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Methods and Strategies for Creating a Culture of Collections Assessment at Comprehensive Universities

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by

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Abstract

Differing from those of their Liberal Arts and ARL counterparts, today's Comprehensive Universities face a variety of unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to assessing their collections. This paper looks at the different needs and interests of comprehensive universities and will focus on the challenges faced in evaluating collections in three distinct university library settings. Case studies from individual universities will be used to examine issues regarding different means of assessing electronic book collections, collection development policies, and library databases.

Introduction

Comprehensive universities are committed to educating students at the baccalaureate and master's degree levels, often with a focus on undergraduate research and community outreach. Despite the more focused curriculum concerns of their past incarnations as teacher training or agricultural schools, comprehensive universities today have evolved into institutions offering a full range of academic programs. Enrolling anywhere from 4,000 to more than 30,000 students, faculty members at these institutions generally face heavy teaching loads. A focus on applied research often accompanies this emphasis on classroom instruction. As a result, the central importance of the curriculum is especially pronounced at a comprehensive university. Faculty research and service, in addition to teaching, frequently has close ties to the classes and programs being taught. (Henderson, 2007)

In response to this focus, collection development in libraries serving comprehensive universities tends to emphasize policies and resources especially tailored to the academic curriculum of the institution. In the area of policy, this emphasis generally manifests itself as an acute preoccupation with prioritizing above all else direct support of discrete curricular units. This is not to say that libraries at comprehensive universities are not concerned with establishing core collections in traditional disciplines or that they fail to consider the value of indirectly related resources amid an increasingly interdisciplinary bent in both student and faculty research. Rather, this emphasis reflects the values and priorities that guide collection development decisions in the face of scarce resources, perhaps at the expense of striving for comprehensive coverage in a discipline or devoting a large proportion of resources to support faculty research not connected to the curriculum. Because of this close alignment with direct support of the immediate curriculum, these values and priorities also require an approach to collection management that is highly elastic and sensitive even to minor changes in course offerings and program structure.

This paper looks at the different needs and interests of comprehensive universities and will focus on the challenges faced in evaluating collections in three distinct university library settings. Case studies from individual universities will be used to examine issues regarding different means of assessing electronic book collections, collection development policies, and library databases. While each of these cases addresses different challenges and different methods for confronting them, common solutions emerge that highlight some fundamental approaches to addressing diverse assessment needs.

Literature Review

A selective survey of recent literature in the area of collections assessment describes some recent research and case studies that focus on approaches similar to our own: highlighting specific tools and methods and responsiveness to external factors. The sources included here also frequently demonstrate a concern with the integration of electronic resources into existing patterns of assessment. (While this section is meant to be prefatory and common to the themes running throughout this article, additional sources may be referenced in the case studies themselves.)

Not surprisingly, and like the case studies presented here, a great many collections assessment articles published in recent years have focused on specific tools and methods employed to achieve desired assessment goals. In 2003, Oberlander described LibStatCAT, a tool designed at Portland State University Library to address collections and other assessment needs, as well as other tools used by the library to address emerging issues in both local and cooperative collection development. Blake and Schleper (2004) argued for strategic combinations of survey data and statistics to provide targeted collections assessment. In 2005, Mortimore advocated "a model of access-informed collection development that brings subject analysis and just-in-time acquisitions together into a single, unified method," making a strong case for considering assessment output from a variety of library units when making collection management decisions. Later, Beals (2006) described a collaborative effort among consortium partners, using Howard White's brief test methodology, to assess subject collections at multiple institutions to determine institutional strengths and establish collection development priorities in the discipline. Hirose and Nakazawa reported in 2007 on the growing use and importance of citation statistics in the assessment of libraries' journal holdings. Also in 2007, Beals and Gilmour once again examined the brief test methodology, this time when used in conjunction with the OCLC WorldCat Collection Analysis tool, finding the coupling valuable in the assessment of collections.

Most recently, Crosetto, Kinner, and Duhon (2008) looked at ways libraries could use readily available data in assessment activities, in this case to accommodate the time constraints associated with a physical move of substantial portions of the collections. Mentch, Strauss, and Zsulya (2008) examined efforts at Cleveland State University to combine input gathered from user focus groups with more traditional statistical data to make informed decisions about the library collections. At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Libraries, Tucker (2009) described efforts to incorporate benchmarking of usage statistics into the collection development policy there, with an eye toward more effective collections assessment. In the same year, McClure (2009) studied the effectiveness of the WorldCat database as a collections assessment tool and identified unique capabilities of that tool. Bhatt and Denick (2009) evaluated the Academic Database Assessment Tool (ADAT) from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), finding both limitations and features relevant to assessment of libraries' electronic resources. Stowers and Tucker (2009) examined the use of link resolver reports to discern trends in journal usage within the disciplines and influence decisions about the collections accordingly.

Several articles have been published in recent years emphasizing the importance of responsiveness to aspects of the curriculum and other external factors. Smith (2003) employed citation analysis to identify works used by graduate students and then assessed library holdings to determine how well the collections were serving the needs of those students. In 2005, Stoller performed a broad study to assess the then-current library landscape and its impact on user behavior and attitudes, finding implications for collections assessment not always in line with emerging trends. Sinha and Tucker (2005) studied the impact of new academic program growth on collections assessment at the UNLV Libraries, focusing specifically on the importance of the libraries' role in the curriculum approval process and subject liaisons' interactions with faculty in other departments. Later, Bobal, Mellinger, and Avery (2008) examined the curriculum-approval role of the library at Oregon State University, the rigor of assessment accompanying the approval process, and the disconnect between identified collection needs and available funding. Also in 2008, Sanville investigated assessments of economic efficiency in the collection development decisions made within library consortia. In a similar spirit to the present article, Austenfeld looked at the nature of collections assessment at a smaller academic library in Georgia, emphasizing the need for sensitivity to the requirements and curriculum of the institution as a whole. Finally, Culbertson and Wilde (2009), in an effort to respond to the needs of doctoral programs at Colorado State University, employed the OCLC WorldCat Collection Analysis tool and other means to assess the strengths of that collection.

Other than Austenfeld, who discusses the collection needs of a small academic library, the literature does not specifically address specific needs of academic libraries at comprehensive universities. The focus of this article is to highlight unique challenges faced by three distinct libraries at comprehensive universities in developing performing collections assessment.

Collection Development Policy as Assessment Tool: California State University, Fresno

Background

As much as we would like to think our primary concerns about collecting are based on content not format, e-resources have certainly challenged many long established notions of how we buy, collect, preserve and provide access to information. Workflow, staff qualifications, and turf (i.e. who is responsible for what) are all being redefined as we try to integrate e-resources into our libraries. While we make progress, new standards and norms have not quite solidified. New tools emerge, such as electronic resource management systems, but they are still in need of polishing before they work as intended. As we find answers, the landscape continues to change. “Under an access (rather than ownership) model, the key question becomes ‘how likely and at what cost can I access this again?’ rather than ‘Is it in my library’s collection?’” (Lugg & Fischer, 2009, p. 75)

Questions at comprehensive universities are sometimes more difficult because our goals can be somewhat ambiguous. For example, it is tricky to pinpoint the exact preservation responsibilities of a comprehensive university library. They are somewhere in between the community college library, with its emphasis on breadth (rather than depth) of current information, and a research library’s extensive and deep collections. Incorporating e-resources into this scenario add yet another level of complication. Considerations of lost back issues after canceling an e-journal and ongoing fees to access essentially what has already been paid for are among the concerns we face as we make collections decisions.

In addition to changes in resources and workflow, in California State, Fresno’s library, we are experiencing a rapid matriculation of faculty resulting in shifts in areas of research and at the same time a decline in funding. While solutions to these problems can differ from library to library or even by subject area/discipline, the one certainty is the desire to keep the collection user-centered. With this in mind, we decided the logical place to start would be in collection development. Our policies needed to be revised, or in some cases completely overhauled in light of all these changes.

Process

The library's liaisons would be the ideal group to take on this project as they have interactions and communication with both the students and faculty-- in general as well as in their specific areas of subject expertise. However, their numbers are dwindling just as fast as their responsibilities are multiplying. In many comprehensive university libraries, all librarians, even department heads are liaisons so their responsibilities are often vast. Ideally, the faculty should also be involved in the discussion of collection polices, yet they too have little, if any, free time, as criteria for tenure and promotion have been raised over the past few years in comprehensive universities making research expectations equal to teaching responsibilities. In most comprehensive universities, both faculty and librarians are expected to participate in faculty governance, scholarly activities, and community service.

Again as our work continues to evolve in order to meet the expectations of library users, something has to give. We may have to let go of some practices to allow us to embrace new activities that enable us to better achieve the goal of meeting the information needs of both our students and faculty.

> Subject specialists should become less attached to the producers of content and more attuned to the needs of those who consume it. Rather than knowing everything there is to know about specific publishers, distributors, or national bibliographies, our specialists need to learn all they can about our users. This would include a deep knowledge of their content needs and how this content is being used. (Sandler, 2006, p. 242)

Although tough to do, taking the time and effort to involve the faculty in updating or revising the collection development policy can reap many benefits for both groups. Librarians can educate the faculty about the state of their disciplinary collections by simply setting up a meeting to inquire about current areas of research. This would also be an easy way to meet new faculty. Once a relationship is established, there is potential for acquiring additional information such as upcoming accreditations, grants awarded that allow resource purchases, and other relevant issues in the department.

Given everyone's time limitations, we look to make the most of any meeting, working to make the policy easier to update as well as have the end product well worth the effort. Policies filed away seemed stagnant and out of date the minute they reached paper, so we made the decision to produce them electronically so they could be both easily accessible as well as easily updated. The hope is that eventually, they can even be changed in "real time" during a meeting between faculty and their library liaisons thereby saving the librarians the extra task of taking notes and at a later time having to rewrite them into the policy. And thinking ahead, the ease of continued revision and building in assessment criteria were also included.

Our campus Research Committee invited library faculty to attend a meeting "just to ask a couple of questions about library policies." It turned out, that they were very concerned about how the library weeded materials and each committee member wanted to discuss his or her discipline specifically. Based on feedback obtained from this meeting it seemed logical that weeding plans should also be included in each subject policy so that it too could be discussed and customized. This would go a long way with faculty in establishing a sense of control over their resources and providing complete transparency.

Product

So the desired outcome is a collection development policy for each department that allows for the opportunity to review any given collection as a whole. Every time it is viewed, it is a reminder of all resources in whatever format and provides constant assessment data. Librarians can provide a current snapshot of the collection during any meeting—large or small without having to gather all of the information themselves.

On the surface the look of the policy is very simple. (See Appendix A) On one page there is a short description of the subject area, details on who uses these materials (graduate students, undergraduates, or both,) any collection guidelines, a short description of the current collection including collecting level, and a portion called "other" to list major databases and/or subject specific journal packages, notes or concerns, cooperative agreements and any additional information. The weeding plan is the last section.

In order to provide more information, links will be developed from the initial screen to LC grids defining call number spans along with hotlinks to current circulation reports and collection statistics from the library's ILS. (See Appendix A) A link to the chart providing collection levels and descriptions would be helpful as well as any outside evaluations/reports purchased from vendors (OCLC, Serials Solutions, Bowker, etc.).

Beyond these components, we are also exploring automating the policies into some kind of database so liaisons can update them "live" with faculty, and also produce quick data comparisons by searching on collection levels, languages, or other criteria.

Discussion

Besides the work of librarians and faculty, we are exploring a number of options for further developing the technical portion: the idea of a class project with our computer science department; grant opportunities that would enable the hiring of computer science students; using existing software (LibGuides or other such tools). In the meantime, we continue to move forward on creating the individual collection development policies and determining how the assessment data will be gathered and updated. Even though this project is still in the making, using the collection development policy as an assessment tool facilitates communication with faculty, provides transparency, saves time, allows for easily updated, dynamic policies, and provides an easy place to "hang" complicated information.

Developing an E-Book Assessment Strategy: Western Carolina University

Background

Emerging formats can be especially challenging when it comes to maintaining the responsiveness necessary to successful collection management at a comprehensive university library. E-books are proving to be no exception. In her introduction to a special 2006 issue of *The Acquisitions Librarian* devoted to topics on integrating print and digital resources in library collections, Fenner (2006) noted the "difficulties in achieving a truly integrated collection." (p. 1) While some progress has been made over the last few years toward the integration of resources in different formats, particularly when it comes to providing access, it remains true that without continued efforts to integrate library collections, there will be "duplication of access, duplication of effort, and duplication of expense." (p. 1)

While the 2006 special issue Fenner introduced included some discussion of e-book integration involving provision of access, the question of e-book assessment was not addressed. In fact, even at this later date the literature contains very little discussion of efforts to integrate e-book collections into libraries' established assessment activities. This late arrival of the topic of e-book assessment to the ongoing conversation about integrating digital resources may seem natural in the sense that assessment traditionally is conceived as an activity applied to established collections for which questions of acquisition, access, and classification already have been addressed. However, as has been the case with electronic journals and electronic journal packages, distinct and sometimes unique qualities of the e-book supply chain and various e-book ownership and access models recommend a less compartmentalized approach to e-book assessment and efforts to integrate it with existing assessment activities.

The fact that e-books exist currently in a developmental state of flux—yielding no consensus standard for publication, sales, access, or classification—offers librarians an opportunity to identify and establish methods of assessment able to contribute to the development of e-book models. Another way of looking at the current developmental state of e-books is to observe, as Horava (2007) has, that "eBooks are in catchup mode":

> The fact that business approaches and access methods have not evolved towards a standard model, in contrast to ejournals, reflects the problematic state of the eBook industry for academia. . . . We are in a period of rapid transformation that is rife with opportunities and bewildering with complications." (p. 16)

In creating methods and strategies for assessment of e-book collections in academic libraries amid the maelstrom of rapid transformation, librarians have an opportunity to identify and contribute an assessment perspective to the development of industry's e-book business models and libraries' best practices. More immediately, though, they must grapple with the complications that go along with that opportunity.

Western Carolina University's Hunter Library recently has been confronting many of those complications as a result of its more aggressive adoption of the e-book format. In 2006, we greatly increased the number of e-books in our collections by subscribing to the e-book aggregator ebrary's Academic Complete subscription package. During that year and the next, we continued building our collection of e-books by purchasing several hundred perpetual-access titles through ebrary and also acquiring all back- and front-list titles available through Oxford Scholarship Online, a collection of monographs published electronically (as well as in print) by Oxford University Press. At the time of our initial investment in Oxford Scholarship Online, only four subject modules were available. Eventually, Oxford expanded its e-book offerings considerably to include a total of 16 subject modules for which update packages could be purchased three times a year. By adding all but two of those additional modules, Hunter Library increased its investment in Oxford Scholarship Online, which had produced encouraging usage numbers during the first year it was offered. In addition to this recently added content, we expect to make further investments in our e-book collections in the future.

Acquisition

An initial challenge has been to work with librarians and faculty to build awareness about e-book vendor business models, the channels through which they may be identified and obtained, and questions to address in terms of format selection and duplication. Since the expansion of our e-book holdings and access, other librarians and I have had several discussions with faculty members about the increasing opportunities to consider e-books when selecting titles for the collection. In some cases, these discussions have revealed anxiety among faculty members about increasing resources being devoted to purchasing e-books as part of a general paradigm shift away from the print format. However, this concern generally diminishes once we explain the ability to select e-books on a title-by-title basis and allow duplication of format when circumstances require it. Building awareness among liaison librarians about e-book acquisition options and policy concerning appropriate duplication has allowed us to communicate these options to faculty who otherwise might have been resistant to considering the newer format. As a result, we have experienced a general increase in requests for specific e-book titles, as well as questions about the possibility of adding electronic versions to complement or replace titles we currently have in print. Conversely, we also have received requests for print copies of titles for which we hold the electronic version, suggesting that faculty are becoming more aware of our existing e-book holdings and considering them in their informal assessment of the collections.

Unfortunately, even as obstacles to e-book demand are removed, identifying and acquiring a particular title in electronic format can be a daunting challenge. In his examination of challenges associated with e-book approval plans, Levine-Clark (2007) profiles issues that also have implications for assessment. He discusses several barriers to effective integration of e-books into library approval plans. Two concerns, however, are of particular relevance to e-book assessment activities. First, a lack of consistency among publishers as to which frontlist titles will be made available in electronic format can cause difficulties for those involved in assessment just as it can for those creating approval plan profiles. If e-book assessment practices are to consider the needs of a collection against the formats available, there must be a clear and reasonably efficient mechanism for determining what titles are published as e-books. Second, even if it becomes clear what titles a particular publisher offers in electronic format, the question of how those titles will be made available to libraries and which vendors might be involved remains.

In order to address these impediments to integrated e-book assessment, we began to recognize that Hunter Library needed to move toward consolidating the majority of its e-book acquisitions with large-scale vendors already oriented towards the library market. Recent partnerships established between e-book aggregators like ebrary, EBL, and NetLibrary and familiar large-scale vendors like YBP Library Services (YBP), Coutts, and Blackwell Book Services offer an opportunity for libraries to accomplish such consolidation. On the heels of these recent partnerships, we have begun working with YBP to integrate our e-book purchasing with workflows already in place to handle acquisitions across publishers.

Assessment

With plans in place for greater awareness and increased organization of our e-book collection development and acquisitions operations, we needed to turn our attention to methods and a deliberate strategy directly related to the application of assessment activities. We developed a three-pronged approach to this goal, once again focusing on integration with existing practices and fidelity to the collection needs of a comprehensive university.

The first task was to identify and document variables integral to the assessment of e-book collections. As expected, these variables included more traditional qualities generally associated with print collections as well as concerns unique to or adjusted for the electronic format. Unique considerations included access terms, access model, and appropriateness of delivery method. Variables common to both print and electronic formats included currency, usage, and curricular relevance. The question of lifespan needs for a particular title—how long the book is expected to provide value to the collection—is an example of a variable taking on added significance in the presence of e-book assessment, since the options of rental, ephemeral access, and perpetual ownership often are present in relation to electronic resources.

Next, we needed to determine what recommendations potentially could result from the e-book assessment process. Mindful of the interdependence of assessment and acquisitions described above, it was important for us to consider possible adjustments at the point of acquisition in addition to those made at the point of assessment. We identified patron-driven acquisition parameters, rental plan profiles, and approval plan profiles as potential adjustments to be made at the point of acquisition. Adjustments identified at the point of assessment included withdrawal or cancellation, replacement or update, format change, and mode of access or ownership change. This list of potential adjustments can guide those recommending actions in response to assessment outcomes. The list of adjustments also includes possibilities, such as use or adjustment of patron-driven parameters, not yet in use at Hunter Library, since recommendations to this end might lead us to consider contracting with an appropriate vendor to adopt that access model where a need exists.

Finally, we developed a process-oriented flowchart applicable to assessment of the monograph collection in general but updated to include criteria inclusive of our expanded e-book access and holdings. This integrative assessment flowchart (See Figure 1) incorporates format and access in such a way that makes deliberate decisions about those variables unavoidable. The resulting process retains the evaluative rigor and selective attention of title-level assessment necessary for the tailored collection of a comprehensive university, while also accommodating the need for e-book assessment and its evaluative criteria and variables, both those common to print monographs and those unique to the electronic format. As with traditional print collection assessment, the criteria and variables to be considered will need to be internalized to a significant degree by the subject specialists involved in order for assessment activities to proceed efficiently. This fact, however, only underscores the need to contextualize these less familiar criteria and variables within the existing and more familiar assessment process.

Discussion

As the methods described above to address the challenges of e-book assessment continue to be implemented, Hunter Library increasingly will benefit from a coherent and integrative strategy for engaging the assessment needs of its growing electronic collections. Adjustments to this strategy and its associated methods are expected as librarians and faculty engage them in the context of specific collection assessment projects. However, we have laid the groundwork for practical and consistent engagement with e-book assessment and the challenges it presents.

The foundational challenge lies in educating librarians and faculty about the role and intentions of e-book collections in the academic library of a comprehensive university, as well as the nature of e-book access and ownership models and publishing trends. Another important step is identifying evaluative criteria and variables associated with the e-book format and helping subject specialists involved in assessment come to understand them in the context of their broader assessment activities. Finally, collection managers must articulate and formalize the integration of e-book evaluative criteria and variables, as well as possible recommendations resulting from assessment, in the form of documented methodology made available to promote e-book assessment and guide those involved through the task of its application. Through these methods and strategies, we are able to engage fully with the e-book format while remaining true to the mission and priorities of collection development supporting the curriculum of a comprehensive university.

Assessment through the Database Renewal Process: Grand Valley State University

Background

An important component in developing a culture of assessment is identifying areas where a demonstrated need is present, and where librarians are not only able to assist in this assessment, but where their skills and expertise are needed. At Grand Valley State University (GVSU), this need presented itself in the area of the database renewal process.

Over the last ten years the University Libraries at GVSU has seen a dramatic increase in the number of online databases available to its users. This growth from a handful of databases to hundreds of resources in need of renewal on an annual basis created a need to develop a more sophisticated method for assessing these resources. This was discussed in the literature by Audrey Powers who recommends developing an assessment process that includes evaluating databases based upon objective criteria and gathered data to assist in continual decision making. (2006) Over the last three years the Libraries have been developing and refining this kind of process, creating one that engages liaison librarians in the assessment of these resources, placing them at the center of the process ensuring that the use and need for databases are examined on an annual basis.

Prior to the development of the library's new process for assessing electronic resources, a small group of librarians and library staff managed the library's database subscriptions. They prioritized databases for trial and acquisition and made decisions on what databases should be renewed or canceled. While the meetings of this group were open for all to attend, librarians outside the group did not attend as meetings were not announced to wider audiences, agendas were not provided to those outside the group and there was no incentive or demand that liaisons be involved in the process. Liaison librarians were not asked to assist with the review of databases in their subject areas, nor did they receive any usage data for databases in their areas. While usage data was available to liaisons upon request, there was little need or incentive to access this information since liaisons were not involved in the assessment of these databases. Since there was little liaison involvement outside of the committee, faculty involvement as a whole was minimal.

In 2005 a new Dean of Libraries was hired and within a few months began a reorganization of the library's structure. At the same time the need to improve the library's assessment practices became apparent. There was a belief that the database collection could be scrutinized more thoroughly. As mentioned above, liaisons were not engaged in assessment and management of these resources so there was at times a disconnect between the database collection and other parts of the library's collections. In addition, there was an impression that once the library acquired a database, it rarely canceled the subscription. The Dean led the process to create a new system and included all library staff involved or interested in examining the issues. In the end, they developed a new process that is transparent and engages liaison librarians in the assessment of resources within their subject areas, leading to a regular and more thorough analysis of the library's database subscriptions.

Process

Every database that GVSU subscribes to is reviewed on an annual basis. At a minimum each database receives a short examination, referred to as an expedited renewal, and then every third year databases go through a more thorough review, called a full renewal. The Electronic Resource Management Team uses the library's electronic resource management system to create prompts that notify them three months before a database is up for renewal and whether a full or expedited renewal needs to be completed. The team then gathers pricing information, ensures usage statistics are available and posted on a shared network drive and then sends that information to the appropriate liaison librarian, notifying them that a renewal is due to the Head of Collections in six weeks.

For both renewals, the liaison is given a form in electronic format that is to be completed (Appendix B). For an expedited renewal the liaison is asked to provide information on the cost of the database, to examine the usage of the resource, note any technical issues during the previous year such as down-time, briefly discuss its relevance to the library's collection and the University's curriculum and to then make a recommendation as to whether the resource should be renewed or canceled. In their discussion of usage statistics, liaisons are asked to provide some analysis, while also calculating cost per session, search and full text access when available. This data provides a measure by which liaisons can examine usage and make comparisons to other similar resources.

For full renewals, liaisons are asked to provide all of the data included in the expedited renewal, along with an overlap analysis of the full text in a database compared to the rest of the library's holdings, a review of any competing products in the marketplace and an analysis of the use of the database over the previous three years. For the overlap analysis the liaisons are asked to list any major journals with unique full text in a given resource and provide the previous year's usage statistics for all unique full text titles within that resource. If there are more than 250 unique titles within a resource then this requirement is waived. This information allows the liaison to determine not only how much unique full text is provided by a resource, but whether that unique content is being accessed by the library's users. Liaisons will often solicit faculty input as part of this process, especially if usage appears lighter than expected or other strong resources covering the subject area have entered the marketplace.

Once the liaison has completed the form, he or she makes a recommendation to renew or cancel a subscription. On occasion a liaison will also ask to have a subscription modified. A modification generally takes the form of adding additional seats to a resource that has a high number of turnaways. Once completed, the form is then sent to the Head of Collections who reviews the renewal. If there are no concerns and a database is going to be renewed, then the form is sent on to the Electronic Resources Manager who handles the actual renewal, on occasion noting in the library's electronic resource management system any issues or concerns that should be monitored in the coming year. If the Head of Collections has any concerns regarding a database or the liaison's recommendation or if a database is recommended for cancellation the renewal is brought to the leadership of the Research and Instruction team for discussion. Out of that conversation, the recommendation of the liaison may stand or the liaison may be asked to consider other factors or issues not addressed in the renewal. If a database is recommended for cancellation and the leadership team concurs with that recommendation, it is passed along to all liaison librarians so they have an opportunity to provide feedback and to raise any concerns. After a set comment period, if no strong concerns are raised, the renewal is passed on to the Electronic Resources Manager who begins the process of canceling the subscription. This feedback process for canceled databases is a primary reason why the renewal process begins three months prior to the renewal date. It allows all relevant parties to be engaged in the process and allows for feedback from all sides.

Evaluating the Process

This process has been in place at the GVSU Libraries for three years and has seen a number of benefits. From a collection management standpoint the regular assessment of resources has led to the cancellation of a number of resources that the process identified. In once instance the library was paying $30,000 per year for an aggregated full-text database. The review of the resource showed that there were only approximately 70 unique titles; none of these titles were essential or seeing any use. By canceling the database the library was then able to put that money toward a subscription for a much more expensive computer science database that the faculty had been requesting and had been previously considered out of reach because of its cost. In another instance, the review of two databases by different liaisons showed that they each felt that their particular resource was important because it contained an online copy of *DSM-IV*. Neither realized that the other database had a copy of the book in it. Once this was realized, the library was able to cancel the subscription to one of the databases.

Of course, it is not always cancellations that arise out of the process. In another instance the review of a resource showed not that it should be canceled, but that additional seats were needed to meet user demand. The issue came to light the first year this resource was assessed. In that instance, a note was made in the electronic resource management system to keep an eye on turnaways. When the problem persisted for a second year the number of seats was increased and the following year the subscription was changed to one with unlimited users.

While it might have been possible for one person or a small group of people to perform this assessment, the distribution of this work to the liaisons provides a number of benefits. First, it spreads the work out so that the bulk of the assessment is not falling on a small number of persons. This is especially important during the end of the fiscal year and calendar year when most renewals occur. To ask one person to carefully assess every resource in a short period of time is just not realistic. This distributed model also allows for a more careful review of each resource by the subject specialist in that field, assures that resource is viewed in context with the rest of that subject area's resources and leads to more ownership of those resources. At the same time, by having the completed renewals reviewed by the Head of Collection Development, there is one person keeping that resource, its usage and pricing in context with the whole of the library's collections.

A second advantage to this process is that it demystifies the assessment process. Instead of a group working behind imagined or real closed doors, the liaisons are actively involved in the process and it is their recommendations that are driving the ongoing development of the library's database collection. They are able to see the criteria being applied in the decision-making process and have an avenue to openly voice their concerns if they disagree with a cancellation decision.

Perhaps most importantly, though, this process engages the liaisons in the assessment of library resources. Instead of that being someone else's job, it is now a part of the regular work. It, in effect, forces them to closely review resources in the context of the entire subject collection and allows them to become more closely acquainted with the library's resources and often the teaching faculty as a result of the process. One of the most common comments from liaisons related to the process is that it helps remind them about a certain resource that may have slipped their mind. It allows them to see if a resource's use is going up or down and gives them an opportunity to adjust their instruction or library guides and communication with faculty and students to promote that resource that may be under-used.

All of this is not to say that the process is perfect and that there have not been bumps along the road. Over the years the forms have gone through numerous revisions. The forms have been simplified and clarified, fewer questions are now asked of the liaisons and those questions that are asked have been clarified. One example would be the section of the form where liaisons are asked to analyze statistics. Originally, the form simply asked liaisons to evaluate the usage statistics. The lack of specificity and parameters led to vague answers so a paragraph was added that asked them to evaluate usage and provided them with some examples of things to consider. In order to provide even more specificity to what liaisons should be considering in their analysis of usage the form was revised again and today has lines for listing cost per search, session and full text access, in addition to the paragraph asking them to perform the assessment and suggesting some criteria to consider. In this instance and in a number of other instances, as the liaison responses were reviewed by the Head of Collections, the form was modified to provide more direction in areas where questions were regularly misinterpreted or producing the desired level of detail needed.

Other issues surround the workload that the process creates for liaisons and their concern about the relevancy of the process. The workload, especially for liaisons with large numbers of databases that renew on with the fiscal or calendar years, is an ongoing issue. The expedited form has been reduced to the point where it generally takes under 30 minutes to complete and liaisons are given six weeks to complete the review. Moreover, the process is taken into consideration when liaisons annual workload documents are created with their supervisors. Still, the process undergoes continual review to keep it as simple as possible, while still providing the framework deemed necessary to thoroughly assess these resources.

A final area of concern that arises occasionally is from liaisons questioning the need for this process. In those instances, the reasons listed above are given to the liaison. Often the most compelling reason, though, is that when the university's administration asks how units are evaluating spending, the library has been able to point to this process as evidence that the library is annually reviewing this significant portion of the library's collections budget.

Discussion

In spite of these issues and concerns, the library has viewed this program a success. The work of assessing databases has been distributed among the library liaisons, the decision-making process has become transparent and inclusive and liaisons are engaged in the assessment of the library's collections. Looking toward the future, the library continues to refine the assessment process including implementing more assessments based on metrics. The library is also looking to continue to engage liaisons in the assessment of other areas of the library's collections. This has begun with the monograph collection, but the library is looking to expand this to the regular evaluation of standing orders and journal subscriptions. The ultimate goal, of course, being that the library is a better steward of university funds and that the library's collections better serve the library's users.

Conclusion

As these three specific examples describe, the best assessment solutions for library collections supporting comprehensive universities combine deliberate planning, an objective framework, and communication with librarians and faculty constituents so they may work together to make informed choices. Finding new ways to critically assess library collections on how well those collections relate to curricular needs is an ongoing process and an essential role for the academic library in a comprehensive university setting.

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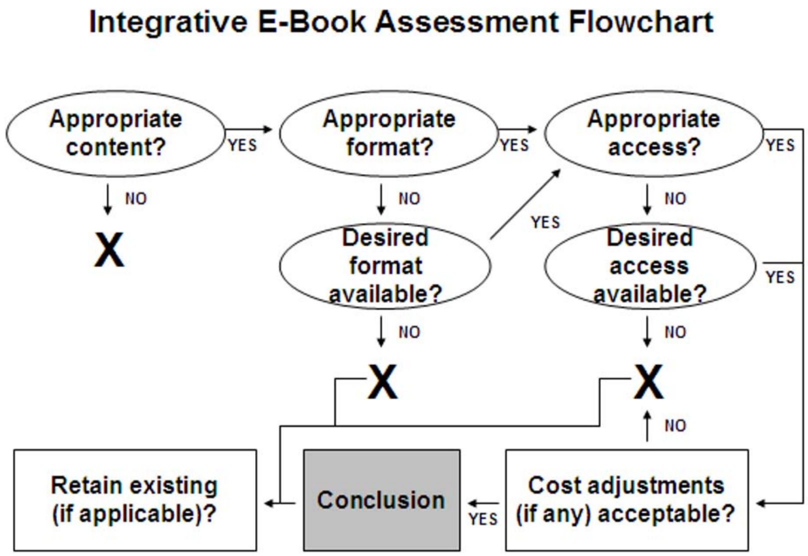
Figure 1



These integrative assessment criteria, while applicable to books in any format, ensure consideration of factors associated with e-books.

Appendix A
California State University, Fresno
Collection Development Policy Template

College Department Name & Name of Librarian Responsible, Contact Information (phone/e-mail) (date written, date revised)
Subject Area Description *Provide a description of the subject and clarify its scope and emphasis, include the degrees and programs offered. Information from department mission/vision statements, and emerging trends in the subject area might also be included here.*
Clientele: *Describe who utilizes the collection and what programs they are affiliated with, strengths of the programs, areas of faculty research, etc. The general size of department (i.e. more than xx number of students enrolled in program) majors and minors, etc…*
Collection Guidelines: *Describe the collecting guidelines in the subject area by addressing the following:* *Languages, Chronological Guidelines, Treatment of Subject, Formats, Geographical, Other General Considerations* – example: **Exclusions:** Dissertations, textbooks, most reprints
Assessment of Current collection: (example) *2 French* *4 Spanish* *4 Latin American Studies* *Link to report from xxxxx* *During the past two years, a core of contemporary critical journals has been added as listed by the accrediting agency xxxx.*
Other: •**Subject Area Concerns/Notes** (example) Serial subscriptions consume over 90% of the budget each year. •**Cooperative agreements** •**List major databases or periodical packages** •
Weeding/Deselection: Policy to be written with department specific to their discipline.

Subject	**LC Class**	**Collection Level**	**Bibliographer**
Spanish Literature: History and Criticism, Collections	PQ 6001-6168	C [4]	Link to latest circulation data
French Literature	PQ 1-3000	C [2]	Link to latest circulation data

Appendix B
Grand Valley State University

Expedited Electronic Resource Renewal for

Resource Costs

Current Cost: $ ______________ **Renewal Cost: $** ______________

Percent Change in cost: ______________

Evaluation of Statistics

Attach vendor-supplied statistics. Describe how current year's statistics for this resource compare with the previous year's statistics and how statistics for this resource compare to other similar resources (if applicable). Include whether usage has increased, dropped or remained consistent from the previous year, are there too many turnaways, and do the statistics warrant any actions such as close scrutiny of this resource in coming years or increased promotion of the resource.*

Cost per Search:* **$** ______________ **Cost per Full Text Access:*** **$** ______________

Cost per Session:* **$** ______________

* *If applicable or available*

Please list any incidents listed in the ERM related to this resource. *Work with the ERM Team if you need assistance.*

Do you recommend the subscription for this resource be renewed?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Discussion of Resource

A. Briefly discuss the importance of this database and the unique content it adds to the collection

AND

B. the rationale for why this resource should be renewed or cancelled.

Point Person: ______________ Date: ______________

Collection Development: ______________ Date: ______________

This resource should be: ☐ Renewed ☐ Canceled

Full Electronic Resource Renewal for

Resource Costs

Current Cost: $ ____________ **Renewal Cost: $** ____________

Percent Change in cost: ____________

Evaluation of Statistics

Attach vendor-supplied statistics for the current year. Discuss the use of the database over the past ***three*** years, considering topics such as whether usage has increased, dropped or remained consistent and how use has compared to similar resources.

Cost per Search:* **$** ____________ **Cost per Full Text Access:*** **$** ____________

Cost per Session:* **$** ____________

* *If applicable or available*

If usage is low, discuss how use for this resource may be increased and what steps will be taken to increase use.

Overlap Analysis

A. If this resource contains full text journals, conduct and **attach** overlap analysis using Serials Solutions. *See ERM team or collection development librarian for assistance if necessary.*

B. Analyze the results of the overlap analysis below, providing a summary of the results; include the number of unique titles and holdings and percentage of unique titles and holdings. **Also** list any significant unique titles or holdings in this database.

C. Evaluate usage of unique titles over the past 12 months, noting the percentage of unique titles with no or little (1-2) use.

D. If the database has significant unique titles listed above, please note their use. Resources with more than 250 unique titles are exempt. Reminder: Reference Triage students are available to assist with this analysis.

Resource Overview and Environmental Scan

A. Please list any incidents listed in the ERM related to this resource. Work with the ERM Team if you need assistance.

B. List any significant new features for this resource.

C. Are there any other comparable resources on the market that should be considered as a complement or replacement for this resource? If so, please list and describe those resources below.

Discussion of Resource

A. Briefly discuss the importance of this database and the unique content it adds to the collection

AND

B. the rationale for why this resource should be renewed or cancelled.

Renewal Recommendation

Do you recommend the subscription for this resource be renewed?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Point Person: ______________________ Date: ____________

Collection Development: ______________________ Date: ____________

This resource should be: ☐ Renewed ☐ Canceled