's ScienceDirect** are all very popular hosting services offering thousands of potential journals and a growing number of books. Within a short period of time we find the landscape filled with over 40 million articles in electronic form from over 30,000 electronic journals.

Look at the usage growth pattern on any of these electronic hosts and you will find that the growth rate is still climbing. Where are all the users coming from?! In addition, **Google Scholar** is a major referral service sending traffic to all the major hosts. Any publisher who lets **Google** crawl their content will see an

almost unbelievable growth pattern.

Of course, from the user perspective, the shift to electronic content has been the greatest thing

since the invention of the printing press. Students and researchers can enjoy more content available at the desktop than ever in the history of research and education. To top it off, with the prevalence of consortia and other content deals, libraries that once bought 1,200 titles or less now find that they have access to 20,000 titles. But with the widespread availability of information has come the aforementioned sense of entitlement from users. Now, everyone wants access to content from their home PC or laptop, and many users are not aware of the work and energy it takes for the library to manage the access and delivery of the resources.

It's obvious that the electronic library is here to stay. It has been a big hit with users, and the hit on the library budget should not go unnoticed. It is not uncommon to find a major library spending up to 70% of the library's journal acquisition dollars to fund these growing electronic collections. Users expect and

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*"Managing electronic resources in today's library is not an easy task, and the stress is beginning to take its toll on the library infrastructure."*

