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

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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?

Who Chooses Wisely? ...
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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

is in print books. The limitation of this study is the short course of the trials — only 37 days for each test. A longer trial period would have resulted in more data to analyze and would perhaps offer more reliable conclusions.

Method

The source of data collected was a large university library located in the Southeastern United States. This particular library was known to have run a pilot DDA program, and the head of the acquisitions department was willing to share the information that would permit this study to take place. This study primarily used existing documents as data — the purchasing data held in existing spreadsheets and in the integrated library system (ILS) and the circulation data captured by eBook content providers. This type of data collection, also known as a content analysis, is described by Wildemuth as "nonreactive measure or as data collected through unobtrusive methods." (2009). That is, the collection of the data itself does not constitute an intervention. This is advantageous because the data collection does not affect the data itself. This method is disadvantageous, however, in that it was impossible to collect any data that were not already collected by the ILS or the content provider.

First, a spreadsheet was obtained listing all the eBooks purchased as a part of the demand-driven acquisitions pilot program. This spreadsheet contained title, classification, and cost data for 347 books. A spreadsheet was also obtained listing all the 1,722 eBooks purchased on the library's e-approval plan over the lifetime of the program. In order to compare a similar number of titles, an online random number generator was used to pick the first title, number 1,111 on the list. Thereafter every fourth title on the list was selected, resulting in a list of 437 e-approval titles to compare with the demand-driven acquisitions titles.

eBooks were compared to eBooks rather than eBooks to print books because, as **van Dyk** noted, there are many overhead costs in the acquisition of print books. Comparing print books to eBooks would make it difficult to control for differences in overhead costs. The overhead costs of acquiring eBooks is beyond the scope of this study, however. Thus, as in much of the existing literature, the raw cost to purchase the book was compared, rather than the entire cost to acquire. This is potentially disadvantageous if the cost to acquire a DDA title is significantly different from the cost to acquire an approval plan book, but even then, the study has validity as a study of the cost of DDA and approval plan eBooks.

While the spreadsheets of DDA titles contained cost information for each title, the spreadsheets of e-approval plan books did not. So it was necessary to look up each e-approval title in the university's integrated library system to find cost data and add them to the spreadsheet. A snapshot of circulation data for three months of the study period was obtained from the content providers. This information was then added to the spreadsheets where it could be manipulated to find an aggregate cost per circulation for e-approvals and for demand-driven acquisitions titles. Essentially, the cost of a specific title, divided by the number of circulations during the study period, is the cost per circulation during the study period. These figures can be averaged to find aggregate figures for DDA or e-approval titles.

Results

The average cost of e-approval plan books in the sample was $89, while the average cost of a DDA title was $71.10. E-approval plan titles saw an average of 5.2 circulations per title over the study period of January-March 2012. This gives an average cost per use of $17.12 for e-approval plan titles during the study period. The DDA titles saw an average of 38.7 circulations per title, giving an average cost per use of $1.84 over the study period. This same theme of high circulation of DDA titles

and low cost per use can be seen in **Carrico** and **Leonard** (2011).

In both cases, the titles did not see even usage. Many titles were not used at all, while a few had very high circulation numbers. (**Nixon** and **Saunders** discuss the theme of higher circulation of books-on-demand in their 2010 article.) In any case, the DDA titles had a greater number of average circulations per title and a lower average cost per use over the study period, suggesting that they are a better bargain than e-approval plans.

Conclusion

Just-in-time collection development offers an excellent bargain — higher circulations than e-approval plans at a lower cost. Interestingly, as with e-approvals, usage is uneven, with many books receiving little or no usage in a given period while others receive extensive usage. Future work would include examining the pertinence to the collection of books collected through the DDA pilot program and the DDA books' contribution to the long-term health of the collection.

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Out of the Shadows: A Public Face for Acquisitions in Academic Libraries

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After seven years working as an Acquisitions Librarian, I have come to the disturbing realization that I am, in fact, in the wrong department. Nothing thrills me more than hunting down obscure materials and putting them into the hands of patrons, figuratively speaking. Acquisitions is all about the patrons — getting them what they need, when they need it, while not necessarily interacting with said patrons. With the advent of patron-driven acquisitions (PDA), this has become even more apparent. We've only just dipped our toes into the proverbial

PDA pool, often pre-choosing titles based on an approval profile that is based upon a careful consideration of what materials a given library *should* have. This implies the presumption that patrons cannot *really* be trusted to choose materials for the library, and it gives the patron only the illusion of choice.

I suggest that we join forces with reference and interlibrary loan departments, working *with* patrons, using reference interviews, to collaborate on collection decisions. At many libraries, where collection development and reference are done by librarians

from various departments, this would not be too much of a stretch. I am proposing a new type of reference interview where librarians would have the ability to use every option at their disposal — in-library resources, interlibrary loan, and purchasing — to get patrons what they need, while working at the desk. This option would also extend to virtual reference interactions via telephone, SMS, instant messenger, Skype, and out-of-library interactions, such as roving reference and embedded librarianship. This could be