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Buying Out-of-Print Books on the Internet, Where the Old is New Again

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I work at the Mina Rees Library of the City University of New York (CUNY), the Graduate Center, in the heart of Manhattan. The Graduate Center is the PhD granting campus of CUNY. The students are required to do extensive reading in their disciplines, which often entails finding older and out-of-print titles.

Despite the research level of classes, the Mina Rees Library is not a research level library; nor was it ever meant to be one. When the Graduate Center was founded in 1961, it was on 42nd street, across from the New York Public Library (NYPL) (http://www.nypl.org/research/css/index.html). Having a premier research institution so close by meant it was unnecessary even to try to duplicate its rich and deep resources. In 1999 the Graduate Center relocated to Fifth Avenue at 34th street, still only blocks away from NYPL. The southeast corner of the same building that now houses the Graduate Center is where New York Public’s Science Industry and Business branch (SIBL) (http://www.nypl.org/research/sibl/) is located; so again, proximity beies the need for Mina Rees to attempt, with limited tax levy money, to be a research level library. Of these two branches, only SIBL has a circulating collection. However, there are many resources, online and in print, available to our students and faculty at NYPL.

The collection at the Mina Rees Library is built on the reserve requests of professors at the Graduate Center. As clearly stated in our collection policy: “Course reserves and departmental reading exam lists are the primary determinants for Library purchases. Additional desiderata lists are compiled by selectors in