

Patron-Driven Acquisitions and the Research Library

Thomas H. Teper¹ Lynne M. Rudasill² and Lynn N. Wiley³

¹University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

²University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

³University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract: The acquisition of materials for scholars in today's library is frequently a matter left primarily to the subject specialist in our large U.S. research institutions. The development of online tools to facilitate choices made by users, but still core to academic collections, has greatly expedited the job of selecting materials in relevant fields. This paper explores the results of a pilot project involving a patron-driven acquisitions plan currently evolving at one major research institution. Analyzing those items purchased for the subject area of political science, both through the program and by the subject specialist, the authors present a comparison of statistics related to circulation, subject emphasis, and consortial holdings. The authors suggest that this collection model is one part of an ever growing suite of services designed to meet "just in time" user needs and is a tool in the development of policies for consortial purchases.

Keywords: Collection development, patron driven acquisitions, subject specialist, acquisitions, circulation statistics, subject comparison, consortial copies

1. Introduction

A common assumption about collection development activities in North American research libraries is that subject specialists or bibliographers make most of the collection development decisions. In fact, the role of library personnel in developing collections at many of our great research libraries is a relatively new phenomenon. As recently as 1930, the U.S. Office of Education reported that upwards of 80% of acquisitions at U.S. land grant colleges and universities were handled by faculty members. U.S. Office of Education (1930) The 1960s represented the period in which the trend began to shift, and the 1970s marked the point at which the ratio reversed, giving an increasingly professional class of librarians responsibility for developing collections that were less focused on the specialized needs of individual faculty members and more focused on the goal of building broad collections that would meet broader institutional needs. Johnson (2004)

Received: 10.5.2012 Accepted: 12.3.2016

© ISAST

ISSN 2241-1925



In recent years, the development of Patron, or Demand, Driven Acquisitions programs have challenged the relatively new role of librarians in developing broad-based, research collections. In some cases, these programs have virtually replaced subject specialists in their duties; in others, the programs have been more modest in scope – seeking largely to provide ready access to materials that could have gone unselected otherwise. The development of online tools to facilitate acquisitions has greatly expedited the job of selecting materials in relevant fields. This paper reports on a pilot project that explores the concept of the patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) plan currently in effect at one major research institution. In it, the authors articulate a rationale for the advancement of patron driven acquisitions, examine the types of materials acquired through this program, and compare the use of these materials with that of materials acquired after identification by a subject specialist.

2. Rationale for Engaging in PDA

The literature regarding the use of PDA as a collection development method is large and growing. Many of the original plans allowing users to drive acquisitions developed out of interlibrary lending departments. In 2010, an entire issue of *Collection Management* explored the subject of PDA from several viewpoints and included a rich historical literature review of the topic. Nixon, Freeman, Ward (2010) Articles from several site specific projects explored the issues of cost per use of materials, and those published most recently included electronic books in their explorations. Shroeder (2012) Breitbach and Lambert (2011) Jones (2011) The general consensus in these articles is that the process is cost effective.

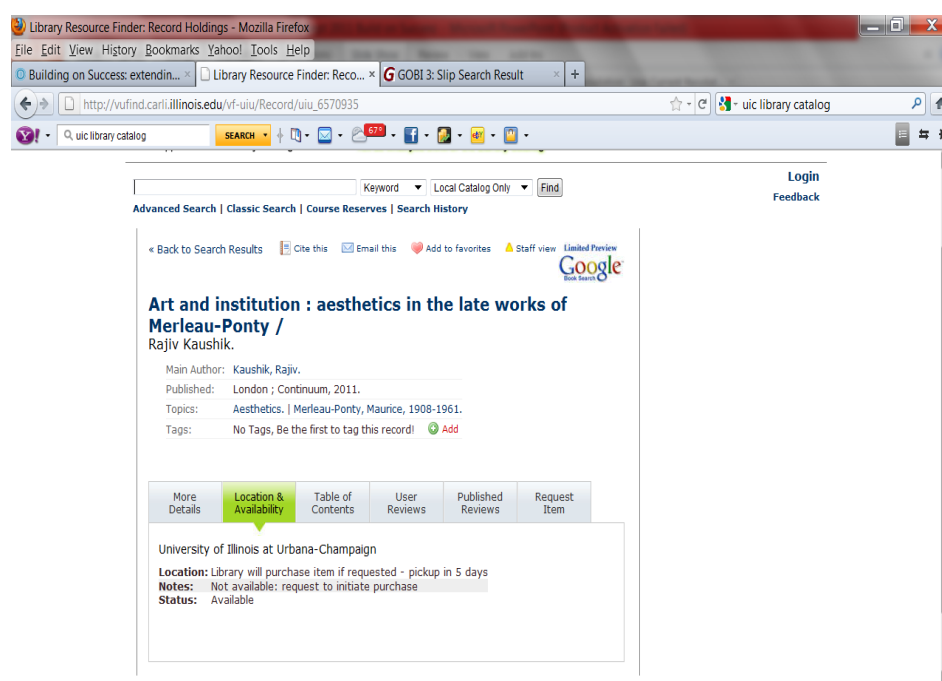
Traditionally, patron driven access programs primarily served to fill identified gaps within local collections. In most cases, librarians identified these gaps through the process of fulfilling interlibrary loan requests. In some cases, PDA provided reserve materials requested by the faculty for specific classes. Given the success of this relatively low-cost endeavor, it seems quite natural for research libraries to explore its use for more general acquisitions. Yet, this tendency runs the risk of bringing two different philosophies of collection development into conflict – the just-in-case model that dominated collection development activities for the last forty years and the just-in-time model that emerged as a mechanism for filling gaps. Subject specialists build collections with an eye toward future scholars; however, it is not as though the requests of our current faculty members and students fall on deaf ears. As is the case at most research libraries, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Library receives requests from scholars in a multitude of ways. For example, the University Library identifies materials for local acquisition in the process of attempting to fulfill ILL requests or in the course of meeting faculty requests that purchases be made for classroom reserves. In addition, all members of the campus community are welcome to request purchases through the "Suggest an

Item for Purchase” link which is one level down on the homepage under “About Us” for those savvy enough to find it. There is also the tried and true method of contacting the subject specialist to see if an item can be purchased. As pieces of a whole, all of these methods assist the user in securing access to desirable materials; however, none of them truly live up to Ranganathan’s fourth law of librarianship – save the time of the user. (1931)

3. View of a Subject Specialist

For the purpose of this study, the authors chose acquisitions for political science as an area to explore in order to answer several questions about the impact of PDA in that subject area. The vast majority of the monographic materials purchased for this subject area at Illinois come through an approval plan that is part of the Yankee Book Peddler (YBP) GOBI platform. In developing our PDA pilot, the University Library utilized a highly structured profile that reflected the profile employed for our general approval plans. By utilizing such a model, we were able to focus our acquisitions and carefully avoid acquiring too many items that would be considered broadly out-of-scope. Users were presented with records in the catalog indicating that they could request the purchase of the work, and could expect it to be available for pickup in 5 days.

Illustration 1. Catalog record for PDA item



When comparing political science acquisitions from the general approval plan and the PDA, three questions were considered from the subject specialist's point of view.

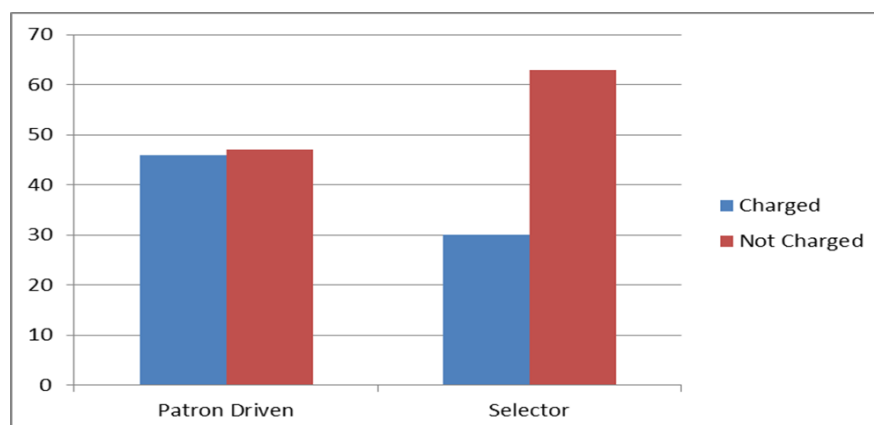
- How do circulation rates for purchases compare between the PDA acquired books and those specifically ordered by the subject specialist?
- How does the content of these materials compare?
- And, since Illinois is part of a statewide consortium, how do the holdings for these titles compare at a larger geographic level?

We looked at the list of materials requested through PDA and those ordered by the subject specialist in the 2011 fiscal year to see what, if any, differences might exist. During that fiscal year, 104 political science items were identified by users for acquisition from the profile of PDA records locally loaded that corresponded to our profile for Political Science. During that same period, the subject specialist chose some 320 titles from the approval slips. In the analysis, duplicates and electronic books were removed from both sets of data. This resulted in a set of ninety-three titles chosen through PDA and 300 selected by the subject specialist. Then, a random sample of ninety-three items from the total of 300 ordered by the subject specialist was taken in order to compare the use of these books with those selected by the patron.

4. Comparing Circulation Figures

The following chart compares the circulation statistics for each group of books received.

Chart 1. Circulation Comparison – 2011 PDA/Approval Plan Acquisitions



Of the ninety-three items identified in the PDA group, almost one-half were actually circulated at least once as of March 2012. By comparison, of those items randomly selected from the pool of titles acquired at the subject specialist's direction, approximately 30% circulated. In retrospect, the most surprising finding is the large number of items selected by patrons, but not charged out to them. One might think that if the user went to the trouble of requesting a purchase, the vast majority of them would immediately circulate. This is clearly not the case. This may be reflective of the impact of the online catalog and the delivery system. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the catalog has been provided in electronic format for approximately forty years. Our users, perhaps unconsciously, treat it like a giant virtual library. Traditionally, the Library complicated physical browsing by the dispersing materials between as many as forty library units and a centrally located Main Stacks. In addition, the last decade witnessed the development of a high density storage facility from which materials are available by request only. The time it takes to get an item delivered from another library is not that much shorter than the time it takes to get a book on the shelf through PDA. The effect of this ease of access may have the user believe that the book actually exists in the collection and they are simply requesting delivery. It might be equated to browsing a physical collection where the user pulls a book off the shelf, then after looking at a few pages, they put it back.

In the end, with twenty of ninety-three in the PDA cohort circulating more than once, the University Library could demonstrate that approximately 22% of the items selected by our patrons received multiple uses within less than one year. Indeed, one title showed more than nine circulation events. By comparison, only nine of the items selected by the specialist circulated more than once, with five circulation events registering as the highest. The result is not black and white from the standpoint that neither appears to be failing in meeting the needs of our users. Rather, the results imply that both systems seem to work well.

5. Subject Comparison

In our analysis, one of the most interesting aspects of the evaluation focused on a comparison of subject headings for the entire corpus of purchases. Again, the user is interested in obtaining materials to fulfill an immediate need or interest. By comparison, the subject specialist takes a broader view both of the discipline and the way it is taught at the institution. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, political science is widely divided into specific topical areas that are easily identified by looking at the "Introduction to" rubrics developed for courses. These include United States government and politics, public policy, political research, comparative politics, political theory, and international relations. As in most universities, the classes offered are not necessarily the same from year to year depending upon who is available to teach, but they do represent the primary sub-disciplines taught locally. Two undergraduate classes taught on an ongoing basis are targeted at students who

Although *United States, government*, and *political* remain dominant terms, there is much less emphasis on *history* and much more emphasis on *international relations*, *foreign relations*, social aspects of politics, and many other areas related to comparative politics and conflict studies. This is reflective of the types of publications of interest to faculty members in the department and the areas in which they publish. If nothing else, this illustrates a difference between the beneficiaries of just-in-time versus just-in-case purchases in a single subject field. The needs of the students are clearly reflected in the PDA program, while the needs of the faculty are more often reflected in the subject specialist purchases.

Illustration 2 - Subjects chosen by political science specialist



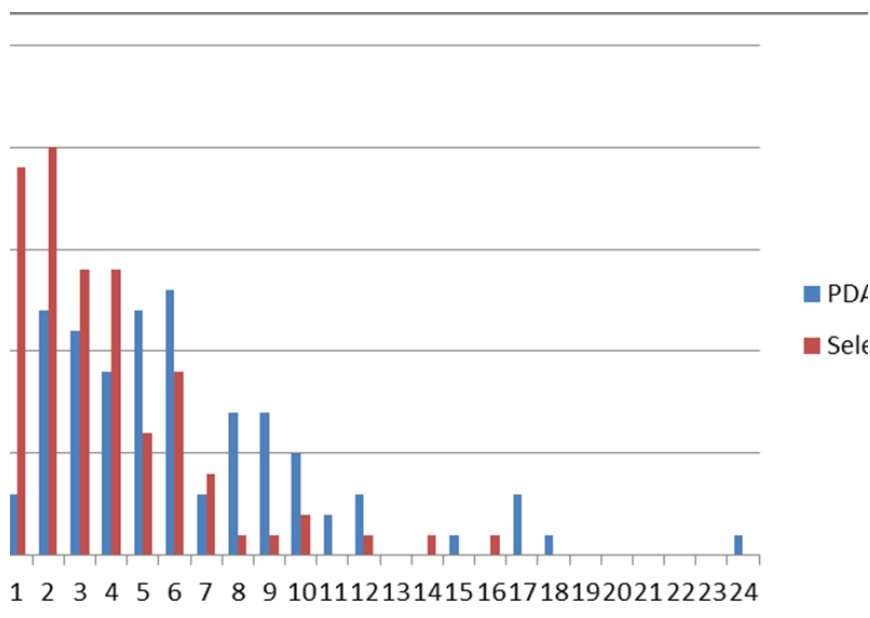
6. Consortial Purchasing

Just as there is a tension between just-in-time and just-in-case purchasing, there is a growing concern about the numbers of physical items on our shelves. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is a member of CARLI, a consortium of seventy-six academic and research libraries in the State of Illinois. With such a large body of institutions collaborating in an active resource sharing consortium, it is only responsible to ask whether we all need to buy a copy of every available book? With delivery of materials from around the State occurring within three to five days for most items, and a circulation desk delivery of two days for materials held on campus that are requested through the online catalog, users can generally pick up items requested from on or off campus within the same time period. This also applies to PDA purchases. Can PDA be folded into the system as a way of reducing the duplication of materials from campus to campus? And, can this be done in a cost effective manner for all concerned?

As we considered these questions, we compared the holdings for each political science title purchased by the University of Illinois' PDA program to see how many unique titles were present within the consortium's collective holdings. The

following chart illustrates the number of holdings for the titles purchased through both strategies in the CARLI consortium.

Chart 2.- Comparison of purchases for titles held in CARLI



As demonstrated here, the selector purchased titles accounted for nineteen items that were unique and twenty items that were held by just one other institution in the consortium. By comparison, the PDA purchased titles accounted for only three unique titles and twelve titles that were held at one other institution. PDA accounted for one title that was held in twenty-four libraries and five more titles that were held at fifteen or more institutions. This may be one of the most telling of the statistics surrounding the different acquisitions approaches, and it should be used to inform discussions about how many copies of any title should be available within such a consortium. As we can see, the cluster of titles held by six or fewer institutions make up the vast majority of the purchases, leading one to believe that caps in the range of five or fewer copies will fulfill most demands. This might be useful in setting guidelines for consortial purchasing, especially in a collaboration of libraries that have finely honed delivery mechanisms such as CARLI.

Of course, it should be noted that this study only evaluated statistics related to print monographs. The purchase and sharing of electronic books is a much more complicated matter. Indeed, in the case of political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, several packages of e-book

purchases benefit the collection, but current lending practices restrict the use of these materials to one campus. The ability to share e-books in a consortium is an exciting proposition, but it is one that has not yet reached fruition.

7. The Future of Demand Driven Acquisitions in Research Libraries

As the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign initiated its first PDA pilot, some subject specialists began to vent concerns they had with the program. Perhaps the most telling of these concerns was that some of the subject specialists believed that a program funded at a modest \$50,000 (approx.. 38,022 Euro) served as a precursor to their displacement from serving as the primary individuals developing the University Library's collections. In some respects, that fear was understandable. The world's recent financial difficulties meant that University Library was in the midst of a hiring freeze, and several well-publicized PDA programs at other North American research libraries spent hundreds-of-thousands of dollars. Yet, the evidence uncovered in this modest evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of PDA and selector-driven acquisitions points toward a more nuanced model in which well-defined and profiled PDA programs serve as a compliment to the expertise of selector driven acquisition programs.

We would like to thank Michael Norman, Garrick Sherman, and the University of Illinois Scholar's Travel Fund for making this paper possible.

References

- Breitbach, W., & Lambert, J. E. (2011). Patron-driven ebook acquisition. *Computers in Libraries*, 31(6), 17-20.
- Johnson, P. (2004). *Fundamentals of Collection Development and Management*. American Library Association, Chicago, Illinois.
- Jones, D. (2011). On-demand information delivery: Integration of patron-driven acquisition into a comprehensive information delivery system. *Journal of Library Administration*, 51(7), 764-776.
- Nixon, J. M., Freeman, R. S., & Ward, S. M. (2010). Patron-driven acquisitions: An introduction and literature review. *Collection Management*, 35(3-4), 119.
- Ranganathan, S. R. (1931). *The five laws of library science*. Madras: The Madras Library Association.
- Schroeder, R. (2012). When patrons call the shots: Patron-driven acquisition at Brigham Young University. *Collection Building*, 31(1), 11-14.
- U.S. Office of Education, Bulletin. (1930). *No. 9: Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities*, 2 vol. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.