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Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection

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Random Ramblings

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To return to the central idea behind this column, focusing on economic self-interest can have short-term benefits and long-term disadvantages in collection development as well as in life. I tell my collection development classes that libraries should realize that vendors need to make a profit to stay in business and that their staying in business helps libraries by providing competition and multiple service options. This principle, like most, has limits. Sometimes vendor profits are excessive. Sometimes a library is in desperate enough financial circumstances to look only at short-term economic benefits since the library simply won't have a long term without doing so. On the other hand, in this time of rapid change and uncertainty, the best strategy for libraries, publishers, societies, and vendors is to consider not only the economic benefits for tomorrow but to consider where the organization would like to be economically in the long term. Alienating customers and losing allies for immediate gain is a much more popular model than it used to be, but the old-fashioned principle of looking to the future may still be the wiser economic decision. 🌱

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Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection

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What We've Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate

by **Forrest E. Link** (Acquisitions Librarian, The College of New Jersey Library) <linkf@tcnj.edu>

When considering the value of usage statistics, it is important to realize that, to paraphrase **Lord Hewart**, data must not only be kept; it must be seen to be kept. Readers of a certain age will recognize the title of this paper as the tagline of the 1967 **Paul Newman** film *Cool Hand Luke*, a classic '60s tale of obstinacy and idiosyncrasy — values honored in Hollywood entertainment but often expensive indulgences for libraries. While in the film miscommunication is the result of a willful denial of circumstances, in library information management, the unwitting neglect of valuable data results in (you guessed it) a failure to communicate.

Here at **The College of New Jersey** Library, we do a strong business in interlibrary loan (ILL), averaging about 1,700 book titles borrowed each year. We also purchase about 5,000 books each year. Now, many libraries have policies in place whereby ILL book requests are linked to purchases. That is, when a book is requested on ILL (sometimes the first, sometimes the second time) it is obtained via rush purchasing.¹ This is often faster and, arguably (since the actual cost of ILL is notoriously hard to pin down),² cheaper than traditional ILL.

This brings me to the usage study at **TCNJ**. Since doing an eBook coverage study last year and attending a session at **Charleston**

Conference 2011, presented by **Richard Entlich**, **Cornell's** Collection Analyst Librarian, I've been intrigued by the fonts of data our ILS (Voyager) is able to spew out. It's all a matter of constructing access queries. I'm also interested in how collection development practices are evolving in the face of declining budgets, the flood of electronic resources, and the growing ease of gathering usage data. So, I thought it might be interesting to see how our purchasing relates to what our patrons are seeking via ILL.

TCNJ Library does not have a policy to purchase instead of borrow on ILL. Book selection is done by subject specialists based on: faculty recommendations; their own subject knowledge; review sources, like **CHOICE**; and electronic notifications from our vendor, **YBP**. Usage data on ILL requests are siloed in access services and used mostly by VALE, our state consortium. By correlating ILL requests with purchasing records and working on the assumption that ILL requests are indicators of user needs, I hoped to discover: 1) if and to what extent we are purchasing book titles subsequent to (but independent of) ILL requests; 2) if there are variances in subsequent purchases by subject specialists (in other words, if some subject specialists are doing a better job at anticipating user needs than others); and 3) if there are patterns of ILL requests that indicate

areas where there is a demonstrated need that is not being filled by purchases. Answers to these questions might help us decide whether a purchase policy for ILL might make sense for **TCNJ** Library.

Envisioning this paper as a pilot study for an anticipated comprehensive approach to the questions above, with the help of our Head of Cataloging, **Cathy Weng**, I gathered data from Voyager on ILL book requests for the 2010 calendar year. In that year, we had 1,737 ILL book requests for 1,309 unique titles. I matched that list of titles against our book purchases from January 2010 through June 2012: a total of 9,839 books representing 9,414 unique titles. The results were surprising.

Of the 9,414 unique titles purchased, only 46 were books previously requested on ILL during 2010. Because of the small number of these subsequent purchases, it was difficult to identify areas where our selectors were more effectively meeting user needs, although there was some indication that books requested in music and Islamic studies were being picked up. In trying to identify areas of particular interest to our ILL requestors (and presumably areas of weakness in our collection), it turned out that LC class P, Language and Literature, accounted for 434 of our ILL requests and only three subsequent purchases.

The data begin to answer my questions, but bring up others: Should we be considering demand-driven purchasing for ILL? If so, because the ILL volume is so high in relation to our purchasing volume (1,309

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unique titles requested in one year, an average of 3,900 books purchased per year), how do we mediate these purchases? I can't imagine devoting roughly one-third of our book budget to ILL purchases. Should we consider books requested twice on ILL (428 books were requested at least twice)? Even this would consume a bit over ten percent of our book budget.

Our selectors are specialists in their fields. Two of them are Ph.D.s. Most of the others have a subject Master's degree. They get a lot of input from faculty and review sources regarding book selection. We have been decently funded. Why, then, have we neglected the valuable data



source needs presented in ILL and, perhaps, spent money on books not being used? (Of course, that's another user study). I would argue that data generated in one area of our library, ILL, is not being communicated to an area that could surely use it — collection development. Our library has expended considerable amounts of time and money putting systems in place to manage and monitor our resource usage. We have the tools; we just aren't using them.

So what is to be done? This quick study has yielded some very provocative results and pointed to the need to ask more questions. As noted above, my colleagues and I are preparing to undertake a much broader survey of what our users seem to want in the

collection and how well we are meeting those needs. We are in the process of formulating a new collection development policy. We have also just hired a new Access Services Librarian who will be reviewing our ILL policies. As these initiatives take hold, perhaps we can begin to resolve our failure to communicate. 🌸

Endnotes

1. Zopfi-Jordan, David, Purchasing or Borrowing: Making Interlibrary Loan Decisions That Enhance Patron Satisfaction, *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserves*, 2008, Vol. 18 Issue 3, p387-394.
2. Van Dyk, Gerrit, Interlibrary Loan Purchase-on-Demand: A Misleading Literature, *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services* 35 (2011) 83-89.

The Unexpected Benefits of “Working Out” Usage Data

by Rachel Lewellen (Assessment Librarian, UMass Amherst Libraries, W.E.B Du Bois Library, 154 Hicks Way, Amherst MA 01003; Phone: 413-545-3343; Fax: 413 545-6873) <rlewellen@library.umass.edu>

Using collection data is a lot like exercising: at first, it can be difficult and unpleasant, it takes a lot of energy, and it feels inefficient. But, after getting into a routine, it gets easier, and an abundance of unintended benefits can be gained.

The libraries of the **Five Colleges, Inc.**, in Mass., have been “working out” with our print book duplication, circulation, and cost data since 2008. The Consortium includes: **Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College,** and the **University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst)**. The close geographic proximity (it is a 10-to-20-minute drive between campuses), a shared ILS, open borrowing privileges, a delivery service, and a long-standing cooperation between libraries have made it easier to undertake this work together.

As a consortium, we are seeking to decrease print book duplication across collections. In 2009, the **Five College Presidents** “... encourage[d] an increased level of cooperation among the libraries and to think of the libraries increasingly as one collection.”¹ **The Five College Collection Management Committee (CMC)** proposed to “... facilitate efforts to better coordinate purchases for our book collections, in an effort to reduce unnecessary duplication, so we can increase the breadth and the strength of our combined collections. We will order additional copies only when they are clearly required to support teaching, learning, and research. This decision will be made at the local library level.”²

To facilitate this, **YPB Library Services (YBP)** was adopted as a common supplier, and to avoid duplication between libraries when checking orders we use **YBP's GobiTween**, a consortial “viewpoint” within **GObI (Global**

Online Bibliographic Information), **YBP's** online acquisition and collection development tool. Duplication (by **OCLC** number), circulation, and cost data are extracted from a shared **Oracle** ILS database and updated annually. The implementation and details of the effort to reduce print book duplication are, of course, more complex, but, ultimately, duplication has decreased.³

This reduction in duplication has allowed each library to purchase a greater number of unique items, while continuing to meet the needs of campus users. Titles that are duplicated are heavily used — on average 71 percent of duplicated items circulated within four years. This reflects, in part, a move toward buying items based on specific use rather than collection building for future use. It also means items are purchased “just in time” by user request instead of “just in case.”

At **UMass Amherst**, individual selectors use the data to evaluate duplication based on discipline trends. High-use items may be candidates for eBook purchase. Actual dollar figures that are tied to circulation and duplication bring a concrete awareness to decision making. Absorbing and internalizing the data provides selectors with a deeper understanding of collections and users.

The unintended benefits of this work are many. As we gain confidence in our ability to understand how our collections are being used, we are more fluent in related decision making. Regular use of data makes it easier to apply that understanding in other circumstances. For example, recently, **UMass Amherst** expanded the “books on demand” program that quickly purchases ILL requests instead of borrowing them. Our knowledge about actual use of these items led to more liberal purchasing parameters.

Similarly, a series of discussions about moving collections to off-site shelving and deaccessioning collections based on use data has progressed in a remarkably straightforward fashion. We have also considered other cooperative endeavors with relative ease. I am not claiming a direct relationship between the annual review of collection use and duplication data and these other outcomes; however, I do believe that our familiarity with and fitness in using the data transfers to other situations. We are more confident in our ability to obtain and understand real data in other situations.

Like a runner on an adrenaline high, it's energizing to discover and understand more about the use of collections. As our endurance for using data increases, we can more easily ask new questions that deepen our knowledge of library users and use. Being in shape makes the new questions seem interesting and attainable, rather than daunting and unachievable. Getting started is often the hard part, but even small amounts of assessment and exercise are beneficial. Having a buddy helps too. 🌸

Endnotes

1. **Five Colleges, Inc.** “Collection Management Committee Minutes January 16” 2009. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/rachel_lewellen/1.
2. **Five Colleges, Inc.** “Collection Management Committee Minutes May 8” 2009. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/rachel_lewellen/2.
3. Leslie Button, Rachel Lewellen, Kathleen Norton, and Pamela Skinner. “Reducing Unintentional Duplication: Adventures & Opportunities in Cooperative Collection Development” *2011 Charleston Conference Proceedings*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2012. Print.