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Back Talk

Editor

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Back Talk

This month we have given Tony Ferguson some time off and are doing another kind of Back Talk. These are some of the letters which we have gotten and which we hope will provoke some comment from y’all out there. Send responses to <strauchk@cofc.edu> or http://www.against-the-grain.com or fax 843-953-8019 or 843-723-3536 – KS

Letter From Stewart Lillard

(Technical Services J. Murray Atkins Library, UNC Charlotte; 9201 University City Boulevard; Charlotte, NC 28223; phone (704)-547-3589) <stlillard@newmail.uncc.edu>

How we are doing on Physics Bestsellers!

In the Feb. 1998 issue of Against the Grain, pp. 46-7, Katina Strauch of the College of Charleston, SC, began to publish a series of scholarly bestseller lists. Drawing on the collective expertise of selectors across the country, Bob Nardini, Yankee Book Peddler, compiled a list of the top fifty (50) books in the LC subclass QC Physics purchased most often. These fifty titles represented approximately the top 10 percent (10%) of the remaining physics titles sold by YBP during 1996/97.

Of the 50 titles (ranging from $19.19 to $139.), Atkins Library purchased 27 titles on approval plan purchased 3 titles on departmental direct orders purchased 30 [total]

Of the 50 titles, Atkins Library developed 3 titles on approval plan and returned them does not own 17 titles does not own 20 [total]

So, Atkins Library is a 30/50 library. Now the big question is “So What?” How do we evaluate this 60% plus rating? Do we win the gold cup, or are we adequate for a mid-size research institution? At least, we know that our faculty members and advanced students have adequate resources on campus. Without the approval plan, I am afraid that our statistics would have been much lower.

As Daniel P. Haliloran, Academic Book Center, wrote on page 1 of the same issue of Against the Grain, Feb. 1998: “among these trends and developments [for 1997] are the central role of approval plans in libraries, including smaller libraries that traditionally had used other collection management tools.” Atkins Library began the BNAm approval plan in 1977/78.

Letter From Bob Nardini

(Regional Vice President, Collection Management & Development Group, YBP) <nardinb@ybp.com>

My first thought [on reading Stewart Lillard’s letter] is that I’m glad people are actually using the list to check their own holdings. We’d hoped a list like this would be useful, so maybe it actually will be.

Other random thoughts: • If teaching faculty at this library were presented with a list of the 20 not obtained, would they recommend buying them? • If presented a list of the 30 already held, would they agree with the purchase decision? • Is approval plan sales actually a good way to measure the value of books? It might be interesting to compare this list with some other methods, e.g., how did the 30 held books circulate compared with other physics books purchased during the year? How did YBP’s 50 titles fare in reviews? (how many were even reviewed at all?)

I guess the 60% would be meaningful only when compared with other libraries, especially with peers. I wonder if an analysis using AMIGOS or the WLN software would identify these same titles as those most widely held, from the time period, in Physics?

It would be interesting, as well, to check the 50 against the holdings of some libraries who don’t rely on an approval plan in Physics, especially in comparison to some who do.

I wonder if publisher sales records would agree that these were the leading Physics titles for the year? Etc. etc. Somebody could really make a project out of this, I’ll bet, if they put their mind to it.

Ed note: What do the rest of you think on this issue? Are “bestseller lists” important selection tools? What role does the approval plan play with faculty and/or bibliographer selection? For example, when I showed the list to our Physics liaison (at the College of Charleston) who is a professor, he said: “Order whatever we don’t have!” What do Y’ALL think? Anyone who wants to explore this further? — KS

Wandering the Web

from page 93

International weekly journal of ideas, opinions, news & analysis.

Fortune: http://www.pathfinder.com/fortune, Searchable archives back to 1993 as well as Fortune 500, etc.


Advertising Age: http://www.adage.com, Great site for articles about advertising issues.


Oral Arguments of the Supreme Court: http://overz.at.nwu.edu/cases/70-18.


Cornell University’s Law site: http://law.cornell.edu/.

International Court of Justice: http://www.law.cornell.edu/icj.


94 Against The Grain / June 1998

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