

Against the Grain

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One Monographs Bucket

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One Monographs Bucket

by **Kelly Smith** (Coordinator of Collections and Discovery, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries) <kelly.smith2@eku.edu>



Introduction

Until 2012, **Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Libraries**, like most academic libraries, allocated a set amount of funds to each subject liaison to spend in their area. As we began to dip our toes into patron driven acquisitions (PDA), a small “discretionary” fund had been used for this purpose. But as PDA became more popular with our patrons, the idea of pre-determined subject allocations quickly became challenging from both practical and philosophical standpoints. When discretionary funds were exhausted, how would we replenish PDA deposit accounts? Would we have to ask a liaison for “permission” to use their funds each time a book was requested? With a deposit account in a multi-disciplinary PDA package, how was that even possible? And if the evidence showed that patron requested materials were more highly used than librarian selected titles,¹ why were we still prioritizing librarian selections? Especially at a medium-sized comprehensive university where liaisons did not necessarily have subject expertise?

So when I was promoted to Coordinator of the division that handled collections in early 2012, one of my first actions was to propose a “pilot” year where we took all subject-allocated monograph funds and put them in one big pool of funds to see what would happen. Liaisons were skeptical. They had questions, lots of questions. But I emphasized that this change was not permanent. That we would try it and find out what problems arose, what problems were solved, and whether the problems solved outweighed the problems created. I also made sure that the branch librarians had more leeway to request titles. For example, the music librarian could still send us lists of scores to purchase, but he agreed to let the music histories, biographies, and other monograph purchases be driven by patron requests.

So in FY2013, we collapsed all the funds and set up a workflow in *Illiad* for InterLibrary Loan staff to send monograph requests through a quick review by the collection development librarian. Based on our collection development criteria, requests were either forwarded to acquisitions staff for purchase or sent to ILL to be borrowed. Additionally, we committed more funds to patron driven online collections, including both eBooks and streaming videos.

Process Observations

So, what were the results of our “pilot”?

In terms of problems, there were only two big ones. First, and this surprised us: many faculty were annoyed that we had purchased titles that they had requested through Interlibrary Loan! They had “only wanted to review them.” We solved this problem through education, explaining that they could indicate in the notes that they would prefer ILL, but that we would use our professional judgement to determine whether individual titles might have a broader use potential that would justify purchase. Second, the onslaught of textbook requests at the beginning of each semester is hard to manage. We maintain a small collection of textbooks on reserve — primarily those donated by faculty or students. Occasionally, we will purchase a textbook for introductory classes or high DFW classes, especially to support students at the beginning of the semester as there is often a lag-time before they receive their textbook vouchers from the financial aid office. So students know that we buy textbooks and some of them request we purchase all of their textbooks. We are managing this through education and a lot of communication, but it is still a problem that we are working through, and we don’t have a set policy yet.

In terms of benefits, I could probably use this entire column to list them, but I will focus on the main ones.

1. **Flexibility.** We can purchase whatever our students and faculty need, at the point of need. If a new faculty member comes and identifies an area in need of more core titles, we can afford as many as they need — there’s no set number. If a program is added (or removed) we can add more titles in that area (or adjust our PDA profiles).

2. **Efficiency.** We don’t have to have extensive email strings between faculty, liaisons, and the collection development librarian to get “approval” to spend funds. Requests are fulfilled with no intervention from the liaison.
3. **Resource optimization.** In this case, I’m talking about staff resources, in addition to collection funds. In the past, liaisons would spend a lot of time looking through catalogs, choice lists, etc., and taking educated guesses about what patrons might want. Now, they are using that time to build relationships with faculty and taking on a more curatorial role — instead of searching for new things to buy, they are exposing our vast collections to their faculty.
4. **Insights.** Tracking the request patterns of patrons is fascinating. We are getting a better understanding of what students and faculty want.

Outcomes

We have continued to use one large budget bucket for monographs since its successful rollout in 2012. One of the big concerns that liaisons had when I proposed this new purchasing model is that their areas would suffer from not being actively “developed.” On the contrary, looking at the evidence, we think that the mix of resources has been enhanced, and the purchasing trends have simply mirrored the trends across our curriculum. I pulled data comparing our 2012 allocations with our 2017 expenditures.

- The biggest change in purchasing was in the “multidisciplinary” category. This category includes the deposits we make into our current PDA pools — **JSTOR** eBooks and **Kanopy** streaming videos — and other online monographs collections. We cannot track these by subject in our LMS, but looking at the usage reports, they represent a wide range of subject areas including humanities, science, social sciences, and health. This subject category now represents 45% of our monographs spend.
- Looking at the rest of the subjects, which represent title-by-title purchases, the biggest increase was in psychology, which increased by 8.75%. Usage data of psychology resources increased similarly. Psychology happens to be our fastest growing program.
- The biggest decrease was in business, down by about 5.5%. Business has shifted somewhat to using more online resources that are available in aggregated databases.
- The median change among all individually tracked subjects was about plus or minus 1%. For the most part there was very little deviation from the 2012 expenditures. So the patrons are doing fine in building these collections.
- The only area that had no monographs purchases in 2017 were Interior Design, a program that was eliminated two years ago.

Future Plans

Now that PDA is firmly entrenched at **EKU**, we are actually taking a step back and looking at how we can also encourage serendipity through curation. We started a staff picks display in our main reading room, modeled after employee staff favorites at bookstores. Staff members recommend their favorite books and we attach a fun description to each book, as well as the name of the staff member. We’ve also started a robust rotation of thematic displays, tied in with campus initiatives or seasonal themes, and before we set these up, we purchase new titles to refresh those topical areas. So while we still have a single monographs budget,

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Textbooks on Reserve — Seven Years and Going Strong

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It is no secret that textbooks have been and still are prohibitively expensive for most students (Martin, Belikov, Hilton, Wiley, & Fischer, 2017; Senack, 2014). In the past we at the **Joseph F. Smith Library of Brigham Young University-Hawaii** held a pretty hard line, as did many libraries, about not acquiring textbooks that were currently in use. Per the collection development policy at the time, we would accept donations of other textbooks in good condition for the circulating collections, but that was as far as we would go. News reports about the high inflation rate of textbooks were prevalent. We had read articles discussing the link between textbook availability and grades and retention. Anecdotally, we heard from students and professors about the practice of textbook sharing, or worse, going without a textbook. Students frequently requested more textbooks in the library. That there was a problem nationally and on our campus was evident, and in our library we began to brainstorm ways that we could contribute to a solution.

Before we launched our textbook initiative in the fall of 2011, there were a few other programs to help students on campus. There was a minimal textbook reserve collection, hosted in the library. These textbooks were brought over by individual faculty members and often were personal copies. The mathematics department offered a rental program for upper division textbooks. The computer science department had also begun a limited rental program.

We heard from one instructor that at his former institution faculty members were required to deposit copies of textbooks in the library for students to use, and we were intrigued by this

idea as a possible solution. There was little in the literature about this concept and we knew that we would not be able to get faculty or departmental buy-in to require the purchase of textbooks to place on course reserve. If we wanted to move forward with the idea that textbooks for all courses will be placed on reserve, it would be up to the library to make it happen.

As we looked for ways to make this solution real, we considered many factors, including funding, staffing, campus relationships and the trend of declining circulation rates for physical books (a trend experienced by all academic libraries) (Anderson, 2017). As a small, highly residential, undergraduate liberal arts university, we wanted to make sure we were putting money into the resources that were most needed and that would get used. We decided to cancel low or no-use monographic serials to free up money to support the reserves textbook initiative. We also chose to cancel a few direct print and online periodical subscriptions, if the titles were included in an aggregator database and had little or no embargo period.

Canceling resources is not an attractive option for any institution. While a research library might want to build a “just in case” collection, as a small undergraduate library with limited space we choose to focus on “just in time.” We do subsidize interlibrary loan (ILL) for students and faculty alike for “just in time” access. Thanks to ILL agreements, we can generally have articles delivered within two or three business days after request submission. Thus far, no one has been denied access to an article they needed for their research due to our cancellations. For us, canceling low-use continuing resources and re-allocating the funds better served our students.

As we continued creating the parameters for this program, we decided that it would require some shifting in staff assignments to make it work. The start-up took two months to acquire, catalog and physically process the initial collection. Currently, staff and librarians devote an average of ten to fifteen hours per week in the months leading up to the new semester and continue to spend more time on course reserves tasks for the first few weeks afterward, as not all materials are in place at the start of the semester. Most of the time is spent on checking edition changes, course number changes and trying to figure out what will no longer be used. The amount of time spent has not noticeably declined, as every title must be checked by hand each semester and new texts

are introduced each semester. Although, we have found the level of spending for new texts has declined.

We recognized that we would need a robust relationship with the **BYUH Bookstore** to make this program work. We began and continue to work with them well before each semester starts to acquire textbook lists, which we then compare against our holdings. We cooperate with each other for resolving bibliographic questions and in identifying textbooks that faculty members may list in a syllabus but not send to the Bookstore. We try to place orders through the Bookstore whenever possible, and they have been grateful for the continued support of the library purchases. The Bookstore had mentioned that they noticed a decline in textbook purchases from students in general even before our initiative.

We also developed relationships with many of the department administrative assistants, as well as individual faculty members, as we have worked together to get everything on the shelf in a timely manner. All but one or two faculty members have been most supportive of the program. A few requested that their required texts be excluded from course reserve, and instead they promised to make available for free the materials needed to those students who have a hard time purchasing the text for whatever reason.

We have worked out a formula to decide how many textbooks to buy for each section. Since most of our classes have an enrollment cap of 25 students or fewer, we decided to set the purchase of textbooks at one per increment of 25 students per section. In other words, if a course had one section with 25 or fewer students, we would purchase one copy of the textbook. The texts are available for checkout, in two hour increments, to be used in the library only. There is a possibility to renew the item if no one else is waiting for it, which often is the case. There is a \$1 an hour charge for returning books late. One frequent request is to let books out of the building; we declined to implement this after feedback from Circulation staff who felt that this would result in more overdue items. Circulation Desk employees are careful to let students know exactly what time the book is due back when they are checking the item out. In addition, Circulation Desk employees track requested titles and alert us when we are missing a text or when more copies may be needed.

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Textbooks on Reserve ... from page 12

we are reintroducing librarian and staff selected titles into the mix. The great thing is that our budget has the flexibility to accommodate both approaches. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Price, Jason S. and McDonald, John D.**, “Beguiled by Bananas: A Retrospective Study of the Usage and Breadth of Patron vs. Librarian Acquired eBook Collections” (2009). *Library Staff Publications and Research*. 9. http://scholarship.claremont.edu/library_staff/9.