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Developing a Multifaceted Approach to Identify a Core Undergraduate Browsing Collection

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Abstract

In planning for a new library that will include a limited number of open stacks, Grand Valley State University librarians were asked to identify what materials should be reserved for the browsable shelves. To accomplish this, librarians considered user behavior by discipline, material types, shelving options and the role of core collections. This paper will discuss these issues as well as differences in how library resources are located and the impact of new discovery tools, such as Innovative Interface's Encore, Bowker's Syndetics, and Google's Book Search on redefining browsability. The paper will also include a discussion of resources used in this process, such as the results from our recent LibQual study, WorldCat Collection Analysis' Circulation Analysis and Bowker Book Analysis reports.

Introduction

The Grand Valley State University Libraries are currently in the early planning stages for a new library on the main campus that is estimated to begin construction in 2010. In planning for a building that will have approximately 150,000 square feet of usable space, there has been significant debate regarding how to best maximize user space and accommodate library collections. Because much of this space will be dedicated to user activities such as computing, group project space, presentation practice, multimedia equipment and quiet study areas the library is acting under the assumption that open stacks will be limited and an on-site retrieval system will be necessary. The question of how best to manage a collection split between browsing shelves and an active collection, housed in an automated retrieval system, remained unclear. With that in mind, an Open Stacks task force was formed to evaluate all shelving options and make recommendations as to the most appropriate distribution of titles in open shelving and the retrieval system.

Background

Founded in 1960, Grand Valley State University is a young comprehensive public university. Its first student enrollment in 1963 was 224. In the past 50 years, it has grown to a size of approximately 24,000 students. The main campus is located almost midway between downtown Grand Rapids and Lake Michigan, in the town of Allendale, Michigan.

The Zumberge Library opened on the Allendale campus in 1969 and was built to accommodate an enrollment of 6,000 students. The Zumberge Library serves an estimated population of 16,000 students today. The current structure has approximately 50,460 square feet of usable space and contains over 250,000 items in open stacks. This figure does not include print periodicals or special collections and archives. Due to space constraints, approximately 100,000 volumes of low circulating materials were moved to an offsite storage facility in 2004.

A second University campus, which opened in the year 2000, is located approximately 15 miles east of Allendale, in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan. This campus has buildings distributed throughout the downtown area. The main campus primarily offers liberal arts programs, while the downtown campus focuses primarily on graduate and professional education programs.

Due to the geographic and programmatic differences in the campuses, the library collections are divided and housed with regard to the major programs offered on each campus. To accommodate the needs of downtown students and faculty, the Steelcase Library opened in 2000 with a fully operational automatic storage and retrieval system to house library materials in its limited footprint. It primarily contains materials relevant to business, education, engineering, and criminal justice. In 2004, a second facility, The Frey Learning Center, opened in another part of downtown, in the Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences building, and focuses solely on serving the University's health sciences programs.

Open Stacks Task Force Considerations

The Open Stacks task force was a cross-functional group made up of liaison librarians whose departments heavily rely on print materials and others immersed in collection development issues in a variety of ways. This group was tasked with examining scenarios for developing the open stacks collection in a new library facility. Some of the factors considered were: user behavior, disciplinary differences, collection use, anticipated collection growth, including a large scale humanities retrospective project, expectations for the future of print reference materials, anticipated continued print journal collections, standard collection lists, and the impact of new discovery tools on browsing and findability. In addition, the task force gave careful consideration to the Libraries' recent LibQual survey comments and a literature review.

LibQual

The GVSU Libraries conducted the LibQual survey in the fall of 2007. Though it is primarily designed to measure user satisfaction with library services, many comments regarding collections and the library as a physical space were reflected in our user comments. A total of 2,752 surveys (229 faculty, 283 graduate students, 108 staff, and 2132 undergraduate) were received. Of 229 faculty responders, 36 submitted comments in the survey. Of this number, 64% were from individuals in Humanities disciplines. There was a general, and sometimes strongly worded, theme amongst these comments: "we want books on open shelves because browsing is key for our research."

Literature Review

The ITHAKA Report: "Ithaka's 2006 Studies of Key Stakeholders in the Digital Transformation in Higher Education", presents the compiled and analyzed results of surveys conducted in 2000, 2003, and 2006 of faculty attitudes toward the academic library. Its findings, in large part, reflect the LibQual comments received and our own anecdotal evidence about library use. That is to say, humanists still see the library and librarian's role as having continued importance. They still want to browse the stacks. Scientists and social scientists, meanwhile, are becoming less reliant on the library for information and services.

Others have reported similar findings. According to Levine-Clark, "...humanists conduct research differently than do those in other disciplines, relying more on...browsing the shelves" than their colleagues in the sciences, social sciences and professional programs. (Levine-Clark 2008) Many of our long-held assumptions about humanists' research behaviors are reinforced by recent surveys and studies of the research process in humanities disciplines. While it is important to consider traditional research patterns and the preferences of arts and humanities scholars, it is also necessary to recognize that these behaviors are changing. Some humanities scholars are employing technological search tools in addition to, and often in place of, physically browsing library shelves. For example, a 2001 study of scholarly research in the humanities conducted by the Digital

Library Federation found that most humanities scholars “reported browsing in the library to be of value to them in their work.” However, one scholar said, “I have found going on the Web to be not only useful in locating sources, but . . . equivalent to just roaming around the stacks and looking for titles of books and stumbling upon things that you never knew you'd find.” (Brockman, et al. 2001) Thus, our Open Stacks task force worked to accommodate the current research needs in various disciplines, with the understanding that these behaviors will likely evolve over time.

Tools and Resources for Collections Analysis

In examining the open stacks issue, the task force visited a number of questions and topics, ranging from the role of core collections and lists to questions of collection usage and growth. General circulation data were taken into consideration, as was circulation within specific subject areas. Special attention was paid to the use of titles in the library's remote storage facility, as well as whether the age of a book had an impact on circulation. To examine these questions, a number of different tools and resources were used, including Bowker Book Analysis, WorldCat Collection Analysis and internal data retrieved from the library's integrated library system.

Bowker Book Analysis

The open stacks task force used Bowker Book Analysis to consider whether *Resources for College Libraries* (RCL) should make up the core of this open stacks collection. Bowker Book Analysis is a tool that allows libraries to compare their holdings to RCL, a standard bibliography of approximately 60,000 standard works that intend to serve as the core liberal arts college library collection. At GVSU, Bowker Book Analysis has been used extensively in program reviews and for examining the needs of new programs.

As with any tool, there are advantages and disadvantages, and Bowker Book Analysis was no exception. On the one hand, RCL is a standard tool and the library had been using it extensively with a great deal of success and credibility. Moreover, Bowker Book Analysis provides a wide variety of options for analyzing and identifying different aspects of the collection. At the same time, the task force was unsure whether titles for every subject should be treated equally. Working with the assumption that in certain subject areas, such as in the humanities, the monograph was more important than it was in others, and that in other fields, such as the sciences, the currency of information was of the utmost importance, the task force questioned whether the use a core list such as RCL was the correct determinant for developing a browsing collection. In addition, the initial analyses using this tool showed that there were large gaps in the library's holdings of these standard works. Not only were sizeable numbers of core titles not held by the library, the holdings of core titles were not consistent across all subjects. In some subject areas the library had a high percentage of the core titles, while in other areas the library had few, if any titles. As a result, the task force decided against the use of RCL or any other standard lists for use in developing the library's core browsing collection.

WorldCat Collection Analysis (WCA)

Another tool used by the task force on this project was WorldCat Collection Analysis (WCA), and in particular, WCA's Circulation Analysis functionality. This feature allowed the task force to examine the last five years worth of circulation data, which was uploaded to WCA. The use of circulation data was considered very important. The task force had preconceived notions and beliefs, as well as feedback from faculty, on how the library's collections were used and how this use varied by discipline. Circulation data allowed the task force to determine if these ideas matched the reality of what the library's users were actually doing, while also examining what should happen with different parts of the library's collections. Ideally there would have been other resources available, such as browsing or shelving statistics, however the library had not collected those consistently in the past and the task force was limited to relying on those statistics that were available.

One of the areas the task force wanted to examine was the circulation data for the materials in the library's remote storage facility. These materials would be moved into the new library facility and the task force needed to determine whether those materials should be considered for inclusion on open shelving. Using the WCA Circulation Analysis, the task force was able to determine that circulation was highest in the History and Language, Linguistics & Literature categories, which had three times the number of checkouts of any other subject area (See Figure 1). Still, in these areas and all of the other subject areas, the task force determined that the total number of checkouts, and the percentage of the total checkouts they accounted for, was too low to be considered for open shelving.

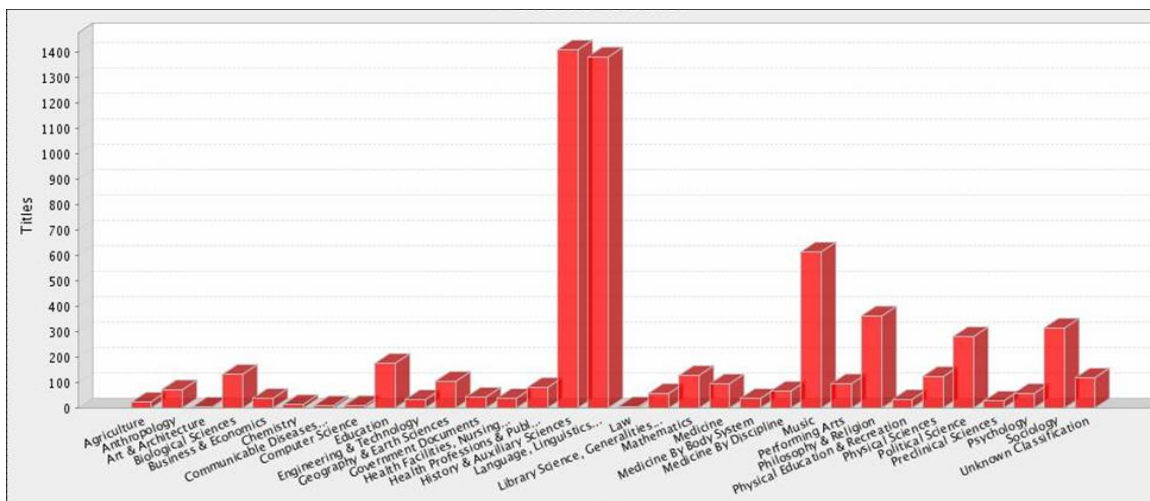


Figure 1. Remote storage circulation across all divisions.

Another question considered by the task force was what percentage of the collection circulated and perhaps more importantly, what percentage of each subject area circulated. The WCA's Circulation Analysis allowed the task force to not only see what percent of the collection and each subject area circulated, but also to easily see whether there were any portions of the collection that circulated at a low rate. It was hoped that it would be possible to identify larger areas of collections, in particular in the humanities, which

circulated at a low rate and may be able to be moved into the ASRS. Unfortunately, the task force was not able to identify any significantly large subsets that circulated at a low rate. Instead it found that often when an area with a lower circulation rate was identified, the total number of volumes was also low. The task force felt it was not worth targeting these areas since putting them into the ASRS could recapture only a small amount of shelf space.

One final example of a question examined by the task force using WCA’s Circulation Analysis considered the impact of a book’s age on its circulation. The task force had a preconception that in the humanities the age of a book was much less important than it was in the sciences or social sciences, and when it examined the data this was exactly what it found. In the humanities, circulation was slightly higher in the most recent 20 years, but over longer periods of time, it was fairly even. At the same time, newer titles in the sciences generally circulated at a much higher rate than older titles. The same was true in the social sciences, although, not as pronounced as in the sciences. Figure 2 illustrates this by showing the circulation by publication date in three fields: Philosophy and Religion, Sociology, and Medicine. However, there were exceptions. The task force found that in Chemistry more titles published in the 1960s circulated than titles that were published since 2000. Despite this exception, the task force was able to confirm its general assumptions about the differences in the circulation patterns of books in the humanities, sciences and social sciences.

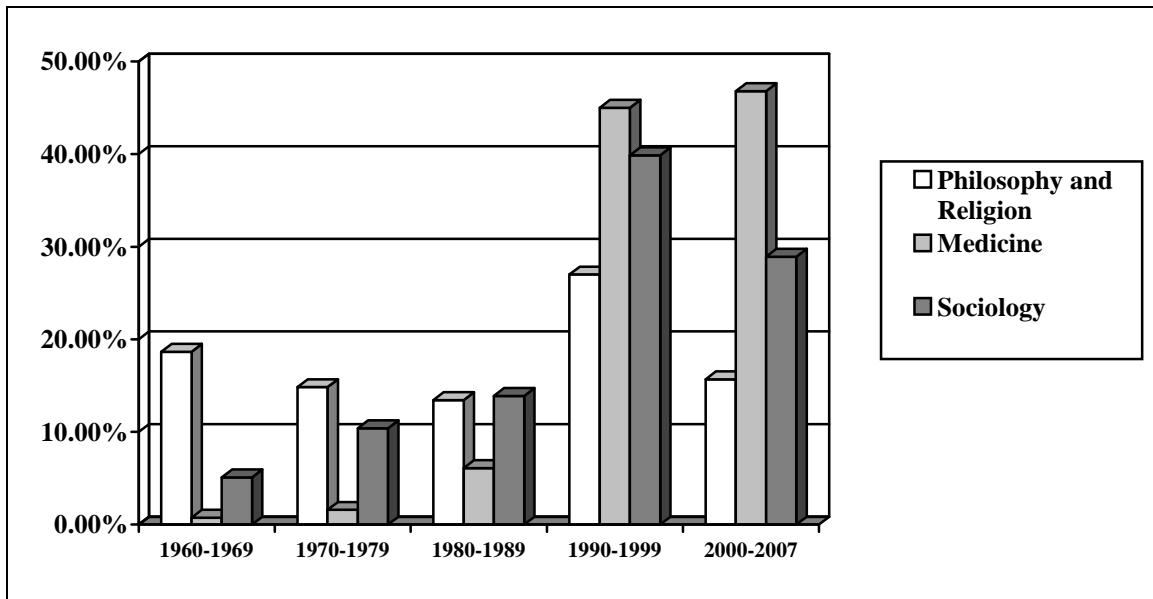


Figure 2. Circulation by publication date.

While the task force extensively used WCA’s Circulation Analysis, it did acknowledge that the tool and circulation analyses have their limitations. The analyses do not take into consideration browsing and in-house use of materials, nor do they account for the use of e-books. At GVSU there are now more e-books in the library’s collection than print books and in some subject areas, such as Computer Science, almost all titles currently acquired are e-books. Yet the impact of the increasing acquisition of e-books was not

taken into account in this analysis, nor was the impact of the increasing use of e-books on the circulation of print titles.

Internal Data

The final source of information the task force used in its work was internal data from the library's integrated library system. This included data on the collections, such as the library's holdings by publication date, as well as holdings by Library of Congress (LC) Classification. It also included acquisitions data. The task force used the holdings by LC classification to compare the information obtained from WCA. Because WCA used a conspectus that was not a clean match to all the subject areas in the LC system, the task force wanted to confirm that the numbers were comparable so that decisions could be based on the WCA data. After examining the fields of interest the committee decided that these numbers could be relied upon for analysis. Acquisitions data were used to examine trends in the library's collection growth, which showed that in spite of receiving only inflationary increases over the past five years, the library has been increasing the number of titles acquired every year. Holdings by publication date and acquisition data were also used to determine how many books in the sciences and social sciences could fit on open shelves. The task force eventually decided to keep the last five years' acquisitions on open shelves.

Discovery Tools

Like so many other libraries, as the task force considered how to support the students of the future, considering how new discovery tools will impact their interaction with library materials was a factor. Systems such as Endeca, Encore, Evergreen, and others are offering simpler, more user friendly interfaces for discovering library materials without the need for shelf browsing. The task force recognized that many faculty continue to place great importance on browsing the shelf for discovery in the humanities fields. Balancing this stated faculty desire with the knowledge that GVSU libraries are investing significant funds in electronic resources, especially electronic journals and increasingly electronic books and media, that will never be discovered by walking through library stacks, the task force had the difficult job of weighing traditional sentiment against the complex realities of the current and future library collections. In addition, significant staff and budget resources are spent in acquiring and improving the customer interaction with these online resources. This shift in collections strategy and new innovations in discovery tools will impact browsing and, the task force assumed, will minimize this attachment to physically scan shelves to find the range of needed materials.

These new tools, currently being coined "next generation discovery tools", come in both proprietary and open source packages. They tend to be striving toward simpler interfaces and a better online user experience. They look more familiar, with more similarities to Internet search engine interfaces than traditional catalog interfaces. They accept keywords and natural language queries that are able to achieve better results than traditional catalogs. A "did you mean" feature generally leads the user to the appropriate result if a word is mistyped or is out of order. As a result, the user has a greater

opportunity of success in finding what is needed from the outset, interacting with the online catalog, before ever making it to the library's book stacks.

Features, such as faceted searching and tag clouds, offer users new ways of taking very broad searches and refining them to get to a more specific result. Users can quickly see the options for drilling down on the same page as the search results, again hopefully making the potential for successfully finding a range of needed information more likely. Facets may include browsing a call number range, or as in the case of Evergreen, clicking on the shelf browser from within an individual record to see what else is available "near" the selected content. So, when a user finds one book of interest, he or she is introduced to the shelf around that book through the online environment.

Other features such as the ability to set up RSS feeds to keep current on new acquisitions and to retrieve search results based on enriched content such as book jackets, tables of contents, reviews, and summaries are also being integrated into many of these new library catalogs. Interaction and participation with the catalog through user recommendations tagging, and opinions are also functions being tried in next-generation catalogs.

These catalogs are going beyond book content, and beginning to explore intuitive ways of offering a great expansion of content to the user. For instance, Worldcat Local incorporates federated searching to include articles in search results, searches for resources beyond the local university into Ohiolink, and retrieves holdings from the entire Worldcat database to help users identify the material they need, no matter where it is located.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the taskforce recommended housing 150,000 to 175,000 titles in an open, core browsing collection. This number includes all currently held humanities titles, titles acquired in the retrospective humanities project, juvenile literature, and materials for all liberal arts disciplines acquired in the most recent five years. Also included in open shelving, but not accounted for in the numbers, are small specialized collections such as popular reading, reference, new books, etc. This plan assumes that all titles currently held in the offsite storage facility will be placed in the automated retrieval system, along with most Government Documents, and bound periodicals. Current periodicals will be placed in open shelving.

There is a growing realization that catalogs will continue to remain relevant and central to the library's future. None of the next-generation catalog options create a whole package at this point in time, but that is likely to change. They are in various stages of development, but all are getting better with each new version or iteration. Functionality will continue to remain key. The catalogs that are easy for users to manipulate and offer libraries flexibility are mostly likely to thrive. Those that continue to be too closed and proprietary are unlikely to gain market share. Users will continue to change the way they

interact with libraries and experience “browsing” in new ways that have yet to be imagined. These will be driving forces as libraries move forward.

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