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Who Chooses Wisely? eBook PDA Purchases: Librarian and Teaching Faculty Selections

by **Debbi Dinkins** (Associate Dean of the Library, duPont-Ball Library, Stetson University) <ddinkins@stetson.edu>

Patron selection for acquisition is not a new concept for academic libraries. Professors request specific book and periodical titles to support their teaching and research, and they have since academic libraries began. Students make suggestions for acquisition and request books through interlibrary loan. Both professors and students have been participating in these kinds of patron-driven acquisition (PDA) activities for decades, and the process traditionally has been mediated by librarians. While traditional PDA has been going on over the course of the history of academic libraries, no automatic acquisition of faculty or student suggestions has taken place until the last few decades. Academic libraries are beginning to implement non-mediated acquisition in various forms, the most common of which seems to be PDA for print books and eBooks. This study compares purchases in one of those categories: the eBook PDA purchases of librarians and teaching faculty.

Literature Survey

Rebecca Schroeder at **Brigham Young University** published the results of a study to compare performance of various methods of PDA at her library. She compared performance of "faculty-expedited orders, suggest-a-book, ILL requests, books in the holds queue, and eBooks" (Schroeder, 2012). While all of the listed processes and programs, not just the eBook PDA program, can be considered types of patron-driven acquisition, most general articles describe PDA in terms of traditional processes in libraries, such as interlibrary loan and library user suggestions. Librarians at the **University of Arizona** launched a comprehensive acquisitions program that looked at patron-driven acquisition holistically. The program, which they describe as an "information delivery system," included PDA for both print and eBook formats, as well as an approval plan for selected core titles, with librarian selections used only to fill perceived gaps in the collections (Jones, 2011). The "Suggest-A-Purchase" program at **Texas A & M** carved out a fund within their acquisitions budget to support exclusively requests from library users (Reynolds, 2010). Another PDA program is the **University of Florida** libraries' "Books on Demand" program, established to fulfill ILL requests for patrons. The program purchases books requested through ILL by faculty and graduate students (Carrico, 2011). A similar study at **Purdue University** concluded that circulation rates of print books acquired through traditional selection methods were lower than for those of the books acquired through their Books on Demand program, a program that purchases books to satisfy ILL requests. Furthermore, the study found that "students make better selectors than faculty, since the circulation rates for books requested by graduate and undergraduate students are higher than the rates for books requested by members of the faculty" (Nixon, 2010). While these programs include an eBook PDA component, the concept of patron-driven acquisition is implemented broadly across traditional processes.

Specific programs using PDA have been described in terms of usage performance of the titles selected. Are the titles purchased through PDA being used? Is there a relationship between the selector of the title and the level of use? In a presentation by librarians from the **Claremont University Consortium**, they reported that they found that each book in the user-selected PDA collection was used an average of 8.6 times per year while each book in the "preselected" collection (the collection selected by librarians) was used an average of 4.3 times per year (Price, 2009). In a study conducted at **Sam Houston State University**, researchers concluded that "students and faculty performed admirably in the selection of titles appropriate to or recommended for an academic setting." Furthermore, the study concluded that patron selections were very similar to librarian selections in many respects, notably academic content level (Shen, 2011). These findings support the conclusion that user-selected titles are used more frequently than titles selected by traditional acquisition methods.

For a well-balanced academic library collection, how much patron selection is too much patron selection? Librarians have long struggled to choose useful, quality resources for their patrons. Yet it has been proven both anecdotally and through the literature that a large percentage of librarian-chosen circulating material just sits on the shelf, collecting dust, and never gets used. In her article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, **Jennifer Howard** quotes librarians who attest to this fact and to other benefits of PDA. A quote from **Rick Anderson**, Associate Director of Scholarly Resources and Collections at the **University of Utah**, states, "About 50 percent of the time, the things we pick don't get used or don't get used in ten years." Another quote from **Nancy J. Gibbs**, the Head of Acquisitions at **Duke**, stated that nothing was bought through the PDA program that was inappropriate for an academic library. Additionally, the article quotes **Dennis Dillon** at the **University of Texas at Austin**, who manages a large eBook PDA collection. According to Dillon, "[library patrons are] picking titles in areas we don't know about. They're usually ahead of librarians in knowing what is needed on campus" (Howard, 2010).

The concept of letting patrons choose content is difficult for collection development librarians to grasp. In many cases, patrons are more effective at choosing resources than library professionals. Even with conclusions of study after study on PDA collections, librarians still want some influence over collections content. "There is some unwillingness among collection development librarians to relinquish the role of selection" (De Fino, 2011). With this reluctance to release control in mind, there are ways to maintain a certain level of control over the content of eBook PDA collections. "A strong PDA profile can prevent eBooks from being purchased that fall outside the library's collecting focus" (Medeiros, 2011). Adding individually-selected titles to a PDA collection, either selected by librarians or selected by teaching faculty, is another method for overseeing the content of purchased titles. If an eBook PDA vendor offers the option of adding titles individually, carefully selecting the pool of titles available in the collection can help alleviate librarians' fears that books purchased by patron selection do not support the library's collection development guidelines.

Methodology and Study Hypothesis

At **Stetson University**, a small university in central Florida, the library began an eBook patron-driven acquisition collection with **ebrary** in September 2010. Originally, the collection was composed of titles chosen by subject area in support of Stetson's most popular majors: psychology, business, and language and literature. For almost two months, the PDA collection consisted of only titles chosen "in bulk" by subject. When established, the PDA collection contained 3,300 titles. At that time, the action that triggered the purchase of a title within the PDA collection was any one of the following: 1) a user spends ten minutes within a book; 2) a user looks at ten pages of a book; 3) a user prints one page from the book. In the spring of 2012, **ebrary** introduced the option of downloading their eBook titles to personal mobile devices, such as iPhones, iPads, Kindles, or other eBook readers. Downloading a title to a mobile device then became the fourth action that would trigger the purchase of a title.

In October 2010, the decision was made to add individual titles to the PDA collection. The Head of Technical Services speculated that by adding individual title requests from teaching faculty and librarians, the library would save acquisitions money because the library would buy the title only if it were used through **ebrary**. This would alleviate buying the print title and possibly having it sit on the shelf without being used. An article published in 2011 by this author describes the study of individual titles in our PDA collection over a 13-month period. Potential savings of $20,601.03 were reported for titles added to the PDA collection but not purchased (Dinkins, 2011).

After work on the 2011 article was completed, a study of **Stetson's** PDA collection in terms of the selector of the titles purchased

was undertaken. The results of a 2003 article comparing circulation usage of print books selected by teaching faculty[1] to that of print books selected by librarians were the impetus behind the curiosity to see whether the findings of that article also held true for a comparison of PDA selections. That 2003 article states, "The hypothesis of this study theorized that circulation percentages of books selected by departmental faculty would be higher than circulation percentages of books selected by librarians in similar subject areas" (Dinkins, 2003). After examining five years of acquisitions data and the related circulation usage data, the study rejected this hypothesis, because circulation percentages for librarians' selections for titles circulating more than once were equal to or higher than the circulation percentages for those titles selected by teaching faculty. In other words, the titles selected by librarians circulated at least as many times, if not more times, than the titles selected by teaching faculty in the subject areas studied. Subject areas in the study included Art, English, History, Music, and Political Science. The 2003 article called for further study by conducting similar research on titles bought by standing order and subscription. However, that research was never conducted.

In 2011, while examining the data for the article on individually-requested titles in the library's PDA collection, similar trends were noted, as seen in the 2003 study, when examining the number of titles bought and the type of requestor for the titles (librarian or teaching faculty). With the chance to conduct a study similar to the 2003 study, but on the eBooks in the PDA collection data in terms of titles bought, work proceeded with that data.

The hypothesis for this new study is that the number of eBook titles selected by teaching faculty that trigger a PDA purchase, as expressed as a percentage of the total number of eBook titles selected by teaching faculty, will be greater than similar percentages of eBook titles selected by librarians or of those titles selected as part of the subject collections. For the purposes of this study, usage is defined as triggering a purchase for the title. Granted, the eBook could be accessed through the PDA collection and not trigger a purchase. Therefore, for this study, usage not triggering a purchase is considered secondary usage and will be reported separately. This type of secondary usage will not be used to support or reject the hypothesis.

Results

As of May 2012, there were 4,109 titles in **Stetson's** PDA collection. See Table 1 for composition of the PDA collection. The titles in the collection were chosen either by subject or individually.

Of the 4,109 titles in the collection, 414 of the titles were accessed, and 226 of the accessed titles were triggered for purchase. Table 2 shows the numbers accessed and purchased titles compared to the entire collection. Of the 226 titles purchased, 50 were added to the collection individually, and 176 were added by subject. Table 3 shows the number of titles bought and the method for adding each to the PDA collection.

Of the total PDA collection, 457 titles (11% of total collection) were added to the collection by individual title requests from teaching faculty and librarians. Of the 457 titles, 50 were triggered for purchase. See Table 4 for the breakdown of teaching faculty and librarian selections.

In summary, as of May 2012, 226 titles were triggered for purchase in **Stetson's** PDA collection. Of those 226, 176 (78%) were added to the collection as part of the subject collections. The other 50 titles were added by individual request. Not surprisingly, a much higher percentage of the total collection of titles were purchased from the subject collection than from the individual requests. The subject collection makes up 89% of the total PDA collection.

Looking at the results in a different way, 4.82% of those titles that were part of the subject collection have been bought, while 10.94% of the titles chosen individually have been purchased. See Table 5.

When considering the number of eBook titles bought as a percentage of the corresponding selection subset of the total PDA collection, the hypothesis of this study must be rejected. The number of titles selected by librarians that were used, when expressed as a percentage of the total number of titles selected by librarians, is 12.7%. The number of titles selected by teaching faculty that were used, when expressed as a percentage of the total number of titles selected by teaching faculty, is 10.94%. The corresponding percentage of the subject collection is 4.82%. As in the 2003 study, librarian-selected titles have a higher usage rate when compared to the other two categories.

For all titles purchased with the PDA collection, the average number of usage sessions is 2.53. The average number of usage sessions for the titles bought from the individually-selected title subset is 3.44. Table 6 shows the average number of usage sessions for each component of the PDA collection, as well as cost-per-usage session. When considering only the titles purchased that were individually chosen, the cost-per-usage session of those titles chosen by librarians is considerably higher than the cost-per-usage session of those chosen by teaching faculty. The average cost of the librarian-selected titles purchased was $71.59, and the average cost of titles purchased from teaching faculty selections was $76.35. The two averages being relatively equal, obviously the average number of usage sessions is much higher for those titles selected by teaching faculty. Table 7 shows these results.

Table 1. Composition of Total PDA Collection

Chosen by Subject	3,652 (89%)
Chosen by Individual Title	457 (11%)
Total	4,109

Table 2. Total PDA Collection in Terms of Titles Accessed

Number of titles purchased	226 (6%)
Number of titles accessed or purchased	414 (10%)
Number of titles not accessed	3,695 (90%)
Total	4,109

Table 3. Titles Purchased in Terms of Addition to Collection

Titles Requested Individually	50 (22%)
Titles Added by Subject	176 (78%)
Total Titles Purchased	226

Table 4. Individually-Requested Titles Purchased

Requested by Librarians	20 (40%)
Requested by Teaching Faculty	30 (60%)
Total Purchased	50

Table 5. Percentages of Each Part of PDA Collection Purchased

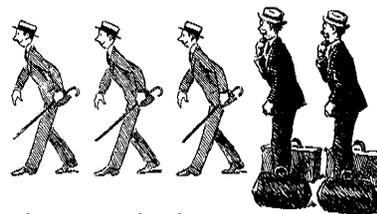| % of Titles Purchased from Subject Collection	4.82% (176 of 3,652)		
% of Titles Purchased from Individual Requests	10.94% (50 of 457)	% of Titles Bought from Teaching Faculty Requests	10% (30 of 300)
		% of Titles Bought from Librarian Requests	12.7% (20 of 157)

Secondary Usage and Potential Savings

It would be remiss to publish any article on a PDA collection without discussing potential savings. One of the main reasons the **Stetson University Library** chose to develop a PDA collection was for the possible savings, and the collection has delivered in that area. For the individually-chosen titles subset alone, 39 titles have been accessed but were not triggered for purchase, with savings of $2,649.84. These 39 titles would have been bought outright before the PDA collection, and this amount would have been spent. For these 39 titles, 26 were chosen by departmental faculty, and 13 were chosen by librarians. These titles may be triggered for purchase in the future, but the cost has been deferred until the title is needed for this greater level of use.

Furthermore, potential savings can be expressed in terms of the subject collection titles that were accessed but not triggered for purchase, with $11,210.60 saved in this area. These subject collection titles may or may not have been selected for purchase before the PDA collection. In fact, many of the titles bought from the subject collection would likely never have been chosen by **Stetson's** librarians. Titles such as *EBay for Dummies*, *Excel for Dummies*, and *McGraw-Hill's Conquering the GMAT* were unlikely choices for purchase. Perusing the complete list of purchased titles has been illuminating for librarians responsible for collection development.

Conclusions

While this study rejects the original hypothesis stated in the Methodology section of this article, much can be concluded from the data collected in the course of the project. Librarians' selections that were part of the PDA collection were purchased at a higher percentage rate than selections from teaching faculty or selections made by subject area. However, librarians' selections had a higher cost-per-usage session than the other selection types purchased. Could this mean that library users

found librarian selections interesting at first glance but then found the titles less useful when studied at length? With an average number of usage sessions of 1.8, the librarians' selections seemed to have been purchased based on a specific need for information rather than a general appeal to a larger number of library users. The average number of usage sessions for titles selected by teaching faculty was 4.53, considerably higher than the other two selector groups. Ten years of collection development experience had shown librarians that most teaching faculty at **Stetson** rarely assigned the print titles they selected for the library. It is hoped that the ease of use of eBooks, especially when integrated with course management systems, makes assignment of eBook titles easy and convenient for teaching faculty. In conclusion, it is obvious from this study that librarian-selected eBooks within **Stetson's** PDA collection were more likely to be purchased but were not used as often as those purchased eBook titles selected by teaching faculty.

Also, adding individual titles to **Stetson's** PDA collection is an effective way for the library to save money on purchases and still offer access to needed resources. Of the 457 titles added by individual selection to **Stetson's** PDA collection, only 50 have been purchased. As of May 2012, the 407 titles that have not been purchased represent thousands of dollars in savings. These titles would have been purchased outright if not added to the PDA collection.

The next course of study on **Stetson's** PDA collection will include a survey of the university's teaching faculty. The survey instrument has been constructed to ask about teaching faculty use of eBooks in general. Are the faculty comfortable with using eBooks for their own research or for class assignments? Do they prefer eBooks to print books? Does their print vs. eBook preference depend on the subject area? The survey will be conducted in the fall of 2012 and results will be examined in the spring of 2013. It is hoped

that the survey results will help **Stetson's** collection development librarians to more effectively match print and eBook format selections to faculty preferences to increase usage of titles purchased. Additionally, the eBook survey should indicate whether faculty training is needed in the use of eBooks.

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*Please Note: For the purposes of the 2003 study and for this study, the term "teaching faculty" refers to faculty members who teach in academic departments. At **Stetson University**, librarians also have faculty status.*

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Table 6. Average Number of Usage Sessions and Cost-per-Usage Session

	Number of Titles Purchased	Average Number of Usage Sessions	Cost per Usage Session
Individually Selected Titles	50	3.44	$21.64
Subject Selected Titles	176	2.28	$31.66
Total	**226**	**2.53**	**$28.66**

Table 7. Average Number of Usage Sessions and Cost-Per-Usage Session for Individually-Chosen Titles Purchased

Individual Titles Purchased	Average Number of Usage Sessions	Average Title Price	Cost Per Usage Session
Librarian Selections	1.80	$71.59	$39.77
Teaching Faculty Selections	4.53	$76.35	$16.84

A Study of the Demand-Driven Acquisition of eBook Titles in an Academic Library

by **Dara Elmore** (Monographic E-Resources Acquisitions Specialist, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University Libraries) <elmored@email.unc.edu>

Introduction

Demand-driven acquisition (DDA) of eBook titles can take place under various business models. In the one discussed here, the library loads a large number of records into its public catalog for materials it does not already own. When a patron searches the catalog and finds an eBook that interests her, she clicks on the link in the catalog and opens it. After a predetermined preview period, the patron is asked whether she wishes to continue using the eBook. If so, this counts as a "use" of the title. The library can arrange to purchase the title at this point, or they can choose to purchase the eBook after a set number of (paid) uses has taken place. In any case, the acquisition of the title is automatic and invisible to the patron.

In spite of the name, libraries exert a great deal of control over the eBook DDA process. The library chooses which records will appear in the public catalog — typically, titles that already meet the library's established bibliographic profile. The library also chooses, at the account level, when to trigger purchase of the eBook. Finally, the library can set a budget for DDA so that acquisition will be slowed down and then stopped when the costs reach a certain level.

There is a growing body of research that examines the effect of DDA on library collections, but this research mostly concentrates on DDA as a mode of acquiring print books. There has been little examination of the DDA of eBooks, perhaps because libraries are just beginning to adopt this practice. This research asks the following question:

Is the DDA of eBooks a less costly method, in terms of cost per use, than eBook approval plans?

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Reynolds, Leslie J., **Pickett, Carmelita**, **Vanduinkerken, Wyoma**, **Smith, Jane**, **Harrell, Jeanne**, and **Tucker, Sandra**. (2010). User-driven acquisitions: allowing patron requests to drive collection development in an academic library. *Collection Management*, 35(3-4), 244-254.

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Literature Review

Breitbach and **Lambert** describe the eBook DDA program at **California State University - Fullerton's Pollak Library**. The library set up a subject-area profile with **Ebook Library** and initially downloaded records for over 25,000 eBooks into the library's catalog, with content being added monthly. It was agreed that the fourth time a book was accessed, a purchase would be triggered. There were limits based on cost: a $250-per-eBook purchase limit and a rule that any short-term loan costing more than $25 would be mediated by a librarian. These two factors likely kept the expenditures on DDA eBooks artificially low in comparison with books acquired through other means. However, since three short-term loans must be paid for before a DDA eBook is even purchased, the cost of eBook ownership through DDA in this program is relatively high. The average cost of a short-term loan is $7.86, and the average cost to purchase is $73.93. Therefore, the average cost of eBook ownership through **Pollak Library's** DDA program is $95.34 (three short-term loans + purchase price).

Kelly (2010) details the eBook DDA program at **Open Polytechnic** (New Zealand), where they elected to load nearly the entire **Ebook Library** catalog, with the only restriction being English or Maori language titles. This amounted to about 120,000 records. The parameters of their DDA program call for short-term loans for the first two usages of a book and autopurchase on the third usage. So the limitations on price that one sees in many DDA studies are not present, although short-term loans were mediated if they cost more than $15.00, which may have lowered purchase prices somewhat. During the 12-month period examined, there were 3,003 short-term loans with an average price of $9.22. 187 autopurchases were made, with an average cost of $66.75, so the average cost to own a DDA eBook was $85.19 (2 short-term loans + purchase price). This compares favorably with the average cost per monograph of NZ$94.21 for print books. In fact, **Kelly** found that books autopurchased through the DDA program saw an average of 9.2 uses in the first year, while their print book collection saw an average of 0.62 uses per item in 2009. Cost-per-use figures were not given, but would likely be favorable given the high usage of DDA eBooks and the unusually high costs of print book circulation at **Open Polytechnic** (all students are distance learners, so books are mailed to them with prepaid return bags). **Kelly** also found that users were generally accessing content related to **Open Polytechnic's**

teaching areas, with the highest usage taking place in the areas of business/management and psychology/counseling — the areas that also use the highest numbers of e-journals. Only 1.2% of short-term loans during the one-year study period were "off topic."

Carrico and **Leonard** (2011) discuss the **University of Florida Libraries'** eBook DDA program, in which they partnered with Coutts to offer about 5,000 eBook titles that fit the libraries' profile. Purchase was triggered upon two usages, at an average cost of $106.86 per title. The theme of high usage of DDA titles emerges in this discussion, as well. During the pilot period, 193 eBooks were purchased and used a total of 912 times, for an average cost per use of $8.06. However, there is no information about a price cap in relation to their DDA eBooks. Post-pilot usage was also high. 78% of the titles purchased were also accessed at least once in the six months following the pilot period.

Hodges, **Preston**, and **Hamilton** (2011) detail two DDA programs at the **Ohio State University Libraries**. In the first program, when a print book was requested for interlibrary loan, it was purchased if it met certain subject-area and cost criteria. In the 22 months between March 2008 and December 2009, 2,146 interlibrary borrowing requests were received, of which 560 titles met the criteria and were purchased instead of borrowed. In the second program, 16,000 eBook records which met subject-area and cost criteria were loaded into the library's catalog. At the beginning of this test, a $25,000 deposit was made, which it was thought would be sufficient for the 18-week test. The test was frozen after 37 days, with the funds exhausted and further funds needed to pay for all the autopurchases that had been triggered. After this, a second test was run in which unmediated access to eBook titles was offered. In the mediated test, more books were used in the sciences and social sciences. In the unmediated test, social sciences were the heaviest users, followed by humanities. The authors assert that, contrary to popular belief, when given the option, humanities and social sciences patrons use eBooks as often as patrons in the sciences. Most subject librarians stated that they would have used their funds to purchase the titles bought in the first test. However, they also raised concerns about the frequent duplication of print books the library already owned and about the purchase of books more than two years old in eBook format. The authors point out that currency should not necessarily be of more concern in eBooks than it