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“Access Versus Ownership” Revisited: The Quinnipiac University Libraries Short-Term Loan Project

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Abstract

Challenged by a historically small monographs collection, a considerable growth in the number of students and academic programs, and faced with space limitations in the stacks, Quinnipiac University librarians began their large-scale investment in e-books in January 2011. Initially, we subscribed to ebrary’s Academic Complete collection. That same year, we began a conversation with EBL and its then Vice President of Sales, Dr. David Swords. It was our desire to compare a subscription approach with a patron-driven acquisitions strategy as we further examined the place of e-books in our libraries. Initially, in 2012, we offered EBL titles published from 2010–2012. Yet, questions remained around the purchase of e-books even when our patrons used EBL titles. An e-book, used but once or twice took up no shelf space, but it represented a purchase—funds spent. In ownership, it also represented a unit that required care; feeding; and, quite possibly, weeding. Discussions with our colleagues at Fairfield University about their short-term loan (STL) strategy intrigued us, and we are indebted to them for sharing data, observations, and issues encountered. In October 2012, Quinnipiac’s Arnold Bernhard Library expanded its own STL initiative, making available the entire EBL catalog and adhering almost completely to STL activity. That is, we bought almost no e-books but made more than 300,000 academic titles available to our patrons. Charles Getchell, former Director of the Bernhard Library, Quinnipiac; June DeGennaro, Collection Management Librarian, Quinnipiac; and David Swords, EBL-Ebook Library/ProQuest will share with you key elements of the planning, implementation, and outcome assessment of this full-fledged STL program at Quinnipiac University. Surprises, discoveries, and future plans will be shared as well. We remain intrigued, as, at present, only three known academic libraries in North America have this valuable access strategy in place.

This concurrent presentation, offered Thursday afternoon, was well attended by librarians and publisher and vendor representatives. It was one of many presentations dealing with e-books—clearly, in general, a topic was of great interest to conference attendees. We appreciated the interest, curiosity, and excellent array of questions that followed our own comments and conclusions.

We work and maneuver in an ever changing and challenging landscape, and while publishers, vendors, and librarians share common desires for success and work more closely than in decades past, harmony and balance can be elusive—that is it can be damn tough to construct an equation where costs, benefits, and revenues are all sufficiently satisfied. Quinnipiac University libraries and their vendor partner added another case study to the multitude of submissions and how it addressed a set of specific problems

against a broader backdrop of challenge and change. The authors/presenters are pleased to share with the larger audience for further consideration, discussion, and possible implementation as our three groups—whose representatives gather annually in Charleston but communicate steadily throughout the year—continue to get closer to harmony and balance.

Publishing, Business Models, and Change

For millennia, books were fragile and scarce. Libraries were their refuge and could be counted on to collect and give safe harbor to civilization’s record of itself. As the pace and scope of information production grew with print, small print runs made it important for libraries to collect scholarly books soon after publication. In recent times, practices such as approval plans gave libraries an organized, labor-efficient means of

obtaining monographs that could eventually prove useful before they disappeared from print.

Meanwhile, in the early 1990s, journals made the leap from the print to the electronic medium. Ever since, books have been declining as a percentage of library budgets. As a result, nearly every library that uses a traditional model offers ever fewer books as a percentage of the available universe of information. Library patrons, by and large students who need rapid fulfillment to complete assignments, and their professors, too often disappointed at the diminished monographic holdings in their campus library, have turned increasingly to journals. As an electronic tool, journals were far easier to search, mine, and cite than print books, making them better for time-haunted researchers. And as the Internet changed expectations about the immediacy and availability of answers to almost any question, books receded as part of the research enterprise, as declining circulation statistics suggest.

By the early twenty-first century, books were becoming electronic, but at the same time, rapid advances in many fields led to the likelihood that a title would become obsolete more quickly, replaced by new research available only in journals or by the rapid appearance of newer books from publishers who vied with one another for authors in most every subject. Happily for those of us who cling to the monograph, the suggestion of a Swiss librarian who found that his researchers seldom used any book more than a couple of times, led Ebook Library (EBL) to create the short-term loan (STL).

The story we will tell today that unfolded at Quinnipiac University should be a happy one for book publishers, for students and faculty, and for the viability of the university library. Thanks to e-books and STLs, it is now practical for a library with a diminished budget to offer a far larger percentage of the universe of books than it could ever afford to buy. Because the library does not need to buy books to make them available, because it does not need to build a collection of ever aging monographs in a world that makes individual books quickly obsolete, and because the library can make tens of thousands more books

available than it could ever afford to own, the library can satisfy its patrons more of the time.

For publishers, the story is hopeful if, in this moment of punctuated equilibrium, wrenching. In the past, selectors typically chose the few titles they could afford based on scant information that they reviewed for a matter of seconds. If they elected not to buy a book, as would be true most of the time, that title nearly always passed into oblivion forever for their library. Today, however, thanks to demand-driven acquisition (DDA), MARC records for tens of thousands of books can reside in hundreds, even thousands of catalogs where they would never have appeared in the past. Those books can be found over years by the thousands of eyes searching those catalogs.

For the library, DDA is based on use, which means need-based expenditure. As Charles will describe, this is an easy sell to administrators concerned that the library not become a black hole for investments upon which no return occurs. At this point, relatively few libraries can be concerned with safeguarding the record of civilization represented by collection building.

For publishers, we are confident that the smaller individual transactions resulting from STLs compared with purchases will, many times, over reward their forward-looking understanding of the inevitable direction of the marketplace. Music and film invite comparison to books. People now buy songs far more often than albums and rent movies on Apple TV or Netflix rather than buy and store DVDs. Indeed, libraries themselves always have been in the rental business with respect to their patrons. Publishers who have understood and supported this sea-change in the market by accepting and adapting to DDA and its engine, STLs are helping books, once again, become important in student research. As June will describe, Quinnipiac was able to offer 350,000 titles to its patrons on a budget that would have supported purchase of only a few hundred titles. Surely satisfying, more people more of the time is the way forward for publishers and libraries alike.

We believe that the implications of Quinnipiac's approach to DDA are strategically critical for the

ongoing vitality of the book itself. Starve libraries of the ability to offer a vast array of monographs, and books will continue their downward trend as a source of research information. By contrast, give libraries the chance to offer more books, to become showrooms for all of the titles a publisher brings to the market by recognizing that old print-based practices are as obsolete as the record store, and the book can flourish.

The Library's Dilemma

It very often comes down to space and money. There just is not enough square footage to meet the program needs for today's academic library. Be it a growing student body and a need for more study space, changing relationships and adjacencies with student support services, or the desire to add services, library administrators more and more find themselves participants in space wars and budgetary challenges.

The Arnold Bernhard Library, which serves as the collegiate library hub in the Quinnipiac University Libraries system, faced the combined space and budgetary challenge (a substantial cut to the Bernhard materials budget) in July 2009. In addition, a new Vice President/Chief Information Officer assumed leadership of the Information Services Division that includes the Libraries. There were also increases in academic programs and planned increases in enrollment for the next several years. The historically small print collections needed to be expanded and updated while reduced funds were already being shifted toward electronic resources—databases and full-text journals in particular. In summer 2010, in order to increase user/study space in the Bernhard Library, a substantial portion of the print collection was placed in remote storage. Evaluation of the collection and collection usage revealed what more and more libraries were reporting—a significant percentage was not circulating.

E-books certainly offered an ideal alternative to our long-standing print purchasing strategies. The popularity of the ebrary Academic Complete collection, offered through a subscription model, helped motivate staff to explore further strategies; the rise of patron-driven acquisition

(PDA)/DDA programs caught our attention in particular. June DeGennaro and Charles Getchell spent time working with their counterparts, Keith Stetson and Joan Overfield at neighboring Fairfield University. Stetson had chosen to load the entire EBL list of titles into Fairfield's catalog and to lean heavily on an STL strategy. Numerous titles might be borrowed more than once, but as data shared with us indicated, the cost of loaning the book rarely reached the purchase price. No shelf space was needed; users had access to substantial numbers of titles beyond what the Library purchased; and if use or other factors dictated, titles could be easily purchased.

To move our ideas forward, I contacted David Swords and, with June, began to map out what would become the Quinnipiac STL project. The final hurdle was securing funding. The long-standing annual budget process ceased to exist, and funds had to be secured on a presentation, demonstration of need, argument basis. Where other submissions failed, the STL project struck the right chord with our vice president. One-time money would make available hundreds of thousands of titles, no space was needed, a small and aging monographic collection was greatly refreshed, and positive political capital lay within.

We received an initial allocation of \$35,000 for the initial STL for FY 2013, eventually overcame some local technical issues with loading the EBL records, tried some deduplication against ebrary titles, and tweaked our Summon discovery layer ahead of starting the STL project.

From the administrative/Library Director point of view, this project proved successful in a number of important ways. While outcomes are particular to Quinnipiac University, I would submit they are at least, in part, transferable. First, we demonstrated to our senior administration a successful return on investment (ROI). Early reports and graphs caught the attention of our vice president, and before year's end, June was asked to give regular updates as well as a presentation to the Faculty Senate. The program was then funded for FY `2014.

Second, we feel we found a powerful new tool to better support our academic programs. Since

Quinnipiac University continues to expand its online offerings, this growing constituency of students and their faculty stand to benefit significantly from the STL program.

A third success came in the collaborative efforts. Discussions with our Fairfield colleagues was most useful; the selection of a vendor partner and close work with EBL (now ProQuest) representative David Swords and his technical staff was also a success.

Quinnipiac Library's EBL Usage Experience

During Quinnipiac's last academic year, July 2012 through June 2013, the library spent \$42,422 on 4,773 EBL STLs. Quinnipiac set its STLs at 24 hours. There were 2,875 unique titles accessed. If all the unique titles had been purchased, their total list price would have been about \$300,000.

A subject analysis by call number of the STLs found that the R classification, the medicine and nursing category, had the highest number of loans. The library attributed the high R count to the significant percentage of student body enrolled in health sciences undergraduate and graduate programs. In addition, EBL provided recently published titles in the medical field, titles the library had not purchased due to fiscal constraints.

The library paid on average \$8.89 for each STL. Generally, medical books are more expensive to purchase than many other academic books. As a consequence, their high use has affected the average cost of the STL. It is suggested that a lower average STL cost may be realized if a greater ratio of students are enrolled in humanities and social sciences programs. Books in those subject areas are historically less costly.

While some STLs have been for nonacademic books, use of casual reading titles has not been a major issue, and the STL cost has been generally inexpensive. The library no longer offers a popular reading collection; it was eliminated several years ago when the budget was cut. So these titles fill in a leisure collection gap, and the minor expense proved worth the goodwill the e-books

engendered and the relaxation they provided to students.

The price cap on STLs is set by the library at \$35. E-books on or above that price generate an e-mail request to a librarian. Called a mediate loan request, it must be approved to obtain 24 hours access or rejected. Last academic year, the library had 54 mediated loan requests: 25 approved, 29 denied. The most common rejection reason was the patron no longer wanted the e-book.

The following techniques help the library control EBL costs:

- If other e-book options exist, order the 856 links in an OPAC record to display EBL last
- List EBL at the end of Serials Solutions's 360 Link Database Order list
- It is cost effective to e-mail the patron before approving a mediated loan request; the title is often no longer needed and the request can be rejected

Some EBL e-books have been bought when the number of STLs has made the purchase practical from a cost perspective. However, the library has not purchased many e-books as a result of repeated STL use. Over the last 16 months, July 2012–October 2013, the library spent \$4,047 on 55 e-book purchases. Most titles have not been accessed more than a few times. The focus on STLs has been a successful strategy for the Quinnipiac library.

Future

The 2013 Charleston Conference marks the formal debut of a STL program of this scale. We wait with interest to learn of more implementations of this type of program so analysis, findings, and sharing of data among librarians, publishers, and vendors may ensue. Each year, the Charleston Conference reminds us that a good deal of work remains to be done as our three groups and all those we serve work move forward.