AI: Initial Responses, More Questions

Rachel E. Scott and Michael Fernandez

Librarians working in technical services have long had opportunities to automate portions of their work.[1] Attitudes about doing so, however, have been mixed.[2] Automation comes with enhanced needs for human-mediated quality control. With this long-standing and somewhat fraught relationship in mind, we began discussing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language model (LLM) tools and their implications for writing and reviewing in *Library Resources & Technical Services (LRTS)* back in 2023. The editorial teams of the American Library Association Core journals had several frank conversations about the potential roles for and our concerns about AI and LLM tools. We drafted a policy that has now been reviewed and approved by the Core Board of Directors and implemented across all three journals. It is our hope to provide guidance that is deliberate and human-centered. The policy, printed below and available on the *LRTS* site, outlines expectations from the perspective of authors, reviewers, and editors.[3]

Use of Generative AI by Authors and Reviewers

Summary: This policy limits the use of Generative AI tools by authors and prohibits use of Generative AI tools by peer reviewers for work under consideration by Core's journals. The limitation on the use of AI tools to author articles is not meant to restrict research into potential uses of LLMs and/or Gen AI tools in libraries.

Authors: Articles submitted to Core's journals must be written by human authors. The use of Large Language Models (LLMs), generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI), or other AI tools to write an article is not allowed. In cases where such tools are used to support a human author's writing or research, those uses MUST be acknowledged explicitly in the manuscript, including the specific tool(s) used, the prompts given, and the section(s) of the article that were enhanced in this manner.

Reviewers: Peer review is a human process in which the peer reviewer synthesizes the author's submission and the reviewer's knowledge and experience. It is uniquely valuable for that reason. Reviewers therefore may not use Generative AI technologies to assist with conducting or writing review reports. By using such tools, reviewers risk breaching confidentiality and giving away the author's unpublished work to AI models.

Editors: The editors of Core's journals reserve the right to investigate and verify that text is human-authored. If you have questions about whether your planned use of AI tools to author an article is acceptable, please contact the editors for clarification.

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The content of this issue also engages with the theme of automation versus human mediation. In addition to a study of AI tools in subject cataloging, articles explore, for example, the limits of vendor-provided approval plans and the American Library Association's "Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries" and the "Freedom to Read Statement." When do librarians adopt these as-is and when do they intervene to customize policies, services, and practices—or even walk away—on behalf of their local constituents? How do we balance the efficiencies of automation and the protections of national guidance with the quality, values, and user-centered focus that drive our profession? Pieces throughout the issue provide valuable insights into the approaches adopted by librarians who leverage evidence to forge a path forward.

Communications on Practice

1. In "Digitizing Pre-1978 Dissertations at Binghamton University Libraries," Erin E. Rushton, Caitlin Holton, and Jamey McDermott walk readers through the key considerations, challenges encountered, and workflow devised for this project that highlights local scholarship.

Features

1. In "Preparing for the Worst but Hoping for the Best: Censorship, Academic Libraries, and Reconsideration Policies," Blair Solon, Margie Montañez, Liz Cooper, Amy Jankowski, Glenn Koelling, and Laura Soito investigate reconsideration policies at US-based Association of Research Libraries. Although academic libraries in the United States receive very few book challenges or removal requests as of this writing, having clear guidelines may provide some protection to library employees. The authors provide a template reconsideration policy that can be tailored to academic library settings.

2. Brian Dobreski and Christopher Hastings approach the topic of "AI Chatbots and Subject Cataloging: A Performance Test" with clear and replicable methodology and professional cataloging experience. The authors evaluated the effectiveness of three chatbots in assigning classification numbers and subject headings. They found that the overall performance of these tools was poor, particularly in assigning classification numbers, but may nonetheless hold promise in saving catalogers time with subject analysis in the future.

Notes on Operations

1. Kelly A. McCusker and Molly W. Rainard discuss their library's use and ultimate discontinuation of approval plans in "Too Broad and Too Narrow: One Library's Experience with Approval Plans." Approval plans were implemented at the authors' library because of the potential efficiencies they offer to selectors and technical services personnel over single-title monographic purchasing. However, the authors found that approval plans took as much or even more time to manage, led to overspending, and kept them from purchasing titles specifically requested by their community.

2. In "Coping and COVID: Developing a Pandemic-Related Mental Health Micro-Collection," Dee Anna Phares documents the development of a "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection at Northern Illinois University Libraries using a trauma-informed approach. Phares demonstrates that college and university libraries are well-positioned to promote well-being and belonging through collections and services that are responsive to student needs.

Book Reviews

1. *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications* by Monica Berger.
2. *Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction* by Marie Keen Shaw.

Notes

1. See, for example, Karen Horny, "Automation of Technical Services: Northwestern's Experience," *College & Research Libraries* 35, no. 5 (1974): 364–69; Michael Gorman, "Technical Services in an Automated Library," *Proceedings of the 16th Clinic on Library Applications of Data Processing* (University of Illinois, 1979), https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4811495.pdf.

2. Bradford Lee Eden, "The New User Environment: The End of Technical Services?" *Information Technology and Libraries* 29, no. 2 (2010): 93–100, https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v29i2.3148.

3. *Library Resources & Technical Services*, "Author Guidelines," https://journals.ala.org/index.php/lrts /about/submissions#authorGuidelines.

Digitizing Pre-1978 Dissertations at Binghamton University Libraries

Erin E. Rushton, Caitlin Holton, and Jamey McDermott

In 2023, Binghamton University Libraries initiated a project to digitize its pre-1978 dissertations and make them available in its institutional repository. This Communication on Practice provides an overview of the key decisions made before embarking on the project, the workflow, and the challenges encountered. We drew upon the experiences and lessons learned from other institutions to guide our process, and we hope this paper will serve as a resource for those considering similar projects at their institutions.

In 2016, Binghamton University Libraries established the Digital Initiatives and Resource Discovery Department. Initially comprising a single librarian, the department has since expanded to seven employees who provide leadership, direction, and innovation in digital scholarship, digital collections, digitization, digital preservation, scholarly communications, and oral histories. Among its many responsibilities are the oversight and management of the digitization lab, institutional repository (bepress Digital Commons), and digital preservation system (Ex Libris Rosetta).

In the department's early days, when there were fewer active projects, students were occasionally tasked with digitizing pre-1978 dissertations and adding the dissertations to the institutional repository. This idea was inspired by Gail Clement and Melissa Levine's 2011 article, "Copyright and Publication Status of pre-1978 Dissertations: A Content Analysis Approach."[1] They suggested that many pre-1978 dissertations were likely in the public domain due to a lack of copyright notice and a potential failure to renew copyright. Given the minimal risk in digitizing pre-1978 dissertations and the need to provide meaningful work to keep the student workers occupied, the project was initiated on an ad-hoc basis.

As the department matured, a digital initiatives assistant was hired to manage the Digitization Lab's daily activities and supervise student employees. The digital initiatives assistant also supported the institutional repository. During this period, the lab's capabilities increased to better accommodate the digitization needs of the materials housed in our collections. One of the most critical additions was an InoTec Scamax 631, a high-volume feed scanner that improved the scope and efficiency of projects by reducing the time required to scan documents.

Around this time, we noticed many downloads from the dissertations that the students had digitized and deposited into the repository. For instance, a dissertation from 1970 had more than 600 downloads. Although this dissertation was a bit of an outlier, many other dissertations demonstrated

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significant usage, some receiving thirty to forty downloads. The interest in the dissertations was not particularly surprising. We had come across articles in the library literature that suggested that digitized dissertations receive far more usage than traditional print because of their broader accessibility and visibility. For instance, Daniel S. Dotson's article on Ohio State University's Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) project highlighted the usage patterns and impact of ETDs. At the time of publication, Ohio State had made more than 50,000 dissertations available online, with more than 29,341,996 downloads.[2]

Interest in this collection motivated us to consider the feasibility of a dissertation digitization project. There were other compelling reasons to consider such a project. First, the project aligned with the libraries' recently created strategic plan, which promotes amplifying campus scholarship and transforming collections.

Second, as open access advocates, we encourage faculty and students to share their scholarly and creative work, including ETDs, in the institutional repository. This project would populate the repository and enhance alumni scholarship and research visibility, especially since there has not yet been a lot of interest from students in depositing their ETDs in the repository. Third, the library's print dissertation collection occupied a substantial space on the second floor of the main library. Although there were no immediate plans to renovate or repurpose the space, using it for a low-circulating and less visually appealing collection was not ideal. The digitization and deaccession of the dissertations could free up space that we could use for study space or more high-use collections.

Finally, we found reassurance in the experiences of other libraries that had embarked on similar projects and had lived to tell the tale.

Project Considerations

Although we had compelling motivations to proceed, we also faced considerations that warranted caution. Our key concern was whether we collectively possessed the time and resources required for a project of this magnitude, which would likely be laborious and time-consuming. We also needed to evaluate the project's priority relative to other ongoing and planned projects and ascertain the level of administrative support. Although the Digital Initiatives Department would primarily be responsible for managing the project and conducting the work, other departments, including Cataloging, Preservation, and Reader Services, would be impacted.

To ensure sufficient support and interest, we prepared a proposal describing the project's goals and objectives, issues to address, and a tentative workflow and timeline. Additionally, we included the success stories we had collected from other institutions. We scheduled a meeting with Cataloging, Preservation, and Reader Services to discuss the proposal and address any concerns. Ultimately, the project was well-received, and we obtained the green light to move forward.

Digitizing Pre-1978 Dissertations at Binghamton University Libraries
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Project Decisions

Before starting the project, we made policy- and workflow-related decisions.

Opt-in or Opt-out for Authors

Our exploratory review revealed that some institutions had invested considerable effort in locating contact information of ETD authors to offer the option to opt in or out.[3] We also found examples of libraries that only contacted alumni authors after digitizing and depositing their work. Despite varying approaches, adverse reactions from alumni were rare in the literature. This evidence led us to not seek permission from individual authors proactively. Instead, we included a link to the libraries' take-down policy on the collection landing page to facilitate the removal of a dissertation on request.

Scope of Project

Clement and Levine's 2011 article suggests that pre-1978 dissertations are likely in the public domain if the author did not renew the copyright.[4] Given this analysis, we focused the project's first phase on pre-1978 publications. In total, 293 dissertations met these criteria.

Retention of Print Copies

The proposed workflow involved unbinding the physical copy of dissertations so that they could be digitized using the feed scanner. Initially there were concerns about discarding the physical copies; however, these concerns were alleviated upon discovering that additional copies existed on microfilm and in print at the Collections Management Facility.

We wondered if libraries are obligated to archive dissertations. We did not come across any mention of this issue during our fact-finding phase, leading us to believe that policies regarding dissertation archiving likely vary institution by institution. For instance, Binghamton University's Graduate School once required students to provide a print copy of their dissertation to the libraries. However, this policy changed in the mid-2000s. Students are now only required to deposit a copy in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. The libraries are not currently collecting print or electronic dissertations, and we have not encountered any evidence that the libraries are obligated to preserve the historical print dissertation collection. Although we did not investigate this issue further during this phase, we plan to conduct a more detailed examination of historical Graduate School handbooks to better understand the evolution of this policy.

Additional Resources and Expertise

The libraries already had a feed scanner that made digitizing a collection of this size efficient and effective, as well as a Zeutschel Overhead Book Scanner for scanning oversized or fragile documents. Additionally, our Preservation Department has a Challenge Titan 200BC guillotine, which made it possible to disbind dissertations in seconds. Given that we were fortunate to have access to technology and equipment to facilitate the workflow, our primary concern was whether we needed coding

expertise. For example, we had seen workflows from institutions that included Python scripts and batch editing.[5] Ultimately, we realized as we developed the workflow that such functions were unnecessary for our needs.

Metadata Requirements

Until the early 2000s, the Graduate School provided the libraries with copies of dissertations. The libraries bound these dissertations and created original Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) records. Subsequently, the dissertations were then added to the libraries' oversized collections. We met with the Cataloging Department to determine what metadata from the MARC records could be used for the Institutional Repository records. Ultimately, we deemed that the following MARC fields from the catalog records were relevant:

- Title (245 Title Statement)
- Author (100 Main Entry—Personal Name)
- Publication year (264 Production, Publication, Distribution, Manufacture, and Copyright Notice)
- Subject (650 Subject Added Entry—Topical Term)

The information we wanted to include in the repository records—but was not present in the MARC records—included degree name, department, advisors, and abstract. We determined that this information could be captured from the physical copy at the time of digitization.

Project Preparation

After decisions about policy and workflow, the project's next phase involved preparing for digitization and eventual ingestion into the repository. This phase involved creating a project charter that outlined, among other things, a project timeline, the roles and responsibilities of project members, project milestones, and deliverables.

Our ILS and discovery coordinator generated an Alma export of the MARC fields noted above. The Digital Commons repository uses the Dublin Core metadata schema, so converting the MARC metadata into Dublin Core was necessary. For author and keywords, this required a bit of editing. For example, the author's name in MARC was *Last Name, First Name*. This was changed to *First Name Last Name* for Dublin Core. The keywords came from the MARC 650 field. The cataloging librarian used Open Refine for data format and cleanup. They also reviewed the subject headings and ran them through MarcEdit. Subject headings like "academic dissertation" were deleted because they were repetitive and existed in almost every record. In addition, more descriptive subject headings were created. The metadata was then formatted into a metadata template to allow batch uploading into the repository.

Project Workflow

The workflow solidified after a month or so of initiating the project. Three student workers dedicated most of their spring semester, approximately 220 hours, on this project.

1. The digital initiatives assistant creates batches (e.g., lists of titles) of approximately forty dissertations, with each student responsible for a portion of the titles. The decision to split the process up into forty or so titles at a time was due to two reasons. The first is that it allows the stacks maintenance coordinator to gather a manageable amount of material at a time once every two weeks. Another rationale for breaking the project into smaller chunks is that it keeps the momentum going and allows each student to stay on task, which can be a struggle with large-scale projects.

2. The list of titles is sent to the stacks maintenance coordinator, who pulls materials, changes their physical location in Alma so patrons do not think they are available, and delivers the dissertations to the Digitization Lab.

3. The digital initiatives assistant and student workers remove the cover bindings using the guillotine in the Preservation workspace. At this time, Preservation Department employees review the items for mold or other physical condition concerns. Staff will also identify, as best as possible, which dissertations have photographs, tipped-in pages, or other additional materials held in a pocket in the binding.

4. Each student worker digitizes their assigned dissertations using the feed scanner. By using the scanner's InoTec Scamax's proprietary software, students are able to create PDF files that support optical character recognition (OCR). The created files are saved on a network drive using the following file naming convention: LastName_FirstInitial_Year (e.g., Doe_J_2024).

5. Works containing unique elements, like tipped-in photographs or folding maps in the folders, are imaged separately because they cannot be scanned using the feed scanner. For these pages or elements, we use the flatbed scanner or Zeutschel. If these elements are part of the main text, the digital initiatives assistant will combine the pages scanned on the Zuetschel with the PDF or PDFs created by the student from the feed scanner. Having the digital initiatives assistant create this PDF is partially based on access to Adobe suite products and partially to have higher quality control on the final PDF created from multiple sources.

6. Each student worker updates the metadata for their assigned dissertations to include the abstract, department, degree name, and advisors. Original metadata is also reviewed and corrected.

7. The digital initiatives assistant reviews each batch and then uploads the files and metadata to the repository. Additional files, such as folding maps, are added separately.

8. The digital initiatives assistant will perform a Google search for the title and author to determine whether a dissertation has been published elsewhere, either as a book or article. If this is the case, the digital initiatives assistant will add that information to an internal note and embargo the dissertation. The digital initiatives assistant will also embargo creative works (e.g., plays, poetry, fiction). These dissertations will be assessed at a later date to determine whether the embargo is warranted.

9. The discarded print copies are sent to recycling at the off-site storage.

10. The digital initiatives assistant sends the cataloging librarian a list of repository URLs. The cataloging librarian updates the Alma records (physical holdings records) to remove the print holdings and includes a link to the digitized copy.

Project Challenges

The project was proposed in September 2023, and digitization began in November of that year. Initially, we expected the project to last well into the summer of 2024. However, all 298 dissertations were digitized and available in the repository by June 2024.

The biggest challenge, and one that we should have anticipated, was the metadata. We aimed to include abstracts, the department's name, and the advisor's name; we believed we could simply copy this information from the OCRed PDF. As we discovered, however, very few dissertations included an abstract. Advisors' signatures were often illegible, and not all dissertations included the department name. Fortunately, one of the student workers helping with the project was a graduate student who was both creative and resourceful. He created abstracts and used his research skills to track down the names of former advisors. With the help of the university archivist, we used course catalogs from that era to track down the illegible names and verify which department advisors worked in.

We also discovered that departments were often not referred to in the dissertation, while other departments no longer existed. Our graduate student could usually deduce the name of the department based on the subject matter or the committee members (that is, once we figured out who the committee members were, which was often an ordeal on its own).

We also did not initially consider that some of the dissertations would be creative works or that some works had been published elsewhere, in part or whole, since the dissertation had been completed. Creative works are more highly protected by copyright, so if there were a misinterpretation of copyright or any other concerns, these works would be the most likely to have an issue. Some creative works still have high publication value even if they have not been published because the content may not age at the same rate as scientific research. These works were given an initial embargo period of one year for the team to research the copyright.

Initially, we planned to add all the metadata to the repository and then add the PDFs later. Once we began, it became clear that uploading the records first would be more work in the long run because of updates to the metadata. The batch updating process would have been just as time-consuming as the original metadata upload. As such, uploading a complete record with reviewed metadata in a batch made more sense.

Conclusion

We are pleased with the progress and outcomes of the project. From conception to completion, the project took approximately nine months. We attribute the project's success to the following:

- Proactive project planning
- A well-defined project charter
- Using existing resources

- Support from colleagues and administration
- A simple yet effective workflow

Key to the project's success was also the collaboration with other library departments. The Preservation Department trained the digital initiatives assistant in equipment use of the guillotine, provided access to the facilities, quarantined the few titles that had been affected by mold, and assisted with disbinding some of the oversized dissertations that were too thick for the guillotine. The Cataloging Department provided metadata cleanup as well as expertise on metadata best practices. Reader Services pulled the dissertations from the stacks and updated the holdings in Alma.

After all project materials had been digitized, the director of libraries' constituent development and the library dean sent a letter to authors whose works had been digitized to highlight the project's goals and accomplishments. The letter also emphasized the libraries' commitment to supporting scholarship, research, and open access initiatives. We have already received several enthusiastic responses from alumni authors. An article about the project was also published in the campus newsletter, *BingUNews*.

Because the project was only recently completed, we have not been able to conduct an assessment on the number of downloads. Moving forward, we would like to meet with the Graduate School to discuss the possibility of digitizing more recent dissertations. As part of this conversation, we would like to discuss how we can collectively encourage current students to deposit their dissertations in the repository in addition to ProQuest.

Acknowledgments

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2. Daniel S. Dotson, "Analysis of Usage of The Ohio State University's Electronic Theses and Dissertations," *Library Philosophy and Practice* (2019): 1–13, https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/2486/.

3. Meghan Banach Bergin, "Providing Online Access to Over a Century of Theses and Dissertations at UMass Amherst," presentation given at the 2019 Northeast Institutional Repository Day, June 18, 2019, https://repository.escholarship.umassmed.edu/handle/20.500.14038/37434?show=full; Christy L. M. Shorey, "Engaging Alumni: The How and Why of Author Outreach for Dissertation Scanning Projects," presentation given at the Charleston Library Conference, Charleston, SC, November 2018, https://doi.org/10.5703/1288284317071.

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Preparing for the Worst but Hoping for the Best
Censorship, Academic Libraries, and Reconsideration Policies

Blair Solon, Margie Montañez, Liz Cooper, Amy Jankowski, Glenn Koelling, and Laura Soito

Libraries in the United States have received the highest number of book challenges on record in recent years. Although the vast majority of these challenges happened at school or public libraries, we sought to assess how academic libraries are prepared to face such challenges, especially with the rise of state laws seeking to limit what subjects can be taught. To answer this question, we analyzed American members of the Association of Research Libraries' reconsideration policies. Our analysis found that a minority of these libraries had a reconsideration policy. These policies varied in how they framed the potential challenge and the procedure to handle a removal request. The messages within these documents were mixed, often obscuring the actual policy. They relied on justifications, typically citing the purpose of an academic library and/or ethical statements from professional bodies, and they borrowed language from other institutions' policies. We conclude with recommendations for creating a reconsideration policy tailored for academic libraries.

> If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all—except the censor.
>
> —John F. Kennedy (handset and printed at the Center for the Book with moveable foundry type on a platen press built in 1888)

When we think of libraries, we might think of books, the physical space, a repository of democratic knowledge, or librarians ready to help patrons. But there is another narrative not always at the forefront of the imagination—one where libraries are, for better or for worse, evolving representations of contemporary political moments. This more nuanced and complicated narrative might get bypassed, in part, by what Fobazi Ettarh calls "vocational awe," or "the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in the beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique."[1] As Matthew Battles explores in *Library: An Unquiet History*, the history of libraries is rife with "points of transformations,

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those moments where readers, authors, and librarians question the meaning of the library itself."[2] The library as an ideological institution has continually shifted in its notions of what knowledge means, who has access to it, and what users' and librarians' relationship to a library's information should be.

In 2023, US libraries received the highest number of book and resource challenges ever recorded in a calendar year.[3] Although 98 percent of these challenges targeted materials in schools or public libraries, there is concern that this trend will continue to grow. During the 2022 Charleston Conference "Long Arm of the Law" session, the director of the American Library Association (ALA)'s Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), Deborah Caldwell-Stone, predicted that book banning efforts are likely to extend to academic libraries because of "divisive concepts laws."[4] These laws stem from an executive order from President Donald Trump's first term and prohibit information or teaching about race, racism, gender, and sexuality. This order, although overturned by President Biden, was the catalyst for state laws to come that would change higher education as we know it. Texas's ban on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in Texas public colleges and universities (Senate Bill 17), for example, eliminated 311 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion positions and at least sixty-nine staffers, which "most impacted women and people of color."[5] The implications for academic libraries in states with such laws can be severe when we consider libraries as spaces that acquire and provide access to information on all topics, including those now prohibited.

We recognize the current predicament libraries are facing, with increasing challenges to books and resources coupled with restrictive state laws, as one of Battles' "points of transformation" for American libraries. Pekoll defines a challenge as "An attempt to to [*sic*] have a library resource removed or access to it restricted, based on the objections of a person or group. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others."[6] The impetus for a challenge, however, can be for many reasons, such as moral arguments, political motivations, outdated or incorrect information, or harmful content.

Reconsideration policies establish processes for reviewing collection material challenges in the context of a library's guiding principles, intellectual freedom, and users' right to information. According to the ALA, all public, school, and academic libraries should have a reconsideration policy to handle library resource objections.[7] We assert that reconsideration policies can serve as a reminder that the resources we have (or do not) are tied (or could be tied) to various political and social moments, and that library users have many reasons they may take issue with library resources. Drafting these policies allows libraries to consider how their collections were developed, and in what contexts, before attempting to communicate with users about the complex work of building academic library collections and how librarians and users relate to them. Enacting these policies provides libraries with a systematic, thoughtful space to have this communication and can demonstrate both a willingness to be open about the nature of our work and to build and maintain good relationships with our users.

Our research team considered the OIF director's statement at the Charleston Conference as a call to action to investigate academic library preparedness to field material challenges by examining

reconsideration policies from American members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). As a study population, ARL libraries are highly resourced, large, mainly academic institutions. Although they may not be current targets of censorship efforts, ARL libraries cannot be considered exempt from the threat of collection challenges. Indeed, ARL's support of statements related to recent challenges to academic freedom demonstrates the need for ongoing advocacy in protecting library values and the rights of information users.[8] For this study, we first investigated how many of these libraries had reconsideration policies and then performed a content analysis of those policies to assess preparedness for resource challenges. We discuss our findings in relation to both professional guidance from ALA and ideas of conflict and relationship management. In this article, we use "challenge" interchangeably with "reconsideration request," a phrase commonly used to describe library resource challenges in the library profession.

Literature Review

Recent changes to the US legal landscape open the possibility for more serious challenges to academic library collections. In September 2020, President Trump signed the executive order "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping," which introduced the idea of "divisive concepts" into political discourse.[9] This executive order effectively prohibited the provision of information or training about concepts such as race or racism, gender identity, sexuality, and sexism in public or government-funded institutions and agencies.[10] Although this initial executive order was revoked by President Joe Biden's executive order "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," it kickstarted a cascade of bills that aim to ban divisive concepts in various capacities at the state level.[11] Continued polarization around "divisive concepts" prior to the 2024 presidential election suggests that divisive concepts legislation is likely to remain in practice at the state and/or national levels.[12]

Since 2021, the nonprofit PEN America (an international literary and human rights organization) has maintained a database of state-level bills, laws, and executive orders that qualify as "educational gag orders." These constrain what can be taught—often related to race, gender, or sexuality—or otherwise stipulate limits around the activities of public educational institutions and occasionally private educational institutions that receive state money. The vast majority of legislative records in the dataset aim to limit teaching or exposure to divisive concepts in education, though a small minority fall outside of this scope.[13] As of April 4, 2024, this database indicates that 126 educational gag orders that target higher education have been introduced as bills since 2021, with twelve passed into law and twenty-eight pending. Of the forty-three bills addressing other aspects of higher education (e.g., eliminating tenure, limiting an institution's ability to formally adopt a specific position on an issue), nine have passed into law and twenty are pending. Three state-level executive orders include higher education in their scope.[14] Recent survey research by Pokornowski and Schonfeld finds that library leaders in states that have advanced or passed divisive concepts legislation have not experienced direct censorship of library content or collections.[15] These library leaders, however, have felt indirect impacts from legislation and

the surrounding political environment that is changing collections practices. Impacts are also being noticed in library functions outside of collections, such as hiring and retention.[16]

Although none of the current bills or laws gathered by PEN explicitly mention library collections in higher education institutions, academic libraries are certainly not exempt. Jefferson and Dziedzic-Elliott outline two 2014 instances that set a precedent for state funding cuts to public colleges due to the selection of library materials.[17] The College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina-Upstate libraries received legislative budget cuts of $52,000 and $14,000, respectively, following political opposition to campus read program book selections with LGBTQ+ themes. This precedent, combined with the flurry of divisive concepts legislation and ongoing volatility in political discourse, underscores the idea that academic libraries would be wise to prepare for potential challenges to collection materials in the future.

Data on book and resource challenges in academic libraries in the United States are sparse. ALA's censorship data indicate that 1,247 documented library book and resource challenges were reported to the OIF in 2023.[18] Through direct correspondence with the OIF, we learned that the number of material challenges for academic libraries specifically was eleven (0.01 percent), with only four (0.003 percent) of these involving books or graphic novels.[19] The scholarly literature addressing book and resource challenges in academic libraries is also relatively scant. The majority of relevant studies used survey methodology to assess the frequency of material challenges and the presence of associated policies.[20] One limitation of survey studies is that respondents are self-selecting, meaning that individuals who complete a survey about library collection challenges and policies may be more likely to have recent interest or experience in this area; thus it is difficult to make conclusions about the results since they could reflect inherent biases. Studies also did not always indicate if they controlled for institution, meaning multiple respondents could have completed surveys from the same institution, potentially adding duplicity to results. Regardless, these studies present a useful foundation for understanding the history of collection challenges and policies in academic libraries.

There is substantial variance in the respondent populations of the survey studies that may impact results as well—in quantity, geographic scope, type of library, and respondent job classification—all of which create unique contexts for collection challenges. Several study populations include institutions outside the United States, where the political climate differs substantially. Schrader et al. looks solely at Canadian academic libraries, Hippenhammer is confined to the United States and Canada, and Matacio has a global scope.[21] Hippenhammer and Matacio focus on private religious higher education institutions where the context and goals for library collection management differ from nondenominational institutions.[22] Bukoff targets smaller US college academic libraries, which often have different objectives and management strategies than libraries at large academic institutions that may more strongly emphasize collection preservation.[23] Separate studies—one by Oltmann and Seigel and one by Newton—focus on US academic libraries in general.[24] Although Vredegoogd does not specify a geographic focus, their discussion implies a relative US range of interest among academic libraries of a broad scope and is framed through the US political context and increase in book bans.[25] Most

studies either allowed anyone to respond or sought a single response from an institution but did not specify a professional role for the respondent, with Matacio and Oltmann being the major exception.[26] They surveyed administrators, who often have different perspectives and knowledge than frontline employees directly fielding patron questions.

The data from these studies do not have any clear consensus around frequency of library material challenges or presence of specific policies for handling collection challenges within or across different variables in respondent populations. The range of respondents across studies that indicated experiencing collection challenges during the study periods is 16 percent to 48.4 percent, and the range of institutions indicating that they had either a standalone challenge policy or challenge language within a written collection development policy is 15 percent to 62 percent. Comparison is complicated by wide variance in survey design, study population, and years covered. Looking at the presence of challenge policies from another angle, Tokarz conducted a content analysis of Carnegie Research 1 (R1) library collection development policies on public websites, where 28.7 percent were found to include specific language addressing collection challenges or intellectual freedom, squarely within the range from the aforementioned studies above, with 10 percent specifying that they do not remove or restrict collection materials and 7 percent explicitly indicating that the library accepts challenge or reconsideration requests.[27]

In an interesting commonality, several studies found that even when written policies exist, academic libraries only reported adhering to them when responding to some collection challenges.[28] Hippenhammer found that removal of collection materials is more likely when a policy is not followed and even more likely when no policy exists at all, underscoring the importance of creating and following appropriate policies for fielding collection reconsideration requests.[29]

The authors of many of these studies felt that collection challenges are an important issue, yet their findings suggest many libraries are unprepared to respond to them effectively. With unfortunate foresight, Schrader et al., on the basis of the data gathered through their study, expressed that censorship is a real threat to academic libraries.[30] Many concluded with a strong call for libraries to adopt or update written policies and reconsideration forms to prepare for handling censorship challenges.[31] Hippenhammer was the first to recommend a specific challenge procedure and reconsideration form more than thirty years ago, but work in this area is slow to continue. In 2024, Ferguson led a professional workshop to address this issue, supporting a largely academic librarian audience in creating effective reconsideration policies for their institutions.[32] Even when prepared with policy documentation, however, collection challenges in academic libraries can be jarring. Podrygula describes how librarians at a public university in North Dakota were surprised to receive a challenge, because even though they had a strong reconsideration policy and form in place, they assumed intellectual and academic freedom principles would preclude someone from making a reconsideration request.[33]

One piece missing from the literature is information about practices in academic libraries for reporting challenges to ALA's OIF, which has maintained a database documenting censorship attempts since 1990

and has an online reporting form.[34] It is possible that censorship challenges occur in academic libraries but that they may not be documented or reported. This possibility is supported by Oltmann, who found that some survey respondents said "they would not seriously consider a challenge to their collection" should one arise.[35] A survey respondent in Pokornowski and Schonfeld's research noted that they view resource challenges as minor issues and would point to more generalized academic freedom policies if necessary.[36] Most libraries reportedly also lack staff training on intellectual freedom and handling book and material challenges, which may include a lack of staff knowledge about censorship reporting norms, whether a reconsideration policy is in place or not.[37] Siegel and Newton specifically call on academic librarians to share challenge information with the OIF to ensure the compilation of accurate statistics so the field can clearly understand the reality of the current landscape of library collection challenges in higher education institutions.[38]

Methods

Research Questions and Sample

To assess ARL academic library preparedness to respond to potential resource challenges, our research team at the University of New Mexico (UNM) sought to answer three main questions:

- How many ARL libraries have reconsideration policies in place or in progress?
- What content do ARL library reconsideration policies contain?
- How do ARL libraries' reconsideration policies align with established standards?

ARL is a member-based nonprofit composed of the leading research libraries in the United States and Canada, including university, government, and independent institutional libraries. We selected ARL academic libraries in the United States as our study population for several reasons. UNM is an ARL institution, and we were interested in evaluating our peer academic libraries' preparedness for resource challenges. We were also interested in exploring how research libraries, a group that typically maintains very large library collections to meet the complex information needs of strong research communities, address challenges given the relatively small amount of recent scholarship on the topic. We focused on academic ARL member libraries in the United States specifically to explore preparedness given the country's evident rise in book challenges since 2022. In total, 103 institutions met these parameters for inclusion in our study.

Search Protocol

Our group developed a list of search terms and a search protocol to evaluate the ARL library websites in our sample for reconsideration policy information. Our full research group conducted an initial test of ten ARL libraries to trial and standardize our search protocol. We then worked in pairs to review the remaining ARL institutions and normalized our findings as a full group. The process, which took place in July 2023, began with browsing each library's webpage to locate information that might be easily found on the homepage, about or information pages, policy or guideline pages, collections information pages, and/or site map. If a policy was not located, the following terms were used in individual searches

of the library's FAQ: "reconsideration," "withdraw," "challenge," "take down," "intellectual freedom," "policies," "guidelines," and "collections." Next, the library's webpage search (or if search was not available for the library website, university website search box) was used with term "library" added to all the searches except "intellectual freedom." As a final attempt, we performed private-mode Google searches using the name of the university, the word "library," and each of the words: "reconsideration," "withdraw," and "challenge." If we still did not find a reconsideration policy on an institution's website, a group member sent a direct email to a collections library worker at that institution to ask if they had a policy; all email responses were recorded.

To scope our research, we determined what minimally constitutes a reconsideration policy. We identified a policy when it specifically included either a procedure or a rule for collection challenges. For procedures, this could take the form of a multistep process, or it could be as simple as providing an email contact for reconsideration requests. Rules were when a library clearly stated that they do not remove items from their collection when challenged. We did not include policies that only stated a broad stance on intellectual freedom, were related to routine deaccessioning or library-led withdrawal, special collections donor policies, gift policies, information on Banned Book Week, or general collections policies unless these also included information on reconsideration or challenges. We also did not include policies addressing peripheral issues, such as takedown policies and harmful language statements, which often turned up in our search protocol due to shared vocabulary.

We included draft reconsideration policies sent in response to the direct inquiry emails mentioned above in our dataset, as these draft policies are a clear commitment from institutions to establish an official policy. The draft policies we identified were in various stages of development but had not yet been adopted as official policy or included on public websites, so we offered to keep draft policies anonymous to encourage submission of incomplete policies. We also included UNM's own draft reconsideration policy in our analysis. Our analysis and findings are based on policies accessed in fall 2023, and we acknowledge that both draft and public policies may have changed since we collected our research sample.

Policy Content Analysis

We conducted an initial review of the identified policies. The review categories were close-ended questions based in part on the ALA *Intellectual Freedom Manual* "Policy Checklist—Reconsideration of Challenged Resources" recommendations and the ALA "Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries."[39] The following questions guided our review:

1. Does the policy allow reconsideration of materials?
2. Is a procedure described?
3. Is there a reconsideration form?
4. Are guiding documents referenced?
5. Is there a date?

Asking the preceding questions allowed us to determine levels of alignment between extant policies and best practices described in both the manual and the toolkit. Question No. 1 functioned as an inclusion criterion; if a rule or process was described, then we could treat the statement as a reconsideration policy and proceed with the following questions. Question No. 2 was informed by guidance in both texts to outline a clear procedure that stated how users can make a reconsideration request and what would happen after a request was made. Question No. 3 captured whether libraries provided a form for users to make requests. Professional guidance suggests the use of a form to collect consistent information. Question No. 4 allowed us to record what outside documentation or statements libraries used to give context to the reconsideration process, as suggested. For Question No. 5, the manual states that selection policies should include information on how often they are reviewed. Although this guidance is not specifically mentioned for reconsideration policies, our group was interested in analyzing how many of the reconsideration policies found had date information for two reasons. First, this is in line with the best practice mentioned in relation to other collections policies above; community members have context for how recent these policies are and when they might be revisited and possibly revised. Second, we wanted to know how many reconsideration policies were developed very recently, perhaps in response to the national increase in resource challenges.

We conducted a close reading and analysis of each document instead of formally coding due to the small number of reconsideration policies identified through our protocol (N = 21) and their short length. Brummett defines close reading as "the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings."[40] Following Paul and Elder's fundamentals of close reading, we took note of the important ideas of the reconsideration policies.[41] Keeping in mind our purpose to examine reconsideration policies in the current moment, we "read in different ways in different situations for different purposes" to grasp the themes betwixt and between the different policies and put this in conversation with "the author's purpose of writing," in this case academic libraries and their proactive response to library resource challenges.[42] The policies varied in length, from a few sentences to more than a page. We organized our analysis based on the categories detailed above from our initial quick review and fleshed them out. Two members of the research team reviewed each document separately. They then met to discuss each policy and come to consensus on what stood out, noting themes or anything of interest along the way.

Results

Summary Findings

Our final sample included twenty-one reconsideration policies, representing only 20 percent of academic ARL libraries in the United States. Of these, sixteen (76 percent) were standalone policies and five (24 percent) were part of a broader collection policy document. We identified sixteen reconsideration policies using our initial search protocol. We also included UNM's own draft policy. We then emailed the remaining eighty-six institutions seeking reconsideration policies due to our inability to find them on public websites. We received fifty responses from librarians saying their institution

does not have a policy, and thirty-two did not reply after two attempts at contact. Two institutions sent formal policies that we did not identify with our search methodology, and two more sent draft policies in development. A summary of the quantitative findings relative to the quick review categories detailed in our methods is available in figure 1.
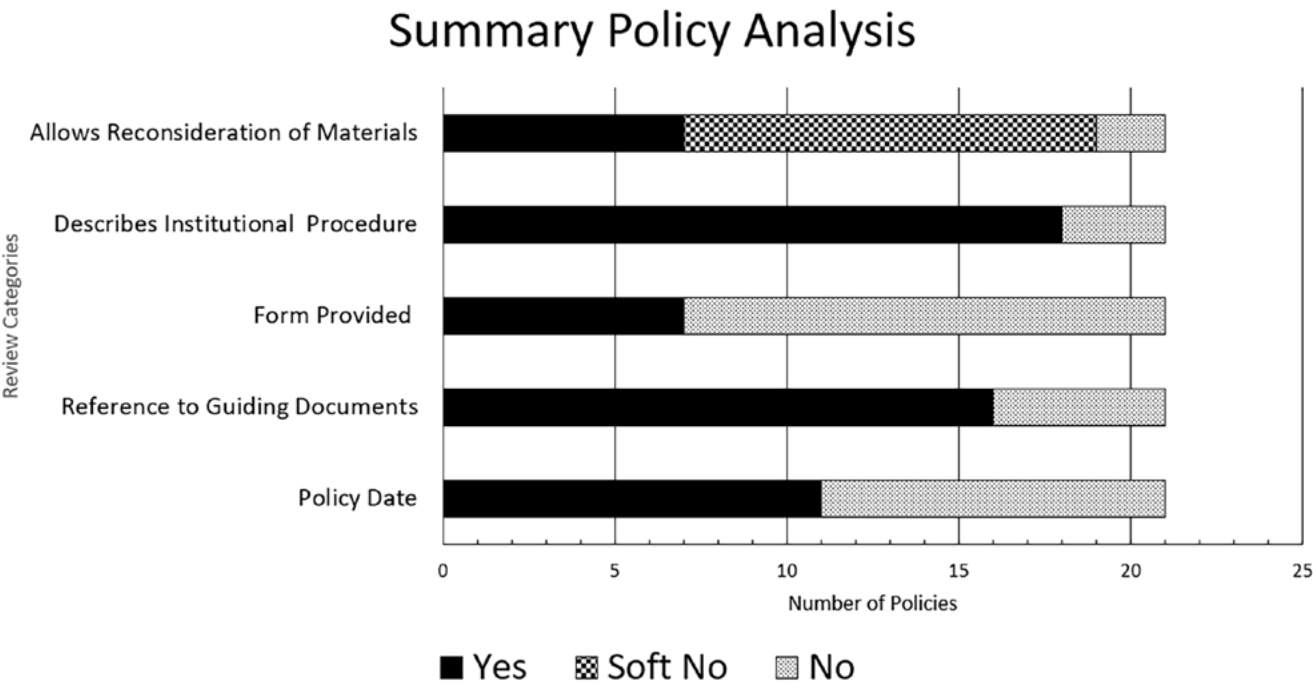
Summary Policy Analysis

Figure 1. Summary policy analysis: Key elements of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Manual's "Policy Checklist—Reconsideration of Challenged Resources."

Only seven policies (33 percent) directly stated that they allow reconsideration of materials, and two policies (10 percent) expressed a clear rejection of reconsideration. The twelve remaining policies (57 percent) expressed what our team categorized as a "Soft No," which we discuss in detail below. Nearly all policies (eighteen, 86 percent) described a clear institutional procedure for handling reconsideration requests or challenges, but only seven provided a public form for requests. A strong majority (sixteen, 76 percent) of the policies we analyzed mentioned or link out to guiding documents that informed their decision-making. These included internal collection policies, library or university mission statements, and policies from ALA and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), which are further explored in the "Supporting Statements" section below. Of the eleven policies we analyzed with dates present (52 percent), six were created or revised since 2022, which follows the recent upward national trend in resource challenges. The proportion of public and private institutions that had reconsideration policies was similar.

Broadly, the policies in our research sample exhibited high variation in content and structure, although there are a number of relatively standard elements and themes. The remainder of our results address the close read portion of our analysis, where we explore the emergent themes from the policy

documents in our research sample. These themes are informed by our review categories, but they primarily highlight nuances and points of confusion across policies.

Policy Framing

The theme "Policy Framing" speaks to the different reasons institutions expressed for anticipated challenges to resources. Many policies had preambles that included context they felt necessary to justify their policy (more on this in "Reliance on Justifications" theme). These preambles often included speculation about who might make a challenge (e.g., producers, donors, faculty) and why (e.g., triviality of the work, offensiveness, erroneous conclusions, defamatory content, misstatement of facts, censorship).

There was a spectrum as to how these policies framed a potential challenge. At one end were policies that anticipated challenges due to censorship (i.e., a desire to control what other people access). For example, this title from a draft policy makes explicit the sort of challenges they expected: "Censorship and Intellectual Freedom Challenges." Policies on this end of the spectrum often mentioned censorship, conferring with legal counsel, or used anti-censorship or intellectual freedom supporting statements from professional organizations. These policies often focused exclusively on censorship as the reason for the challenge.

At the other end of the spectrum were policies that framed challenges as due to a problem with the information itself (e.g., outdated information, erroneous content, poor scholarship). The following title is an excellent example of this: "Request for Removal of Materials from the Collections or from General Circulation Due to Allegations of Dubious Scholarship."[43] Policies like this often listed several reasons why something might be challenged. Pejorative or offensive content might be included in the list, but the emphasis of the whole statement was more on the quality of information. For example, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's (UIUC) policy stated that materials will not be "withdrawn from the collections based on allegations of false, misleading, pejorative, or potentially harmful information."[44] As another example, Northwestern University's policy focused on the producers or owners of the information who might make challenges rather than a general audience—"authors, creators, or collectors"—and acknowledged that they may "misstate facts, reach erroneous conclusions, or make claims that may . . . be hurtful to individuals or lead future researchers astray."[45] Moreover, they asserted that libraries are not fact checkers for their content but may "correct known errors issued by publishers."[46]

Some policies fell in between these two and read more objectively in that they did not prescribe a specific reason for the anticipated challenge. For example, the University of Connecticut mentioned their commitment to intellectual freedom, but the rest of their policy was devoted to explaining their procedure.[47]

Mixed Messages

Many of these policies were not straightforward or easy to understand, hence the "mixed messages" theme. This theme has two subparts: (1) the Soft No and (2) the non-endorsement.

The Soft No

All the policies we reviewed resisted resource removal; no policy enthusiastically invited the community to challenge collection materials. Collection policies or guidelines that explicitly expressed they would not consider requests to remove material were categorized as "No Reconsiderations." There were only two clear No Reconsiderations policies: University of Georgia[48] and Virginia Tech.[49] From the University of Georgia's policy: "The UGA Libraries do not remove, at the request of an individual or group, material which has been selected for the collection according to criteria in the Libraries' stated collection policies."[50] By contrast, some policies clearly allowed reconsiderations. Brigham Young University (BYU), for example, concisely explained why their collection may contain items their community might object to and then provided a reconsideration form.[51]

But within the language around resistance to resource removal, some policies were more straightforward than others about whether they allowed reconsideration requests. This dynamic led to some policies that straddled statements that material would not be removed or withdrawn with a clause that then offered recourse for challenging material. We classified such porous policies as a "Soft No." These read like a No Reconsiderations at first glance, but upon closer inspection, they left wiggle room for a reconsideration request to be made. Soft No policies often presented strong language against removing items or entertaining reconsideration requests, but they still provided a way for someone to make a challenge.

Soft Nos made up the majority of policies. These policies would say something like "most requests will be declined," or they would consider opinions but will "never" remove something by request; however, they then provided a reconsideration form or an email contact and laid out a procedure for managing reconsideration requests. Tulane Libraries, for example, "do not routinely add or withdraw, at the request of any individual or group, material selected for the collections."[52] The "routinely" puts this statement into the Soft No category.

Other policies included a sentence about adding a note to the item or the record: We will not remove the item, but we will add a note. The University of Florida provided a good example: "The Smathers Libraries may choose to document the perceived problem . . . in the catalog record and possibly also in or on the item itself."[53] UIUC stated that they will not withdraw items from the collection "based on allegations of false, misleading, pejorative, or potentially harmful information."[54] They go on to say that there may be "specific challenges of merit" and give a procedure. They do not elaborate what might constitute "merit." Northwestern similarly stated they will not withdraw an item: "Our policy is that materials acquired by the Libraries stand as published."[55] In the next sentence, however, they stated that they "have created a process to engage in a dialogue around the immediacy of access to potentially harmful collections" and urged patrons to contact them if they "encounter images, language, or other

content [they] consider harmful, offensive, or inappropriate."[56] They did not explain the goal of this dialogue, though. The phrase "immediacy of access" hints at an access restriction of some kind in place of resource removal.

The Non-Endorsement

Non-endorsement clauses were also common among our sample. In this case, "non-endorsement" means that inclusion of an item in the collections did not constitute an endorsement of those ideas by the library or institution, for example, "Appearance of a resource in the collections or on display in the library environment does not necessarily mean that the Libraries advocate or endorse the ideas or statements found in that resource."[57] Although this makes sense to librarians and is included in the ALA "Freedom to Read Statement," it might be unclear for the community. Because the community might think of libraries as spaces of democratic knowledge that lie outside of critique, a statement like this might be interpreted in different ways. To patrons, it might seem like librarians choose the books and then cede responsibility for them when they are in the library. A disclaimer like this may have been intended to educate patrons about the paradoxical relationship of libraries to their books: Although librarians actively build collections, they are not responsible for the ideas the collections hold. Some of our materials may be viewed as problematic, but we keep them for a variety of reasons. To do otherwise would be censorship.

Reliance on Justifications

Many of the policies had long preambles that made it difficult to understand their actual stance on collection reconsideration. These preambles were the justifications or explanations giving context to the actual policy. They often contained two functions: the first was to explain the purpose of an academic library, and the second was to cite values and statements from professional organizations that supported the library's own values.

The Role of an Academic Library

There was nothing surprising about the role of an academic library. Library items were necessary for teaching, research, learning, free expression, and creativity. Large research libraries have a stewardship and preservation duty; several policies emphasized the importance of not interfering in the publication record or mediating the scholarly conversation. Diversity, accessibility, and "equitable access to information" were also identified as important for an academic library in our sample.[58] Intellectual and academic freedom were frequently mentioned as well.

Supporting Statements

Policies relied heavily on statements from organizations outside of the library to support their stance. Although most policies referenced at least one guiding ideal or document, some referenced several, with the highest number being seven. The most referenced statement was the ALA "Library Bill of Rights."[59] The ALA "Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries" and the ALA

"Freedom to Read Statement" were also cited several times.[60] Statements that were cited only once were the American Association of University Professors academic freedom statement, the ALA "First Amendment and Censorship Statement," the ALA "*S*tatement on Book Censorship," the ALA "Freedom to View Statement," the ACRL "Statement on Academic Freedom," and the ALA Policy Manual.[61] One library cited the First Amendment of the US Constitution. BYU cited their religious doctrine.[62] Several referenced institutional guiding documents such as collection development policies, mission statements, and institutional policies.

Varying Procedures

All but two policies included some explanation of a procedure for making a reconsideration request. The procedures for handling a reconsideration request varied significantly, as did their specificity. One commonality was that these reconsideration procedures involved more than one person. In almost every library, decisions were made in consultation with others—mostly within the library, but some also referred to university counsel. Requiring requests to be made in writing was another similarity. Some libraries even required a signed form before they would consider the request.

Those policies that included forms (the minority, 35 percent) had varying levels of difficulty. Some forms were short, requiring only the name of the individual challenging an item, bibliographic information of the item to reconsider, and reason for the challenge. Others had multiple open-ended questions ("Are you aware of any review or criticism of this material by scholarly/literary sources?" "To what in the work do you object? Be specific, cite page numbers and quote exact passages").[63]

Borrowed Language

This last theme is unsurprising given the culture of sharing among libraries; policies often borrowed language from each other to varying degrees. A few phrases showed up multiple times. One was a variation of "The Library occasionally receives requests from the producers or previous owners of library materials in all formats that the Library return, destroy or delete particular items that have already been acquired."[64] The other phrase was a variation of "materials acquired or produced as part of the Libraries' collections will not subsequently be withdrawn based on allegations of false, misleading, pejorative, defamatory, offensive, or potentially harmful content."[65] The last one was "The library may choose to document the perceived problem that generated the request for return or withdrawal to inform potential users in the catalog record and possibly also in or on the item itself."[66] We did not determine the originator of these phrases, although several policies referenced Cornell University's policy as inspiration.

Discussion

Our analysis reveals more than just the anatomy of the reconsideration policies in our study. The themes we identified in policy content have implications for the relationship libraries want to cultivate with their communities. In our discussion, we explore the subtext of our findings.

Soft Nos and Conflict Relationship Management

The Soft No category takes a number of forms and enables libraries to make versatile decisions based on their specific goals and contexts. Broadly, the collection of Soft Nos suggests that on one hand, ARL libraries do not want to remove books from their collections, but on the other, they also want to keep dialogue open with their communities. What works for one library, however, does not necessarily work for another. Some institutions, like Northwestern, indicated that they may want a chance to respond to their community about reconsideration requests. Others, like UIUC, anticipated that some challenges may be valid but wanted to be clear that those cases are rare. In other cases, like the University of Florida, a library would not remove an item from the collection but might have added a contextual note. Ultimately, many of these Soft Nos hedged the library's stance. Although they provided space for recognizing nuance and inviting dialogue, they were not necessarily edifying to the policy reader.

The use of reconsideration policies, and in particular those that fall into the Soft No category, may be seen as a conflict management strategy. As organizations seek to address disagreement or conflict with the public, they can take a spectrum of advocacy and accommodation positions.[67] The reconsideration process allows libraries to recognize nuances in collection strategy and find balanced approaches to addressing community needs. In the event of a challenge, the use of reconsideration policies supports organizational efforts to achieve a collaborative stance that both advocates for library values and is attentive to community needs. In contrast, libraries that do not have reconsideration policies may not be able to advocate as strongly for library values and may unduly concede to requests to reduce material access. Libraries that take a more competitive No Reconsiderations stance may appear less open to feedback and miss opportunities to address community needs through dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. Northwestern's policy was an example of a collaborative conflict management strategy. They stated they will not remove items, but they have a "process to engage in a dialogue around the immediacy of access to potentially harmful collections."[68] Although the purpose of this dialogue could be more explicit, it was clear that Northwestern was trying to connect with its community in this policy.

Cautionary Labels

As an alternative to item removal, some of the reconsideration policies offered the option to put a note in the record or item, depending on the situation. Emory's policy was more specific about when a note would be placed, saying they "may document and reference the objections raised regarding the materials, including adding any corrections, errata, warnings or notices about inaccurate information, to the catalog record or on the item itself."[69] The University of Florida, by contrast, stated that they "may choose to document the perceived problem that generated the request for return or withdrawal to inform potential users in the catalog record and possibly also in or on the item itself."[70] Libraries need to be thoughtful about what they mean with statements like this. Under what circumstance will they include a label and what will the label say?

The ALA "Labeling Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" distinguishes two types of labels: (1) "view-point neutral directional aids" and (2) "prejudicial labels."[71] Directional aids "are a convenience designed to save time" like stickers indicating genre. Prejudicial labels are content warnings: "Prejudicial labels are designed to restrict access, based on a value judgment that the content, language, or themes of the resource, or the background or views of the creator(s) of the resource, render it inappropriate or offensive for all or certain groups of users."[72] ALA provides a stern warning about prejudicial labels, calling them "a censor's tool."[73] The ALA and the Association of American Publishers' "Freedom to Read Statement" also specifically warns against adding labels: "[A label] presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine."[74] Virginia Tech was the only library in our sample to make a statement against adding such labels: "[The principle of academic freedom] includes the rejection of practices that . . . involve the prejudicial labeling or rating of library materials."[75]

Antelman also discusses the implications of any content warning, focusing on the labels "potentially offensive" and "harmful."[76] For Antelman, "potentially" is a key qualifier that "makes explicit the subjectivity" of what is offensive; the reader decides what offends them.[77] By contrast, "harmful" as a label indicates the library "is claiming a negative impact on the reader."[78] They state: "The move from offense to harm shifts responsibility to the library for the negative mental state readers may experience based on their own sensibilities (they took offense) and acknowledges the offense as both real and damaging."[79] If a library acknowledges something is harmful, they should be prepared to take responsibility for that harm, which might run counter to free speech and intellectual freedom.[80]

We have ongoing questions about adding extra information into the record or item. On one hand, we can imagine a scenario where labeling is one way to be responsive to the community. For example, perhaps a library wants to indicate that a book contains something that is culturally sensitive.[81] Adding a label that indicates a book contains images of human remains, for example, can certainly be a directional aid that gives extra information to the reader without being prejudicial. On the other hand, we could imagine groups abusing this to make political statements. Where are the boundaries? How do we define community needs? How do we distinguish harm from offense?

Missing Pieces

We noticed some points were largely absent from the policies in our analysis. First, very few institutions defined who could participate in a challenge. This may reflect the orientation of the public institutions in the set of policies we identified, which are more likely to serve public audiences than their private counterparts. One institution's reconsideration form required authentication to access, so this library limited reconsideration requests to their current students, staff, and faculty, although the policy itself did not detail a specific limit for community requests. We can imagine a scenario where a library would want to hear from someone outside the campus community about something in their collections.

Second, none of the policies we examined included what a successful challenge would entail. We saw examples of what happens if a challenge is unsuccessful (e.g., it will not be eligible for reconsideration

again). It may be that removal or restriction procedures are detailed in internal documents. This could also be another indicator of libraries' unwillingness to remove books or a tacit acknowledgment that a successful challenge is unlikely.

Limitations

Although our study provides an important survey of reconsideration policies in ARL libraries, we recognize limitations to our approach. We looked at a small subset of academic libraries in the United States, and we cannot expect our results to be generalized to the academic library community more broadly. Collection management at ARL libraries is often different than at other types of academic libraries; small regional universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges likely have different collection priorities, smaller budgets, and limited staffing. Further research is needed to understand the landscape of preparedness for book and resource challenges at other types of academic libraries.

Despite our thorough process, it is also possible that we did not capture every policy used by ARL libraries to field reconsideration requests, which would give an incomplete picture. The rate of reconsideration policy presence in our sample—20 percent, with only 5 percent as part of a broader collection development policy—is lower than the findings of Tokarz, who identified 28.7 percent of R1 library collection policies on public websites to have a section on resource challenges and intellectual freedom.[82] Though our studies looked at different groups of institutions—ARL versus R1—there is substantial overlap between them. The discrepancy could be due to our search terms or how we defined a reconsideration policy, which may merit additional investigation between the two research samples.

Conclusion

Our results provide clarity on research library preparedness to handle material challenges. Given the low proportion of reconsideration or challenge policies identified from institutions in our research sample, it is likely that many large research libraries are unprepared to effectively respond to collection challenges. This may be due to an assumption that the purpose of large research libraries to support academic research and teaching and to maintain the scholarly record exempts them from reconsideration requests; this includes the possibly that challenges may occur but are not taken seriously by a library, a finding from Oltmann.[83]

The wide variation in policy content evident among our research sample also suggests that reconsideration policy norms in ARL libraries are still in development. Academic library collection management and purposes differ from public or school libraries, where resource challenges are a more longstanding and public issue, so it is logical that policy needs for academic libraries, and in particular large research libraries, would look different. Our findings will help inform the creation of reconsideration policies that serve institutional priorities and values at academic libraries of all sizes. As a community, we would benefit from heeding the calls from over three decades of challenge and reconsideration policy researchers in academic libraries to create or update our policies related to censorship and collection challenges.[84] Our team joins this recommendation, and we additionally

implore the academic library community to develop reconsideration policy standards for academic libraries to make effective policy development more accessible in a higher education context. After our close reading of policies through the present study, we present a few recommendations to complement those found in the ALA *Intellectual Freedom Manual* "Policy Checklist—Reconsideration of Challenged Resources."[85]

Academic Library Reconsideration Policy Recommendations:

1. Explicitly allow reconsideration requests by having a public policy. The ALA recommends this, and we want to emphasize that this is best practice for academic libraries as well.
2. Be clear and do not hedge. Keep the language simple and straightforward. Do not get bogged down in the justifications.
3. Embed this policy within your collection development policies. This gives your policy context. We noticed some of the policies that were embedded could skip much of the preamble because it was already covered in the greater collection development policy.
4. Opt for an easy form. Do not make your community jump through unnecessary hoops. Your ability to do this, however, might depend on your library's political climate. Is your university supportive of library decisions? Does your state have laws or bills pending about divisive concepts?
5. Assign someone the responsibility of reporting challenges to the ALA. This does not need to be in your public policy, but we recommend including it in internal guidelines so someone is responsible for this step. Many academic librarians may not realize they should report challenges. You can report to ALA using this form: https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report.
6. Use a strong supporting statement relevant to academic libraries. We recommend the ALA "Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries" because it references the "Library Bill of Rights" but contextualizes it specifically for an academic audience. We also recommend the ALA "Freedom to Read Statement." In our opinion, it is the strongest anti-censorship statement and covers many of the points made in preambles.

We have also created a template reconsideration policy for academic libraries based on the above recommendations, which can be tailored to any institution. It is located in the appendix and is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

Appendix

[Replace the information in brackets to suit your institution]

Academic Library Collection Reconsideration Policy

Library Mission Statement: [Insert the appropriate mission statement here]

Reconsideration Guidelines:

[Your institution] Collection Development Guidelines are based on the research and instruction needs of [your institution]. The library uses the American Library Association's "Intellectual Freedom

Principles for Academic Libraries" and the "Freedom to Read Statement" (https://www.ala.org /advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/intellectual; https://www.ala.org/advocacy/int freedom/freedomreadstatement) as guides to ensure that a wide breadth of materials is available to the [your institution] community. Request for reconsideration of materials follows the rigorous process below:

1. An individual completes the reconsideration form.
2. The request is reviewed by the [designated leader, e.g., director of collections, collections coordinator, etc.] with the appropriate [designated advisors, e.g., collection advisory group, relevant subject liaisons, collection specialists, etc.].
3. These librarians submit a recommendation and the submitted reconsideration form to the [administrator] for review.
4. The [administrator] makes the final decision, ensures necessary actions are taken, and informs the individual in writing within 90 days of initial request, barring unexpected staffing changes.

NOTES:

a. The item being reconsidered remains available to the [your institution] community during the review.
b. The [administrator]'s decision is final.
c. The [designated leader] maintains a file of all reconsidered items that includes the title, date challenged, date resolved, and disposition.
4. Please direct any questions about this policy to the [designated leader].

Reconsideration Form:

Note: Materials will not be reconsidered without a complete form.

1. Your name:
2. Your email address:
3. Your phone number:
4. Your university affiliation:
   ◦ Faculty/staff
   ◦ Student
   ◦ Community Member
   ◦ Other: _____
5. Title of Work:
6. Author/Creator:
7. Stable URL/Permalink or Call Number:
8. What are your specific objections to this work? Please include any page numbers/time stamps.
9. What do you want to happen to this work?

Reconsideration Report (Internal):

Title: _____

Author: _____

URL/Call Number: _____

Resources Consulted: (include policies, articles, reviews, etc.)

_____

Materials Reconsideration Recommendation to Administration:

_____

Justification and comments: (include majority and minority positions)

_____

Material reconsideration reviewed by: _____

Date: _____

Administration's decision: _____

Date of challenge notification sent to ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom ([designated leader]) https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/report: _____

[Date of adoption]

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Contributor Role Taxonomy

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AI Chatbots and Subject Cataloging
A Performance Test

Brian Dobreski and Christopher Hastings

Libraries show an increasing interest in incorporating AI tools into their workflows, particularly easily accessible and free-to-use chatbots. However, empirical evidence is limited regarding the effectiveness of these tools to perform traditionally time-consuming subject cataloging tasks. In this study, researchers sought to assess the performance of AI tools in performing basic subject heading and classification number assignment. Using a well-established instructional cataloging text as a basis, researchers developed and administered a test designed to evaluate the effectiveness of three chatbots (ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot) in assigning Dewey Decimal Classification, Library of Congress Classification, and Library of Congress Subject Heading terms and numbers. The quantity and quality of errors in chatbot responses were analyzed. Overall performance of these tools was poor, particularly for assigning classification numbers. Frequent sources of error included assigning overly broad numbers or numbers for incorrect topics. Although subject heading assignment was also poor, ChatGPT showed more promise here, backing up previous observations that chatbots may hold more immediate potential for this task. Although AI chatbots do not show promise in reducing time and effort associated with subject cataloging at this time, this may change in the future. For now, findings from this study offer caveats for catalogers already working with these tools and underscore the continuing importance of human expertise and oversight in cataloging.

A s with many areas of practice, the cultural heritage domain has shown increasing interest in the use of AI in recent years, particularly in libraries. Gupta and Gupta noted this rise in interest, as well as the potential for libraries to experiment with their use in existing workflows for a variety of areas, including reference, collection management, and reader's advisory.[1] Practitioners in library cataloging spaces are also now demonstrating an interest in leveraging AI in their work. AI-based open source and vendor-backed tools aimed at catalogers and their workflows are beginning to emerge.[2] For now, though, currently available large language model (LLM)–based chatbots such as ChatGPT are appealing here because of their accessibility, their low barriers to use, and their capability to process and generate text information. A recent survey of academic libraries found that more than 50 percent of respondents reported using an AI chatbot in their cataloging work.[3] As Inamdar observed, AI tools hold great potential for metadata tasks, but significant concerns about quality and reliability of their output remain.[4] This has led to the emergence of some exploratory testing of AI tools' ability to perform library cataloging.[5]

One of the most challenging and time-consuming parts of producing library metadata may be subject cataloging: the analysis of a resource's "aboutness" and the assignment of corresponding subject

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headings and classification numbers.[6] This task not only requires a cataloger to quickly comprehend an often complex resource, but also fluency in the formal and intricate systems used to represent subject and genre in library data. Systems such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), Library of Congress Classification (LCC), and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) are widely used throughout libraries in the United States and elsewhere but come with high learning curves and typically require specialized education, training, and practice to achieve proficiency.[7] If effective in performing and supporting this kind of work, freely available AI tools such as chatbots hold the potential to reduce the high time and effort costs associated with subject cataloging. The potentials for AI subject cataloging remain relatively untested and underexplored, though the present study is aimed to address this gap.

In this article, researchers present the results of a performance test of three free AI chatbots' capabilities to conduct subject cataloging tasks. Specifically, using a well-established instructional cataloging text as a basis, researchers developed and administered a series of exercises to gauge the ability of OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, and Microsoft's Copilot to produce appropriate LCSH, LCC, and DDC headings and numbers. The goal of this study was to capture the state of AI subject cataloging at this moment and explore the current potentials for chatbots to complete common library subject cataloging work. The findings presented here add further empirical evidence into discussions concerning the quality and reliability of AI-performed metadata work. In addition, the authors present a documented and replicable test that can be used again to assess AI subject cataloging with future versions of these and other AI tools as this technology continues to develop.

Literature Review

The public premiere of AI chatbots such as ChatGPT piqued the interest of many throughout the international library community. Research into the applications and implications for libraries is just beginning to emerge, although it is likely to grow as libraries and their stakeholders are now showing greater awareness of AI and its possible roles in library work.[8] A review of the available literature shows much discussion of the potentials for AI, for example, as in Inamdar's exploration of the possible impacts of AI tools on library workflows, or Chhetri's SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis on AI and libraries.[9] The impact of AI on libraries' information literacy work is also prominent.[10] Actual case studies of AI implementation are, however, somewhat less prevalent. Rodriguez and Mune offer an interesting example with their overview of the development and deployment of an AI chatbot for reference services at San Jose State University.[11] Other recent cases of AI implementation in libraries show the range of work this technology is beginning to touch on. This includes search functions that recommend books based on statements rather than traditional searches, AI personalities imitating real-life figures to teach students, and translation of archival manuscripts.[12] That these examples vary so widely clearly demonstrates librarians' interest in adopting AI to facilitate all manner of their work.

Regarding library cataloging work, no well-documented case studies of integrating AI into active, existing workflows were available, although the community's desire to explore and experiment with this

practical application is clear.[13] A recent survey published by Primary Research Group sought to discover how prevalent AI use was in the workflow of catalogers at twenty-six universities. Of the universities that were contacted, two reported using Google's Bard AI (now Gemini), four reported using AI-enabled Bing (Microsoft Copilot), and thirteen reported using ChatGPT in their workflow.[14] It should be noted, however, that many respondents felt that these tools did not actually increase their productivity. Even so, catalogers' experimentation with AI in their daily work is likely to continue, despite warnings on the dangers of the unreliability of AI tools for such tasks.[15]

Such unreliability is apparent in the handful of documented tests of AI for cataloging work. Breeding prompted ChatGPT for MARC and BIBFRAME records for a specific book, and while the results looked convincing, closer inspection revealed significant fictitious or inaccurate information.[16] This is not surprising given the well-known tendency for AI chatbots to "hallucinate," that is, invent incorrect information.[17] Even so, Breeding felt that such tools, with the correct prompting and oversight, could still be of some use to catalogers.[18] Brzustowicz also put ChatGPT to the test in creating MARC records, finding the results more promising but also recommending that ChatGPT be used only in conjunction with cataloging professionals who could recognize and correct the mistakes.[19] It should be noted, however, that both the methodology and validity of this study has faced criticism from members of the cataloging community.[20]

Testing focused specifically on subject cataloging tasks is less well-documented. Of note is a 2023 study by researchers at Oklahoma State University looking at the reliability and usability of ChatGPT to harvest keywords, assign classification numbers, and choose LCSH terms.[21] This study was relatively small in scale, asking ChatGPT to create three DDC numbers and three LCSHs for a book about trade in ancient Rome and then asking ChatGPT the same questions three months later. The results were underwhelming: of six DDC numbers generated, only two were usable, with three incorrect and one that did not even exist. For subject heading work, however, ChatGPT proved more reliable, being able to generate valid LCSHs for all prompts.[22] In perhaps the most extensive subject cataloging experiment to date, Chow, Kao, and Li tested the ability of ChatGPT to provide subject headings in response to structured prompts containing titles and abstracts for thirty dissertations and theses; the authors noted the promise of these tools for reducing cataloging time but found validity issues that indicate the need for continued cataloger oversight.[23] These results begin to shed light on the potentials and pitfalls of AI chatbots for subject cataloging, although more robust testing and examination is required.

Methodology

In contrast to previous works, the researchers sought here to test multiple tools for multiple subject cataloging tasks, including subject heading and classification number assignment, through a replicable and well-documented methodology. To do so, the test designed for this study was derived from the second edition of Broughton's *Essential Classification*.[24] This monograph was designed as a beginner's text on subject cataloging, suited for graduate students studying library and information science. Earlier chapters of the book focus on the basics of subject analysis and representation, with subsequent

chapters focusing on the application of popular subject and classification systems. Specifically, chapters 12 and 13 cover the use and assignment of LCSH, chapters 15 and 16 cover the construction of LCC numbers, and chapters 17 and 18 cover the construction of DDC numbers. Within the text of these chapters, the reader is periodically presented with exercises to test their ability to construct and assign basic subject headings and classification numbers. These exercises are designed such that, with minimal prompting, a beginner-level student can assign appropriate headings and numbers to books bearing very descriptive titles, based on title, author, and publication information alone. In using these simple prompts as the basis for the current test, the researchers sought to emulate the basic, easily replicable questions a subject cataloger might face; the lack of further prompt engineering stands in contrast to previous work by Chow, Kao, and Li, the implications of which will be addressed further in the "Discussion" section.[25]

Researchers elected to focus the test solely on LCSH, LCC, and DDC due to the prominence of these particular systems in library cataloging. As such, they selected a sample of exercises across the six chapters identified above. In constructing this sample, researchers looked for exercises designed to yield complete subject headings or classification numbers, attempted to balance the number of questions on subject headings with those on classification, and avoided exercises on overly narrow or specific tasks (e.g., Cuttering names, using specific tables of limited applicability). Table 1 lists the exercises included in the test.

All questions from each of these exercises were adapted with minor alterations into prompts and given to three LLM-based AI chatbots: ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot. These three tools were chosen for their overall prominence and the mention of their use by library catalogers in current literature.[26]

Table 1. Test exercises from Broughton's Essential Classification.

System	Exercises Included	No. of Questions
DDC	17.1, 17.2, 18.6	23
LCC	15.1, 15.4, 16.3	25
LCSH	12.1, 13.1, 13.3, 13.4, 13.5	50

Although premium versions of some of these tools are available, researchers only used the freely available version of each as of May 2024 (ChatGPT 3.5, Gemini 1.0, and Copilot build 2024.5), feeling this would better represent the tools available to all libraries regardless of budget considerations. During the test, each individual question from each exercise was presented as its own prompt, with as little modification as possible. For example, question 4 from exercise 13.4 was given as: "Construct a Library of Congress Subject Heading for the following title: *Chimpanzee: A Topical Bibliography.*"[27] The resulting prompts were thus simple but easily replicable. In total, the same set of ninety-eight questions were asked of each of the three tools.

The test was conducted during May 2024. The entire text of each tool's response to each prompt was saved, totaling 294 responses. Responses were reviewed and compared with the answer key given in the Broughton text. If at least one subject heading or classification number provided by the tool matched the text's answer for a given question, this response was marked as correct (e.g., Chimpanzees – Bibliography). This was meant to reflect the text's requirement of only one heading in response to

each prompt, although this approach presents a limitation that will be addressed further below. In a limited number of cases, researchers judged that a nonmatching response was an acceptable alternative or close enough to count; the details of these situations are specific to each system and are described in the Results section. If no subject heading or classification number provided by the tool was found to be a match or otherwise acceptable, the response was marked as incorrect (e.g., Chimpanzees – Bibliography – Topical – Research). Finally, in some cases the tool returned a response stating it could not answer the prompt, leading researchers to mark the response as a refusal. Regardless of whether a subject heading or classification number was the expected answer or not, researchers attempted to validate it against the corresponding system. This allowed researchers to gauge if returned headings and numbers were, if not correct, at least valid in the sense that they existed and meant what the tool said they did. Checking of headings and numbers was performed using WebDewey, Classification Web, *The Classification and Shelflisting Manual*, *The Subject Headings Manual*, and OCLC's WorldShare Record Manager tool. The qualifications of the researchers to assess the results include previous professional experience as a cataloger, as well as more than ten years of experience teaching graduate cataloging and classification courses.

Results

Dewey Decimal Classification

The tools were given three DDC exercises totaling twenty-three questions. General performance across all three tools was poor, with the majority of responses deemed incorrect. Table 2 summarizes the results of the DDC exercises. To calculate the final grade, researchers included all correct and acceptable answers. ChatGPT was slightly more successful than the other two tools, but still only achieved a final score of 26 percent.

Table 2. AI performance on DDC exercises.

	ChatGPT	Copilot	Gemini
Correct	5	1	4
Acceptable alternative	1	1	0
Incorrect	17	21	19
Refusal	0	0	0
Final grade	26%	9%	17%
No. of valid DDCs	16	14	16
Percentage valid	70%	61%	70%

Although the majority of DDC numbers provided were not appropriate for the specified title, many of the provided numbers were at least valid DDC numbers (i.e., the number exists and means what the tool described it to mean). As shown in table 2, the tools ranged from 61 percent to 70 percent success in this regard. Table 3 provides further details on each tool's incorrect responses, including DDC numbers that were valid but still incorrect.

For all three tools, the most common error was providing a valid DDC number that was too broad, for example, assigning 720 to a book on cathedrals when 726.6 was the expected number. On the other hand, assigning a number that was too specific occurred much less frequently. Another common error was assigning a number for an incorrect topic altogether, for example, assigning a number on legal

offenses against the person (345.025) to a bibliography on capital punishment (016.36466). On several occasions, ChatGPT and Copilot returned numbers that do not exist and cannot be built using DDC tables. Finally, an error specific to DDC construction was the failure to follow number order guidance, including "first of two" order or preference order, which are to be followed when multiple numbers are possible.[28]

Library of Congress Classification

The three LCC exercises comprised a total of twenty-five questions. Again, overall performance across all three tools was poor, and especially so for Gemini, which only provided a correct answer to one question. Table 4 shows the tools' performances on the LCC exercises. To calculate the final grade for this set of questions, researchers included all correct, acceptable, and close answers. Here, close answers were considered any response where the classification number itself was correct while the author Cutter was incorrect. Overall, ChatGPT and Copilot performed slightly better than Gemini. It should also be noted that in two instances, Gemini refused to provide a response, claiming it did not have enough information to assist with the request.

Table 3. Nature of errors on DDC exercises.

	ChatGPT (*n* = 17)	Copilot (*n* = 21)	Gemini (*n* = 19)
Incorrect topic	5	6	8
DDC number does not exist	2	2	0
DDC number too general	7	12	8
DDC number too specific	1	0	1
Did not follow order rules	2	1	2

Table 4. AI performance on LCC exercises.

	ChatGPT	Copilot	Gemini
Correct	2	5	1
Close	2	0	0
Acceptable alternative	1	1	0
Incorrect	20	19	22
Refusal	0	0	2
Final grade	20%	24%	4%
Number of valid LCCs	13	13	3
Percentage valid	52%	52%	13%

Table 5. Nature of errors on LCC exercises.

	ChatGPT (*n* = 20)	Copilot (*n* = 19)	Gemini (*n* = 22)
Incorrect topic	6	12	11
LCC number does not exist	2	0	8
LCC number too general	6	5	1
LCC number too specific	2	0	0
Provided main class only	3	2	2
Provided number range only	1	0	0

In comparison with the results of the DDC exercises, the three tools were less successful in providing valid LCC numbers (see table 4). Whereas ChatGPT and Copilot provided a valid LCC 52 percent of the time, Gemini was only able to do so 13 percent of the time. Gemini was also far more likely to hallucinate nonexistent LCC numbers. This and other kinds of errors observed in the results are detailed in table 5.

Gemini provided nonexistent numbers in response to eight questions, whereas ChatGPT did so for two questions. The most common error across all three tools, however, was assigning a number for

an incorrect topic. For instance, when asked to classify a book on jobs in ancient Rome (HD4844), Gemini's response suggested it be classed with books on the history of Egypt at DT57. As with the DDC exercises, the tools were more likely to assign an existing LCC number that was too general or broad rather than one that was too specific. Assigning only the main class was another error encountered in all three tools' responses, for example, assigning simply "BV" as the classification number. In one instance, ChatGPT provided a range of numbers for a single book (TX724-TX727).

Library of Congress Subject Headings

Unlike in the classification number tests, the three tools tended to respond to LCSH questions with multiple possible subject headings. To address this, researchers chose one heading from each response to consider when calculating the test results. If any heading within a response matched the anticipated answer, this heading was chosen. When none of the possible headings matched, researchers chose the closest possible suggested heading, preferring the slightest variations in terminology or subdivision order. When a single closest match was not apparent, researchers chose the first or most prominently recommended heading from the response. The results of the LCSH test, summarized in table 6, are based on these best possible matches.

Table 6. AI performance on LCSH exercises.

	ChatGPT	Copilot	Gemini
Correct	21	4	11
Close	5	1	1
Acceptable alternative	1	0	1
Incorrect	23	45	33
Refusal	0	0	4
Final grade	54%	10%	26%
Number of valid LCSHs	38	18	24
Percentage valid	76%	36%	48%

Final grades on the LCSH test were calculated using all correct, close, and acceptable answers. For the LCSH exercises, an answer was considered close if cataloging software would correct the proposed heading in the course of normal authority control, for example, if a variant term was given rather than the preferred term. Researchers used OCLC WorldShare Record Manager to manually verify these headings were close enough to control to the correct heading automatically. Four refusals were noted, all occurring when using Gemini. Refusal responses simply stated the tool was "not programmed to assist with that" and gave no further information.

Overall, although Gemini and Copilot performance remained poor, ChatGPT showed more promise. Its final score of 54 percent was significantly higher than those of the other tools and was in fact the highest score observed by any tool on any of the tests. As shown in table 6, for 76 percent of the questions, ChatGPT was at least able to provide a valid LCSH heading (i.e., the terms existed, were combined correctly if applicable, and meant what they were described to mean). Gemini and Copilot performed worse here, with neither tool able to provide a valid LCSH even 50 percent of the time. While Gemini was most likely to hallucinate LCC numbers, Copilot was the most likely to hallucinate nonexistent LCSHs. Table 7 details these and other errors in the tools' incorrect responses.

Gemini hallucinated nonexistent LCSHs about as frequently as Copilot, whereas ChatGPT did so far less often. Frequent examples of LCSH hallucinations were fabricating subdivisions (Deserts – China – Periodicals – In Chinese) or using a book's title as part of the subject heading (The greatest weddings of all time [with illustrations] – Weddings – Pictorial works). ChatGPT's most common source of error was the

Table 7. Nature of errors on LCSH exercises.

	ChatGPT (n = 23)	Copilot (n = 45)	Gemini (n = 33)
Incorrect topic	1	1	2
LCSH does not exist	5	26	19
LCSH too broad	2	2	3
LCSH too narrow	3	1	8
LCSH lacking subdivision	11	15	0
Incorrect geographic subdivision	1	0	1

omission of necessary subdivisions. For example, for a book with expected heading "Butterflies – Nomenclature," it instead simply provided "Butterflies" as the heading. This occurred in Copilot's responses as well, although it was not an issue for Gemini, which tended to add more, albeit incorrect, subdivisions to headings. Separate from this error was prescribing an overly broad LCSH (e.g., "Biogeochemistry" rather than "Sea-water – Iron content"). Interestingly, ChatGPT and Gemini were more likely to provide overly narrow headings rather than overly broad ones. For instance, for the above-mentioned book on butterflies, Gemini suggested "Butterflies – Nomenclature – History," a level of specificity that was not warranted from the title. Specific to the LCSH tests was an error concerning geographic subdivisions, where a response did not correctly invert a place name used as a subdivision. Finally, suggested LCSHs with completely incorrect topics were relatively rare.

Given the fact that most responses contained multiple possible subject headings for a given book, researchers broadened their examination to include consideration of whether all of these headings were at least valid LCSHs. As shown in table 8, for any given prompt, ChatGPT responded with an average of six possible headings. Copilot and Gemini typically responded with comparatively less, with averages of 2.5 and 2.9, respectively.

Table 8. Overview of all LCSH provided in responses.

	ChatGPT	Copilot	Gemini
Total LCSHs provided	298	125	133
Total valid LCSHs provided	189	65	64
Percentage valid	63%	52%	48%
Average number of LCSHs provided per book	6.0	2.5	2.9
Average number of valid LCSHs provided per book	3.8	1.3	1.4

Across 50 LCSH questions, ChatGPT provided a total of 298 headings, Copilot 125 headings, and Gemini 133 headings. Reviewing all of these headings, researchers determined that 63 percent of all headings provided by ChatGPT were valid LCSHs. Copilot performed slightly worse here, with 52 percent of suggested headings valid, as did Gemini with 48 percent. Thus, although ChatGPT provided an average of six LCSHs per book, only 3.8 were valid. Gemini provided an average of 2.9 headings per book with 1.4 being valid, and Copilot provided an average of 2.5 headings per book with 1.3 being valid.

Discussion

All three tools performed inadequately on the classification number tests. In their responses, the suggested DDC numbers tended to be overly broad or general, or for different topics entirely. In the latter case, some responses included reasoned, although perhaps not compelling, explanations for the chosen number. For a title on the topic of bush walking, for example, Copilot assigned a DDC number for hazardous materials, explaining that the terrain and possible presence of camping fuels would make this activity dangerous. Such explanations, particularly for less obvious cases, could be persuasive and would certainly require the user to doubt and double-check the response to determine that it was incorrect. In LCC assignment, the tools were prone to the same kinds of errors, with many overly broad numbers or numbers better suited for other topics. In several instances, the tools seemed to "learn" an LCC number and attempt to reuse it. The most noticeable case occurred with Copilot, which used HE355 (traffic engineering) for three separate titles on railroads, masonry, and investment planning, respectively. Further consideration of prompt feedback within a session is addressed below. Hallucinated nonexistent classification numbers were a larger concern in the LCC exercises, particularly for Gemini. The DDC responses contained fewer such cases, although due to the differing structures of the two systems, most simple number combinations are likely to mean something in DDC, unlike in LCC, where many gaps and unassigned ranges exist.

Although performance in assigning subject headings was similarly disappointing, ChatGPT was noticeably better at this task than was observed in any other tool/task combination during the test. ChatGPT was able to suggest LCSH headings that were valid 63 percent of the time, far more impressive than Gemini or Copilot, which both stood closer to 50 percent. It should also be noted that ChatGPT provided on average more possible headings for each prompt as well, something users might find helpful because, unlike with classification numbers, most resources will receive multiple headings during subject cataloging. Even so, at a final score of 54 percent, ChatGPT was unable to muster a passing grade on subject heading assignment. Suggested headings from ChatGPT were often too general, and although additional prompting may have yielded a narrower, more subdivided version, follow-up prompting was not included in the present test. Many of the headings provided by Copilot exhibited the same kind of error, which tended to assign overly broad headings without any subdivision. Interestingly, in some instances Copilot took a more faceted approach in its subject heading construction, providing separate terms for concept, place, and form, but refraining from combining them. This suggests Copilot might be more successful in assigning terms from a post-coordinate system, such as Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (FAST), instead. In contrast, Gemini provided too many subdivisions, many of which were hallucinated and placed within square brackets like a qualifier (e.g., "Choctaw legends – [Thunderstorms]"). As such, while Gemini performed slightly better than Copilot overall, it was more likely to provide invalid headings in its responses.

The overall findings of the tests back up Bodenhamer's previous observation that ChatGPT showed more immediate potential for assigning LCSH than it did for classification numbers.[29] Indeed, test results here show that none of the tools performed well on DDC or LCC assignment, and while Gemini and Copilot struggled with LCSH as well, ChatGPT showed some promise. Even so, the free version

of ChatGPT tested here could not be relied upon to provide adequate subject headings for a resource without some cataloger oversight. Although test results do not indicate the use of either of the other tools for subject cataloging at this time, it should be noted that Copilot provided much more additional information in its responses, including websites and other resources to help the user in choosing numbers of headings. This kind of assistance could be useful to catalogers but was not analyzed in the present study and should be followed up on separately. It must, of course, be noted that these tools are likely to continue to develop and improve in coming years and may be more useful in subject cataloging tasks in the future. There is already some evidence to suggest that paid, premium versions of AI tools are capable of performing better metadata work, although this remains to be evaluated.[30]

Based on the present findings, AI chatbots are more likely to be of use in subject heading assignment before other areas of subject cataloging, and it is likely that, in time, AI chatbots will continue to perform better on all the tests run in this study. As such, the broader takeaway going forward may lie less in the quantity of errors observed here than in the quality. As shown above, simple subject cataloging prompts to these tools often return classification numbers and subject headings that are either too broad or are for the wrong topic. Catalogers currently working with these tools would do well to check any suggested number or heading to see: (1) that it exists, (2) that it means what the tool claims it does, and (3) that nothing narrower (i.e., more specific number, more subdivided heading) is more appropriate. AI chatbots may even provide a good starting point for subject cataloging, but their human users currently need a firm understanding of DDC, LCC, or LCSH to be able to effectively assess and adjust any provided suggestions using these systems. This makes it doubtful that these tools can do much to reduce the time and training needed for subject cataloging, at least for now.

As these tools continue to develop, so too does user understanding of how to employ them more effectively. Although this study used only simple, single prompts, other works have explored the use of more robust prompt engineering.[31] In focusing on simplicity and replicability, the present study is limited in its omission of these more sophisticated prompts. Similarly, some immediately obvious errors in chatbot performance such as including the title as a subject heading or repeating a previously used classification number could have been quickly addressed with a second feedback prompt. Although catalogers using chatbots will likely find more effective ways of interacting with them in the coming years, it should be stated that if users would need to spend significant time prompting, re-prompting, and verifying results, it would likely be more efficient in many cases to just perform subject cataloging themselves. Still, these tools may hold potential to assist in subject cataloging, even if they cannot independently complete the tasks. Going forward, the knowledge needed to understand and assess chatbot cataloging should be included in emerging conversations about the kind of AI literacy needed by information professionals.

This study was not without a number of other limitations that must also be noted. The Broughton text served as a wonderful resource, providing a number of questions designed to be answered by a human cataloger with very little contextual information.[32] Even so, it is likely these exercises were meant as more formative assessments rather than summative, with students learning and improving throughout

rather than being graded for overall performance. Also, this test was not designed to measure intra-indexer consistency, that is, how consistent a tool is at providing the same number or heading to the same resource, although this may be worth examination in future study. It was also unlikely to reflect how real users would be interacting with a chatbot, which would likely feature more back-and-forth dialogue. Adjusting or changing a prompt on the fly may have led the tool to a more accurate response in any given instance, particularly those with very obvious errors (e.g., title used as a subject heading). Follow-up user studies with practicing catalogers would provide more insight into how chatbot interactions are playing out in real working settings. Although validity was assessed for all provided headings and numbers, choosing only the best or closest to compare to the answer key may present an overly optimistic view of how these tools fully perform. Finally, as explained above, while premium versions of these tools may have performed better, they require costs that not all libraries are able to pay, particularly in support of what is already resource-intensive work.

Future work could and should address these limitations. In addition, a number of other opportunities exist for further study. This test could be repeated with future versions of these tools to gauge their improvement in performing subject cataloging work. The test could be modified to include some level of prompt engineering focused on instructing the chatbot to follow specific cataloging and classification rules, provide a certain number of headings, or take into account additional information such as summaries or tables of contents. This might better reflect *in situ* cataloger interactions with these tools. In addition, testing other systems for subject cataloging would be of use, particularly for specialized libraries and libraries outside of the United States. Using a simpler system, such as the FAST vocabulary, or a more domain-specific system, such as the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), is another worthwhile direction for research. Comparative testing may also yield useful results. Testing free versions versus premium versions may help libraries decide whether the investment in a paid tool would really be justifiable. Finally, testing could be useful to compare performance among three different groups: AI chatbots, beginning catalogers, and beginning catalogers paired with chatbots. Results of such a study may yield more actionable results for libraries interested in incorporating AI tools into their existing workflows.

Conclusion

Working from a well-established cataloging text, researchers tested three free and commonly used AI chatbots on a series of subject cataloging tasks, finding none of these tools currently adequate in their ability to assign DDC, LCC, or LCSH. These results add further empirical evidence into ongoing conversations about AI and library work and offer a starting point for continuing observation of the development of AI cataloging. Of particular interest are the kinds of errors observed during this study, which provide both caveats for catalogers already working with these tools, as well as indications of the kinds of knowledge still needed by library staff moving forward. Part of the challenge in subject cataloging is, after all, its subjectivity and the lack of any real-life answer key. Fluency in subject cataloging systems remains critical. All of this underscores the continued importance of human labor in subject cataloging work. In the future, AI tools may prove more valuable in assisting catalogers,

especially in subject heading assignment, but continued testing and assessment will be needed to demonstrate this. The present study suggests a number of promising directions for future study, including the repetition of the Broughton test on future versions of these and other AI tools as a means of tracking progress and comparing performance. Careful, ongoing assessment is required to support the responsible incorporation of AI into libraries, not only in subject cataloging, but in all areas of information work.

Notes

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32. Broughton, *Essential Classification*.

Too Broad and Too Narrow
One Library's Experience with Approval Plans

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In 2019 a public urban academic research library decided to implement a subject-based approval plan to assess its viability to replace single-title book ordering. However, due in part to our library's unique collecting needs, the plan necessitated extensive and continuous reviews and revisions, which ultimately prompted us to discontinue the plan. Our experience was illuminating because, in the end, we felt we needed to experiment with approval plans to be sure that we were doing the right thing for our library and its users in continuing single-title purchasing of monographs.

The Auraria Library serves three institutions, the University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver), Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver), and Community College of Denver (CCD). Although some of their collections' needs overlap—all three have education, psychology, and business programs, for example—they also have unique needs. CU Denver, a doctoral university with very high research activity, has a College of Architecture and Planning; MSU Denver, a large master's granting university, has a Department of Social Work; and CCD, a community college, has a veterinary technology associate of applied science degree. Another complexity in the campus's student makeup is that we serve students at all levels, from community college students to doctoral students. Consequently, collection development at Auraria Library entails balancing the unique needs of many departments, schools, and colleges as well as community college students, undergraduates, graduate students, instructors, faculty, staff, and researchers.

In 2018, staff and faculty at Auraria Library began discussing the viability of approval plans to replace single-title ordering. We define approval plans as an arrangement with a supplier—in this case GOBI Library Solutions (GOBI), an EBSCO product—to automatically provide print and/or electronic books to a library based on a carefully established profile of subject and non-subject parameters. This acquisitions strategy gets its name from the idea that the books are already "approved," per the predefined parameters.

The acquisitions and collection development staff and faculty at Auraria Library had been using the book vendor GOBI for well over a decade at the time when we decided to try a large-scale approval plan and had had success using smaller approval plans for collecting award-winning adult and children's books. We knew, in theory, how to manage an approval plan. However, we had always relied on single-title book ordering for the vast majority of our print and e-book purchases. This new project, which, if successful, would replace single-title purchasing at our library, would be a significantly larger approval plan than we had managed in the past.

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A number of reasons motivated the consideration of an approval plan, including: (1) our newly hired director had just implemented approval plans to replace single-title book ordering at her last library to great success; and (2) the head of the department that was at the time doing collection development was looking for ways to reduce the amount of time librarians and staff with collection development responsibilities spent on the tedious process of title-by-title selection. This would, in theory, give them more time to concentrate on other responsibilities. After all, if there was staff time to be saved by using approval plans, it was surely worth exploring further.

Library leadership was enthusiastic to transition from single-title book ordering to an approval plan for many reasons outlined by Rondestvedt: saving time, receiving books more quickly, and saving money.[1] Conversely, many of our librarians with collection development responsibilities were hesitant for reasons listed in the same article: inflexibility in orders, irrelevant materials, profile issues, lack of oversight, and the fact that the "library's collection will look like everyone else's."[2] They were also concerned we would not stay current on new topics and the available books on those topics, which would hinder their ability to support users' needs. Other concerns raised included: (1) whether turning single-title collecting over to an approval plan might result in a less well-curated collection; (2) whether the staff time saved on the collection development side might simply shift to acquisitions personnel in managing the approval plan; and (3) whether our unique situation as a tri-institutional campus necessitated a collection approach that was in some ways simultaneously broad and narrow, which we were skeptical an approval plan could provide. With these concerns in mind, however, all personnel involved nonetheless felt that it was worth trying an approval plan, given their success at other institutions.

Collection Development at the Library

At Auraria Library, collection development has fluctuated in importance over the past decade in terms of time allocated for the work and perceptions about the importance of the work. Collection development responsibilities have been handled in different departments and divisions, conducted by librarians and staff with or without instruction or reference responsibilities, and done by personnel with and without a master's degree in library science. In 2015, the library underwent a major reorganization, and collection development was spread between individuals in two departments, Researcher Support Services (RSS) and Education and Outreach Services (EOS). It was this initial reorganization that spurred conversations about implementing our first comprehensive approval plan (although it would not be implemented until 2019), and it would be a subsequent reorganization that would prompt our reconsideration of whether it was the best strategy for our institution.

The Auraria Campus is a commuter campus with only one official dormitory, and as such, most students live off-campus. For this reason, the library has found that electronic resources best allow us to serve the majority of our students, as they allow easy access to library materials. For the same reason, all three schools had strong online programs even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2019, most of the e-books accessible through the library were from large package deals, including demand-driven

acquisitions (DDA) and evidence-based acquisitions (EBA) programs, rather than single-title purchases. Despite the fact that only a small percentage of e-books were purchased title-by-title, it still amounted to several thousand books and e-books per year.

Auraria Library had a collections budget of approximately $3.6 million in fiscal years (FY) 2020 through 2022, with approximately 80 percent spent on subscriptions. In FY20, $428,500 was allocated for all single-title book purchases, whereas in FY21 and FY22, $370,000 was allocated. This money is used to purchase individual titles selected by librarians as well as book requests from campus faculty, staff, and students. Although the single-title book budget may appear ample, it must support three schools with a combined full-time student equivalent of approximately 32,000. The money does not go far.

The library uses subject fund codes to designate materials that are purchased to support specific subjects. However, only single-title book funds are split by subject—for example, business has a specific amount of book money allocated to purchase all single-title print and e-books. The amount allocated to a given subject is based on the number of students enrolled by discipline, average cost of books by subject, subject need for new content, and book usage. Although Auraria Library is mainly focused on acquiring single-titles in electronic format, there are some departments and disciplines on our campus that prefer print books, which also factors into determining budget allocations by subject.

In addition to single-title print and e-book purchases, part of the library's e-book offerings are provided through e-book packages and DDA and EBA programs, amounting to between five and seven of such packages and programs at a time. We have participated in two e-book DDA programs and three e-book EBA programs, either alone or through consortial deals; however, our participation has fluctuated depending on usage and funds available in a specific year. Therefore, although our users have access to many more books outside single-title purchases, the single-title book funds are the only funds that can be used to purchase individual print or e-book requests and books from smaller publishers or independent bookstores.

The library does not have official liaison roles, but collection development is predominantly based around subjects. However, the 2015 reorganization prompted further changes in the organizational structure of collection development. After this reorganization, not everyone in the two departments with collection development responsibilities conducted collection development, and it was sometimes difficult to balance collection development needs with other departmental goals and individual workloads. Therefore, it was decided in 2017 that all collection development would be consolidated into one department, RSS, and librarians and staff in RSS would take over the subjects previously in EOS. This process took two years to fully implement.

This transfer of duties to RSS entailed certain staff without a background in librarianship to take on collection development responsibilities while also balancing their work related to other areas, such as geographic information services, special and digital collections, and the institutional repository. This also meant librarians who were already doing collection development took on more subject areas, along with their work related to scholarly communication and research support. At the implementation of

the approval plan in 2019, seven library faculty and staff had collection development responsibilities, with an average of eight subject areas per person, although one RSS librarian was doing collection development for as many as nineteen subject areas at one time. This work included communicating with departments on campus, learning about departmental needs through informal and formal channels, and reviewing and selecting print and electronic resources for purchase or weeding.

After the transfer of collection development to RSS, the department began to discuss potential ways to streamline collection development projects and the selection of materials. One idea was to expand our use of approval plans. At the time, single-title book ordering at Auraria Library was located within the Collection Strategies Department, which encompassed all acquisitions personnel. Purchases were primarily based on requests from campus faculty, staff, and students, as well as reviewing slips generated by GOBI. Slips are weekly GOBI notifications that inform librarians when a book matching specific criteria, such as publisher, subject, content type, and call number, were available to review. These slips were based on the same document GOBI uses to create an approval plan; however, instead of the item being automatically shipped (either physically or electronically) library faculty and staff with collection development responsibilities would review the books (or "slips") and decide which ones to purchase.

Literature Review

Historically, approval plans seem to have originated out of twin concerns: budget constraints and staff time. In 1995, Abel estimated that the staff time required to order each single-title print book to be as high as $40 per book at the time.[3] Budget concerns persist as a motivator to consider approval plans; as Horner notes in her 2017 article on the University of Manitoba Libraries' study, "budget challenges were . . . a strong motive to review the performance of UML's approval plan."[4]

When approval plans began, they were heralded as a technological advancement that would revolutionize the workflow of acquisitions and collection development by some, while at the same time being met with skepticism by others. Quinn calls this the "specter of 'surrendering to the vendor'."[5] However, there was also an appeal to the idea that vendors would help libraries with collection development by pre-selecting books and that "library managers . . . don't have to invent the wheel."[6] As approval plans first came to be widely used, they were regarded as time-savers for librarians, as firm ordering was thought to be a tedious, time-consuming task.

Brantley confirms this view in a 2010 article, stating "automation allows for a reduction in human processing and, in turn, faster workflows and a more efficient organization."[7] However, equally consistent throughout the literature is a caveat that books will inevitably slip through the cracks of approval plans and that results might not meet the library's selecting criteria. For example, Brantley notes that history monographs tend to be interdisciplinary, which may cause them to be missed by approval plans.[8] Hart acknowledges this too, noting that "usually there are provisions for returning books the library does not want to add to its collection. Those books retained are paid for, processed, and added to the collection."[9] Moreover, Pickett, Tabacaru, and Harrell contend that, "consistent

review of approval profiles is 'necessary to ensure adjustments occur based on user needs and fiscal constraints.'"[10]

Most of the recent literature on approval plans focuses on measuring usage of titles selected on approval, and although that is not the primary measure we will discuss in this paper, it is clearly an important factor in the continuing participation of most libraries in approval plans. In a 2017 study, Ke, Gao, and Bronicki compared the usage of print monographs ordered through approval and by title-by-title selection.[11] The study authors found that their print monographs ordered on approval had lower circulation than the title-by-title selections.[12] Tabacaru also found that usage of books selected by librarians had higher usage than books on approval and stated, "subject librarians are better predictors of library monographs use than is the approval plan."[13] Of title-by-title selection, Ke et al. also write that "[t]his type of manual selection is highly valued because it incorporates liaison librarians' subject expertise and knowledge, a process considered essential for building a quality and relevant collection."[14] However, usage also depended on the amount of time items were in the collection and subject, as the study reviewed books purchased from FY 2011 to FY 2017. Books that were in the collection longer had higher percentages of use because users have more time to find and access those books. Additionally, the number of books available to purchase as e-books increased between 2011 and 2017.[15]

Tyler et. al. used a slightly different metric to measure success, comparing which type of selection—approval plans, librarians, or patrons—were most heavily cited.[16] For social science materials, they found that "the librarians significantly outperformed both the approval plans and the patrons"; for the sciences "both the librarians and the patrons handily outperformed the approval plans"; and for the humanities "librarians again outperformed the approval plans'. . . the PDA patrons outperformed both."[17] This goes to show that even though approval plans may save time and money in some cases, considering circulation statistics and citations, firm order selections routinely outperform approval plans.

Gao, Turner, and Ke also set out to determine whether firm order books had higher usage, and if so, how to modify the approval profile to increase the usage rate of books ordered on approval.[18] These authors looked more granularly at circulation stats in comparison with many other researchers, as they reviewed their profile in small sections, breaking them down by small call number ranges: for example, looking closely at the range BF 636–637. By looking at circulation stats in such detail, the authors found that different subject areas required different approval and firm order needs.[19]

As recently as 2021, Attebury found at the University of Idaho that circulation statistics for research books did not justify keeping the books on approval, despite the program having been implemented to save time and money on selection of these materials.[20] In fact, University of Idaho librarians eventually elected to keep the profile running as slips only, meaning they would receive email notifications of books that met their approval profile criteria, but the books would not be shipped automatically.[21] This finding, and those of Tyler et al. and Gao et al., beg the question: are we truly meeting our users' needs with approval plans?

The aforementioned studies were all based on print book usage, which does not capture the full picture of approval purchasing or usage, as GOBI and other book vendors also offer e-preferred approval plans, which provide an e-book rather than a print book when one is available. Horner finds that it can prove quite difficult to compare the usage of print books with that of e-books, resulting in a kind of apples-and-oranges comparison that yielded questionable results. It is important, as Horner notes, to exercise "caution in drawing conclusions about the higher number of uses/transactions/sessions of e-books in comparison with print usage."[22] This is something that rang true in our experience with approval plans, as we struggled to capture meaningful usage while receiving both print and e-books on approval.

In addition to concerns of usage and relevance to the collection, many have raised concerns over approval plans being ineffective for acquiring books that fall outside of the historically white supremacist structures of academia. As Monroe-Gulick and Morris note in their 2023 article, the ways in which librarians "collect and acquire information results in bias and unbalanced collections."[23] The literature presented ample evidence that approval plans are not a good tool for capturing small, independent publishers that would help alleviate the centering of colonialist perspectives in the collection.[24] Many found small publishers were not adequately captured on approval, rendering approval plans less effective in these efforts. Pickett, Tabacaru, and Harrell mention that in ARL's 1997 study on approval plans, they found "minimal coverage of small presses and inadequate profiling."[25] Brantley identifies one hurdle to capturing small publishers on approval: that GOBI and other book vendors "require contractual terms that booksellers are unwilling or unable to meet."[26]

In the 2022 article "The State of the Approval Plan in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic," Mihailovic details the results of a survey of academic librarians on the shift in their monograph acquisitions strategy: specifically, the change in their approval plans to accommodate distance learning necessitated by the pandemic.[27] Mihailovic found that some libraries stopped their approval plans, some reduced them, and a small minority made no change to their plan. Among those who stopped their approval plan (ten out of forty-one respondents), at least one respondent cited dissatisfaction with, and low circulation of, the print approval books as the reason for stopping their plan.[28] Interestingly, another respondent decided to discontinue their plan *because* of the staff time it takes—the very thing that approval plans were meant to alleviate.[29]

Studies that reported more benefits than drawbacks in approval plans saw those benefits in e-preferred plans, rather than traditional print plans. Pickett, Tabacaru, and Harrell found benefits when they switched from print approval to an e-preferred plan: "weekly print approval shipments declined, mitigating ongoing space limitations; duplication was minimized, and oversight of e-books by subject selectors and collections personnel has improved."[30] Additionally, one respondent to Mihailovic's survey whose library had an e-preferred approval plan indicated, "Covid hasn't affected our approval plan, but rather underlined its importance."[31]

Overall, the authors' takeaway from the available literature on approval plans is that they require review, assessment, and maintenance. Although they can save time in some circumstances, approval plans do not eliminate the need for oversight by librarians for single-title collecting. What goes largely

unmentioned in much of the literature is the amount of staff time invested in selecting title-by-title and the impact on the quality of the collection if this process is removed. It seems that even in the best-case scenario, review is required or at least recommended as a best practice. Such a review of course requires staff time, and further study would be necessary to determine whether the time saved by eliminating single-title ordering is undone by the time taken to review and correct the results of the plans.

Implementation of Approval Plans at the Library

In 2019, RSS approached the Collection Strategies Department about implementing a comprehensive approval plan and agreed to an introductory meeting with GOBI to discuss a pilot. The licensing and acquisitions manager at Auraria Library oversaw big-picture GOBI activities and therefore took the lead on liaising between GOBI representatives and collection development personnel. Additionally, since our collecting priorities had long been focused on electronic resources, we communicated this to GOBI at the very start to keep in mind when designing our approval plan.

After discussing possibilities with both GOBI and internal stakeholders, we elected to start by moving just one area, business, to approval. In this section, we will refer to books in either format as "books"; however, due to our status as a commuter campus, it should be understood that Auraria Library generally prefers e-books in single-title purchasing, The rationale for moving business first was that the RSS department head had recently been asked to oversee the business collection among many other responsibilities and would not have much time to devote to title-by-title selection. Due to the transition of collection development responsibilities after the reorganization, as well as some upcoming retirements, we would apply similar rationale in selecting future areas to transition.

First, the licensing and acquisitions manager met with the GOBI representative and the former business liaison to map the library's needs to the approval plan. This involved reviewing the list of call numbers for business and any related subjects and determining whether we would like to have books automatically added to the library's collection based on the library's collecting interest in each subject or Library of Congress (LC) call number. We carefully analyzed our campus needs for each area. For example, our business programs do not have a large focus on water transportation (HE380.8-1000) and we excluded that area from the approval plan.

After we completed this process for business, we began to track the business purchases on approval to ensure (1) that books received were appropriate for the library's collection, and (2) that the budget for a specific discipline was not exceeded based on their annual allocation for single-title book orders. After the business approval profile was up and running, the licensing and acquisitions manager began to work with RSS to identify the next areas to transfer to the approval plan. We began to track upcoming areas using a table similar to that shown in table 1. We also began to run monthly reports to help us determine if and when subjects were over or under spent, review the types of books received, and see if there were issues with fund codes. In late summer 2020, the collection development program lead librarian began working closely with GOBI on the approval plan. In the summer 2021, they reviewed the GOBI profile line-by-line to correct mistakes in the fund allocations.

Table 1. Approval transition timeline.

Time	Action
Fall 2019	Business and hospitality transition to approval, modern languages partial transition to approval
Winter 2019	Economics, political science, and public administration transition to approval
Spring 2020	Law, criminal justice, and public health transition to approval; turned off print approval, review slips for print purchases
Summer 2020	History, theater, and international affairs transition to approval
Winter 2021	Human performance and sports and anthropology transition to approval; unsuccessful transition of ethnic studies to approval
Spring 2021	Quick review of full approval plan, pause in adding new subjects
Summer 2021	Combine approval plan and slip profiles
Summer 2021–Spring 2022	Extensive tracking and review of approval purchases
Summer 2022	Approval plan turned off except children's literature award winners

As a result of the campus closure necessitated by the pandemic, print book shipments were halted in April 2020. Although print shipments started again in 2021, the library determined that print books should not be automatically shipped. Auraria librarians had noticed that some titles were published as e-books months after the print book was published, and with e-books preferred over print on our campus, we wanted the option of selecting the e-book option instead at a later date. Therefore, print approval was shut off permanently in late spring 2021, and subsequently, subject areas on the approval plan would need to have slips reviewed for print book purchases.

In the end, thirteen subjects were fully placed on the e-preferred approval plan between summer 2019 and summer 2021: business, hospitality, economics, political science, public administration, law, criminal justice, public health, history, theatre, international affairs, human performance and sports, and anthropology. Our GOBI account was set up to automatically select a 1-user e-book where available, with priority given to EBSCOhost and then Ebook Central (ProQuest). If an e-book was not available through EBSCOhost or Ebook Central, and it matched our approval plan, then the e-book would be purchased through another available vendor. This priority was put in place because of automatic upgrade programs we had with these aggregators, which would upgrade a title from 1-user to 3-user, or from 3-user to Unlimited, if the existing simultaneous usage cap was exceeded. Ethnic studies was scheduled to be added to the plan; however, after much time spent trying to determine the best way to select materials via GOBI's approval plan, we could not narrow it down enough to be successful without excluding topics or overspending extensively. For similar reasons, modern languages had specific authors placed on approval, but it received very few purchases on the plan. We elected not to add any new subject areas to approval between summer 2021 and summer 2022 in order to assess and review the program, at which point we decided to suspend the plan.

When evaluating the success of our approval plan, we made the choice not to look at usage as many other studies have done, primarily because of the difficulties in accurately capturing e-book usage for comparison purposes. As a commuter campus with the majority of our budget dedicated to electronic

resources, we naturally prioritized e-books from the beginning and later turned off print books altogether. Gathering e-book usage would have entailed gathering data from multiple publishers that may or may not have been comparable, as not all vendors use the same usage metrics and could not properly be compared to print usage. Of course, we might have figured out a way to measure usage if we had been on the fence regarding whether approval was working for us. However, for the reasons described below, we felt that we had enough information even before evaluating usage to know the approval plan for single-title books was not meeting our library's needs.

Overview of Purchases

Because of empty positions and extended leaves, Auraria Library waited until January 2024 to do an extensive review of our collections acquired on approval. The collection development program lead librarian pulled a list from Sierra, the library's Integrated Library System (ILS), using vendor codes. When books were purchased on approval, two vendor codes were used—one for e-books and one for print books—and these were combined with a subject code for each subject. Therefore, we were able to analyze the number of books and costs associated with those books for each subject and material type. We then analyzed the books purchased by subject, paid date, cost, and format. From fall 2019 to summer 2022, the library purchased 2,383 books on approval, which included 356 print books and 2,027 electronic books. The total cost was $231,820.24.

Unsurprisingly, as business was the first subject area placed on approval and was allocated the most money of all subjects on the approval plan, at 624 titles it had the most purchases. History, with its broad subject areas, large allotment of money, and preference for monographs over journals, acquired 459 books on approval. However, only 15 percent of history books received from the approval plan were in print format. This was problematic for us because despite prioritizing e-resources in general, there are exceptions, and we knew that our history faculty in particular prefer print books over e-books. Since our approval plan was e-preferred for all subject areas, this did not meet the needs of history faculty.

Economics was not allocated a lot of money, and we were shocked by the number of books purchased (399). We realized, however, that there were errors in the approval plan, and many business books were being shipped using the economics fund code. Hence, the number of true economics books was much lower. Other surprises were that books related to the subjects English language and literature and social work were purchased using fund codes specific to those subject areas, yet these subjects and fund codes were never added to the approval plan.

Business (28 percent), economics (19 percent), and history (14 percent) spent the most amount of money. History books are typically cheaper than business books, so we received more books for the amount of money spent. Business book prices averaged $102, economics $112, and history $72. (See tables 2 and 3.)

The year in which we received the most books was 2021, with a sharp decrease in 2022. This is expected because as a result of overspending, we had to turn off most subjects on the approval plan at the end of 2021 or beginning of 2022. (See table 4.)

Looking closer at the economics spending, between FY 2020 and 2022, economics was allocated $21,280.45 for single-title print and e-book purchases, including books purchased by librarians reviewing slips and selecting items for purchase and requests from faculty, staff, and students. Yet, $44,587.44 was spent on economics books during that same time frame. Meanwhile, business was allocated just over $100,000 and only spent $64,207.45. We addressed the issues in the approval plan that led to charging business books to the economics fund; however, economics was still consistently overspent. Additionally, because the single-title book fund allocations by subject had not been reviewed and redistributed in at least six years, we reviewed these allocations at the end of FY 2020 to ensure subject areas with more book needs, such as history, were allocated more funds.

There were also irregularities in the number of books shipped on approval per subject area. At the start of the approval plan, business books were few and far between. We had to continuously review and edit the business call number ranges in the approval profile for any books to be sent. On the other hand, history was only fully on approval for two years and was allocated $44,377.80 for all single-title book purchases during that time, and $33,047.48 was spent from the approval plan. Although it was not overspent, history faculty submit many book requests, and with those requests coming out of the same pot of funds, little funds remained for faculty requests. Therefore, we grew concerned that we would not be able to purchase requested books that we knew would receive immediate use. We were never fully able to correct or even explain these

Table 2. Total amount spent and number of books received on approval by subject.

Subject	Amount Spent	Books Shipped
Business	$64,207.45	624
History	$33,047.48	459
Economics	$44,587.44	399
Criminal justice	$18,627.38	195
Political science	$16,624.18	179
Public health	$9,966.45	99
Anthropology	$8,758.33	86
Hospitality	$9,950.20	83
International studies	$8,207.94	79
Theatre	$5,862.91	54
Human performance and sport	$3,388.67	36
Law	$2,438.85	35
Public administration	$3,819.62	29
Ethnic studies	$1,484.99	18
Modern languages	$483.20	4
English language and literature	$245.20	3
Social Work	$119.95	1
TOTAL	$231,820.24	2,383

Table 3. Total e-books and print books purchased.

Material Type	Books Purchased	Cost
E-books	2,027	$208,804.91
Print books	356	$23,015.33
TOTAL	2,383	$231,820.24

Table 4. Number of books sent on approval by year.

Year	Books Shipped
2019	81
2020	969
2021	1,176
2022	157
TOTAL	2,383

types of discrepancies, and trying to do so began taking more and more time from staff and faculty in both Collection Strategies and RSS.

Lessons Learned

After consistently working to implement and refine the approval plan for three years, we reviewed the time and money spent on the venture and determined that it had not been successful for Auraria Library. Due to the limited funds and diversity of programs on campus, it was difficult, even impossible, to limit an approval plan to meet campus learning, teaching, and research needs without overspending. On the flip side, when we tried to narrow the collection areas to reflect what we believed we needed, the plan ended up so constrained that no books could get through.

Even after spending days closely reviewing the approval plan for issues, and GOBI subsequently correcting these issues, we would still receive books not relevant to campus and quickly go over the budgets of multiple subjects early in the fiscal year. We had to consistently review the budget for subjects on approval to determine when (not if) the plan would need to be turned off so that a subject did not overspend in one fiscal year. And once the plan was turned off, there was little money left for requests that came from campus users for that subject. We were still reviewing books, just after the money was spent and not before, and we experienced none of the anticipated time savings. Additionally, like Gao, Turner, and Ke found when looking at usage for materials on psychological disorder topics, we know that campus users are more interested in the application of rather than the research on many topics, particularly when related to psychology, social work, and education. Approval profiles make it difficult to de-prioritize research titles, hence single-title ordering is needed to ensure materials with direct applications are acquired.[32]

We also encountered issues with receiving e-books that were well over our set price limit. Our original price cap for an individual e-book was $280; however, we had to lower it to $249 to decrease the number of expensive, and frequently irrelevant, e-books that were being sent. This issue turned into an even bigger one for our firm order acquisitions specialist, who is the staff member responsible for placing print and e-book orders. GOBI's method of reimbursing us for the books that came in over our price limit should have been simple: they would apply the amount as a credit against our next invoice. However, the problem we ran into many times was that the books that came in totaled more than the invoices we were receiving. For instance, our average invoice was only around $600 to $700, but on more than one occasion we received an $800 book, making it very difficult to be reimbursed under GOBI's system. Meanwhile, the firm order acquisitions specialist was still ordering single-title books as normal to support the programs not yet transitioned to approval while we worked to troubleshoot the plan, further negating any staff time we were saving.

In addition to receiving multiple titles that were over our price cap, we also received a number of titles that were completely irrelevant to campus studies, despite our careful selection of subject parameters. For example, in just one month we were sent three different books about train transportation in England. We also had concerns about how the approval plan only enabled us to purchase materials

from large publishers, rather than being able to support smaller, independent publishers as we try to do wherever possible. It is standard practice in collection development at the library to actively research and purchase resources from smaller publishers, and we have ceased purchasing from vendors, publishers, and bookstores in the past that did not meet our standards. As a library dedicated to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, we felt that the inability to purchase from small and independent publishers through the approval plan did not adequately support our mission.

Finally, in terms of library faculty and staff with collection development responsibilities, if a subject was on approval, it was easy to forget to review the few slips that came through, and we were not as aware of what was being published or purchased in a subject for the library. It is difficult to promote a collection when you do not know what is in it. And with the decrease in publications during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were worried the overspending on single-title books on approval would be even higher after normal publishing timelines resumed.

Benefits

The major benefit we found was familiarizing ourselves with the approval plan document itself with the assistance of our GOBI collection development manager. We appreciate our GOBI representative's expertise and developed a closer relationship with them, and as such we have a better understanding of GOBI's capabilities. Additionally, the approval plan document that controlled our slips had historically been reviewed in bits and pieces rather than as whole, and while reviewing the plan for issues, the collection development program lead librarian sat down and reviewed the thousands of rows one at a time. This led us to realize that the plan should be reviewed on a more regular schedule to reflect any changes in campus offerings.

During our time running the approval plan, RSS saw two retirements and one impending retirement whose positions we would not be able to fill immediately due to a hiring freeze from the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, another benefit we found to an approval plan was that we were able to bridge the gap in collection development duties caused by these retirements and let those subject areas run on approval while we re-staffed. After each of these librarians announced their retirement, we were able to quickly shift around which subjects would go onto approval next to accommodate the absence of a dedicated subject specialist.

As we had several new collection development librarians start after we discontinued the plan, we were able to make them familiar with the approval plan document from the beginning so that they could understand and recommend changes to the plan as needed. In fact, the authors feel we have gained some level of expertise in the reading and revising of the approval plan document that controls our slips, which we did not have before. Ultimately, there is now a much higher level of ownership over our slips approval plan among collection development librarians, resulting in even more conscientious selection than before.

Our acquisitions and book ordering workflows also saw some benefits from our experience with the approval plan. Our firm order acquisitions specialist reported less time spent per day checking GOBI for new orders. Additionally, having the subject of business 100 percent on approval was beneficial to this staff member's workflow, mainly because business books can be difficult to find through third-party vendors when they are not available through GOBI. An indirect benefit to the acquisitions workflow that came from the approval plan was that we finally implemented an API to facilitate communication between GOBI and our ILS. The API has continued to be used well after we stopped the plan and has proven to be an improvement in the ordering workflow overall.

A final benefit that did save time was keeping the children's literature award winners on approval. It took the librarian with education collection development responsibilities hours each spring to research and select the awards; as Tabacaru also found, their high usage in children's literature warranted allowing more children's literature to be sent on approval.[33]

Further Changes at the Library

In summer 2022, the library went through another reorganization and the former RSS department was split into two, with collection development moving under the newly named department Collection Development and Strategies (CDS) department. Although there were still a couple of individuals with collection development responsibilities not in CDS, over the following year, with new hires replacing retirements that had not been filled during the COVID pandemic, those responsibilities eventually fully transferred to CDS. This reorganization combined the collection development and acquisitions employees into one department, which spurred our desire to re-evaluate some of the projects the two groups had worked on together, including the approval plan.

After three years spent experimenting with a comprehensive approval plan, we returned to reviewing GOBI slips by subject and resumed our previous workflow of single-title ordering. As mentioned above, usage of the approval books was not a decisive factor in whether we would continue it, owing to several issues that clearly indicated the approval plan was not working for our library. However, looking at book usage of approval plan versus firm orders could be a potential area of future study. The persistent issue of overspending was the most important factor; however, a close second was the fact that managing issues with the approval plan was taking as much if not more time than single-title ordering had been. Our inability to purchase titles specifically requested by our community as a result of the plan being overspent was another important factor. In the end, we felt that all the constant monitoring of and tinkering with the plan was resulting in much more time spent on the approval plan than would have been spent doing our traditional single-title purchasing.

We maintained a handful of our EBA and DDA e-book programs, although budget cuts in FY 2024 and FY 2025 forced us to scale back on these models. We also elected not to explore any new e-book packages or programs, as we wanted to ensure we had funds to purchase book requests and support independent publishers and bookstores. Although our experience with the approval plan was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems clear to us that—as a library focused on electronic

resources and with few funds to dedicate to a well-curated collection—the issues the library experienced with the plan would not have been lessened if we happened to undertake it at a different time. In fact, it may have been worsened if we had had print included in our approval plan because we would have been purchasing more books with the same amount of funding.

We do think that approval plans could save time for a library with a larger collections budget and only serving one institution, as balancing the needs of one institution is simpler than balancing the needs of three. Overall, there do seem to be benefits for staff workflow to be found in approval plans if a library has collecting needs that can be well-defined by LC subject areas and non-subject parameters, and if there are real and pressing issues with a single-title ordering workflow. In our case, however, a careful and considered single-title book-ordering approach has proven to be the best thing for the library's book and e-book collection.

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Developing a Pandemic-Related Mental Health Micro-Collection for an Academic Library

Dee Anna Phares

Academic library patrons dealing with the impact of trauma, depression, anxiety, or addiction spawned or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic require materials that address the unique conditions that have shaped mental health since late 2019. This paper demonstrates how one academic library endeavored to address patrons' needs for mental health resources by developing a "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection. The paper explores the process of creating and curating a small-scale topic-specific collection using a trauma-informed approach and highlights the importance not only of acquiring materials exploring pandemic-related conditions and praxis, but also gathering contemporary texts that provide a record of the historical moment and a window into the minds of a population attempting to cope with a public health crisis that initiated a mental health one. Ultimately, the paper contends that college and university libraries are well-positioned to deliver patron-responsive service to their campuses that promotes well-being and belonging.

During an interview for the television news program *60 Minutes* on September 18, 2022, then-president of the United States Joe Biden declared that "The pandemic is over" while also acknowledging that "We still have a problem with COVID" and that the "impact on the psyche of the American people as a consequence of the pandemic is profound."[1] A piece from *The New York Times: Coronavirus Briefing* was even more explicit, noting that mental health professionals "report[ed] practices filled to capacity" and "patients who had been stable for years . . . are now in need of medication, intensive outpatient treatment or hospitalization."[2] Despite the announcement of the official termination of the COVID-19 national emergency on April 10, 2023, and a widespread inclination to return to "normal" since, the lingering psychological effects of the pandemic are not as easy to shed as an N-95 mask.[3] People dealing with the impact of trauma, depression, anxiety, or addiction spawned or exacerbated by the pandemic—as well as those trained to support and treat those individuals—require resources that address the unique conditions that have shaped mental health since late 2019.

College and university campuses are acutely in need of this kind of support, with numerous studies pointing to increased emotional strain, substance abuse, and even suicidal thoughts among students, staff, and faculty as an outgrowth of greater social isolation, economic and physical insecurity, and technostress.[4] Further, institutions of higher learning require resources because they serve as incubators for mental health professions, providing the training for the next generation of counselors, clinicians, therapists, clinical social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists who will be grappling with the after-effects of the pandemic, and they support the research that informs future practice. Academic libraries, which undergird the instruction and research missions of their institutions, are well-positioned to meet the needs of their campus communities through the development of micro-

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collections focused on the intersection of the person and the pandemic. These resources have the capacity to serve multiple constituencies and multiple purposes—offering materials for classroom and clinical use, as well as providing a foundation for professional and personal research on the mental health effects of COVID-19 and other shared traumas. This paper explores the process of creating such a collection, using a trauma-informed approach, and highlights the importance not only of acquiring materials exploring pandemic-related conditions and praxis, but also gathering contemporary texts that provide a record of the historical moment and a window into the minds of a population attempting to cope with a public health crisis that initiated a mental health one.

Literature Review

In the wake of the worldwide lockdowns that began March 2020, academic libraries immediately began reevaluating and reimagining services, resources, and workflows to ensure that patrons had access to the materials and the assistance they needed. Many studies have explored the continuum of responses. Hinchcliffe and Wolf-Eisenberg's "Academic Library Response to COVID-19" reports on the data collected and shared about the rapidly-changing nature of public services in the early days of the shift from in-person to online.[5] Shin et al.; Lierman, McCandless, and Kowalsky; Norton et al.; and many others deal with the trials and triumphs of information literacy instruction in the age of Zoom and other video conferencing platforms.[6] And Hervieux; Decker; De Groote and Scoulas; Radford, Costello, and Montague; and Vogus examine adaptations to reference interactions, including expanded use of chat and other teleconferencing services for ready reference and research consultations.[7]

Most of the conversations about academic library collection in the time of the coronavirus have focused on the question of *where,* born of a need to bring the campus library to the patron, regardless of geography. More often than not, this has manifested as a discussion about format—with Walsh and Rana; Appleton; França; Becker; Serrano and Fernandez; and Lowe all pointing to the ways in which the pandemic simply expedited the move toward e-resources as digital content became not simply a matter of convenience, but of necessity when physical spaces were closed and physical materials were unavailable.[8] Scholars have also turned their attention to the importance of *how* materials are acquired as a result of COVID-19, with França; Prelitz; Lewis et al.; and Prelitz delving into the promise—and potential complications—of increased reliance on patron- or demand-driven acquisition models of collection development for e-books and streaming video.[9] Levenson and Hess explore the possibilities of collaborative collection development in the post-pandemic world as a way for libraries to move from "building independent collection silos to building and supporting collective collections in a variety of formats."[10]

Less attention, however, has been paid to the subject of *what* specifically is being collected because of the pandemic. Bangani, as well as Babalola, Bankole, and Laoye, discuss the necessity of acquiring credible COVID-19 resources, as well as purchasing and promoting texts about fake news to enhance information literacy and help combat misinformation, such as unreliable material about vaccines.[11] However, most details about the procurement of library resources focused on pandemics—such as

SARS-CoV-2—can only be gleaned indirectly. Publicly accessible COVID-19 research guides and library webpages provide a glimpse into holdings, but as Fraser-Arnott's study notes, most academic libraries' subject guides linked out to content created by government entities or to free e-resource collections temporarily made available by scholarly publishers, as opposed to pointing toward materials available in their own permanent collections.[12] Explorations of college and university library catalogs may reveal holdings on subjects such as pandemics, coronaviruses, communicable diseases, or public health—assuming no institutional login is required to view the results of a search—but only item records that specifically refer to COVID-19 or indicate a publication after December 31, 2019, provide potential evidence of collection development activities motivated by the recent pandemic.[13]

There is, however, evidence for the collection of resources to support mental health both before and after the arrival of SARS-CoV-2. Essentially, the pandemic has hastened the adoption of compassionate and trauma-informed approaches—advocated for by Zettervall and Nienow; Frey and Powell; and Richardson et al.—that were already gaining favor in libraries.[14] Efforts to address the impact of trauma in academic libraries has, understandably, focused on welcoming and inclusive spaces and empathetic and empowering service models, with special attention directed at reference interviews and instruction sessions, as evidenced by the work of Tolley and Nelsen et al.[15] And various scholars, such as Hinchcliffe and Wong; Ramsey and Aagard; and Henrich, Bruce, and Chenevey have explored how adopting a holistic approach to patron needs—including an emphasis on emotional health and well-being—can make academic libraries more successful in serving their campuses, especially as the diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions has increased among college students, faculty, and staff.[16]

Collection is an essential and growing part of that work. Cox and Brewster point to the employment of bibliotherapy and the creation of leisure reading and cognitive behavioral therapy collections in UK academic libraries pre-COVID.[17] Hall and McAlister note that 52 percent of the academic libraries that participated in their "Emotional Well-Being/Mental Health Resources Survey" report having materials targeting these specific well-being needs.[18] And a July 2022 *Against the Grain* article highlights marked increases in college spending (113 percent) and student use (88 percent) of e-books and audiobooks focused on mental health between 2019 and 2021.[19] Although there are collections focused on fostering the mental well-being of patrons, little work is being done on trauma- or pandemic-informed collection. In their conclusion, Cox and Brewster suggest that "the later parts of the pandemic crisis may also lead to shifts in understanding of the need and means of addressing it."[20] This article explores how one library has endeavored to address patrons' present and future needs for mental health resources through the creation of a micro-collection that both supports efforts to understand and cope with COVID-19 and preserve contemporary responses to the pandemic.

Psychological Impact of COVID-19: Campus Needs

There is no current data that would allow for any reliable measure of the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on either college campuses or society at large. More than five years after it first

appeared, the virus persists, and so does the impact on mental as well as physical health—especially for those experiencing symptoms of long COVID, whose "own emergency [was] never formally declared."[21]

Existing research does, however, indicate the pandemic's potential for significant and ongoing psychological effects on college students, since many "already experience[d] depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder symptoms" before being confronted with lockdowns, disruptions to work, school, housing, and daily routines, in addition to dealing with fears about personal safety and mortality. Data confirms that even students without preexisting conditions frequently experienced increased stress and somatization—the physical symptoms of psychological distress—in reaction to the pandemic.[22] Current scholarship has only begun to estimate the potential enormity of the lingering problems as well as the long-term ramifications for a global community processing a collective trauma.[23] Some have gone so far as to declare that the impact of COVID-19 on college students and higher education "is irreversible."[24] Even so, studies suggest that academic institutions can and should "take steps to prevent any further mental health deterioration and promote the well-being"[25] of their students, and that those supporting students must develop "increased, proactive, and comprehensive responses that would improve students' capacity to transit beyond the current period and remain resilient in the future."[26]

Faculty also require assistance and "proactive, and comprehensive responses" to allow them to identify the challenges students face and—in the case of psychology faculty—effectively prepare future professionals in mental health fields. Although academics in the behavioral sciences are acutely aware of the trials that evidently lie ahead, both in terms of training future mental health professionals and in their own work as researchers and practitioners, they still require academic library resources and librarians to support their research and instruction activities. [27]

Traditionally, the dominant channel for the transmission of scholarly communication in the field of psychology is the peer-reviewed journal, as borne out by a number of citation analysis studies.[28] Although there is extensive COVID-related research that may inform and shape classroom and clinical practice, the sheer volume of scholarship concerning the psychological effects—and interventions to address these effects—has the potential to be overwhelming. An October 2022 article in the journal *Nature Medicine* notes that, at the time of publication, there were more than 35,000 published papers on the potential mental health ramifications of the pandemic, and that figure continues to increase, with a January 7, 2025, Google Scholar search for "mental health," "effects," "covid-19," and "pandemic" papers published between 2023 and 2025 alone returning 27,600 results.[29] Even with that volume of publication, researchers can and will access articles on the psychological impact of COVID through Google Scholar and library-licensed databases, such as PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Science Direct, Scopus, Medline, PubMed, ERIC, Sociological Abstracts, and Business Source Complete.

It is clear, however, that students, faculty, and researchers require books as well as journal articles to meet information and instruction needs, with Edwards reminding that these texts meet "a series of distinct intellectual and community needs."[30] Respondents to a 2019 Cambridge University Press/ Oxford University Press survey commented on how monographs provide "the scope and space to create

a sustained argument and extended discussion . . . synthesising research, bringing together different themes either across a subject area or more widely across multiple disciplines"—precisely the kind of approach required for such a complex topic as the mental health effects of a pandemic.[31]

Methods

Developing a COVID Micro-Collection

In spring 2020, Northern Illinois University Libraries, like many others across the United States, created a COVID-19 research guide that provided coronavirus facts; infection rates; public health advice from federal, state, and local health authorities; campus resources and updates; details about lockdowns, library closures, and service changes; and links to the latest scientific research on the disease, such as those collected by Cochrane Library and the National Library of Medicine.[32] For researchers and professionals in the mental health field who wanted information on COVID's effects and responses to them, librarians recommended materials curated and regularly updated by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, offered controlled vocabulary suggestions, and showed them how to set up search alerts in PsycInfo, Medline, and PubMed, as well as sharing information about Psychology-focused grey literature sites.[33]

Although valuable, the COVID-19 guide did not address patrons' information needs for managing their own mental health. In summer and fall 2020, subject specialist librarians reported that when they were delivering services to individuals and groups, patrons often divulged details about their personal struggles as well as their academic ones. In transactions, consultations, and information literacy instruction sessions, students, staff, and faculty reported numerous difficulties. These included maintaining focus, anxieties about sick family members, issues with food and housing insecurity, concerns over lack of access to mental health providers, struggles with persevering in the face of the twin pandemics of COVID and racial injustice, problems finding trans-affirming physicians, and the challenge of attending to the mental health needs of others while trying to cope with their own worries and uncertainty. The collaborative and individualized nature of one-on-one work encourages patron disclosure, and the Reference and User Services Association's 2017 and 2023 guidelines for providers of reference and information services does highlight relationship- and trust-building as a central feature of these interactions.[34] Apart from RUSA's now-retired "Health and Medical Reference Guidelines," however, many librarians at Northern Illinois University possessed neither the professional competency needed to "participate in effective wellness interventions" nor access to the appropriate health collections.[35] Librarians steered patrons toward "reliable and verifiable health information," such as relevant campus and community services and people qualified to address their needs and concerns, and the psychology subject specialist librarian curated and shared a list of materials already in Northern Illinois University Libraries' holdings.[36] However, a review of those holdings revealed a lack of current resources appropriate for explicating or ameliorating the mental health effects of a public health emergency.

Northern Illinois University Libraries' patrons were searching for resources that did not yet exist or were not readily available to them. To address this unmet need, in spring 2021, the selector of psychology and psychiatry materials made the decision to begin acquiring recent and newly published books focused on pandemics and mental health. As the pandemic continued and the volume of publications in this area increased, the psychology subject librarian developed a more deliberate and systematic plan to create a "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection focused on serving the information and mental health needs of the university's diverse patrons and the intersection between the coronavirus and the multiple areas of specialization of the Department of Psychology and the various mental health clinics on the campus.

Another element of the plan for the burgeoning micro-collection was to adopt a trauma-informed approach to collection practice that accords with the University Libraries' continuing work to diversify its materials and foster inclusion, and wider campus efforts to promote trauma-informed teaching and learning. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) notes that trauma knows "no boundaries" but "is especially common in the lives of people with mental and substance use disorders."[37] Writing before the advent of COVID-19, Artime, Buchholz, and Jakupcak noted that college students reported high rates of traumatic experience—postulating that those with exposure to violence, illness, and other traumas may face serious negative psychological consequences.[38] Further, Welsh, Shentu, and Sarvey highlighted marked increases in binge drinking and consumption of cannabis, prescription stimulants, psychedelic and dissociative drugs, as well as opioids amongst US college students in the decade leading up to the pandemic.[39] The COVID-19 pandemic is widely acknowledged as a collective trauma with potentially far-reaching adverse mental health outcomes for students and non-students alike.[40] Based on data collected before the pandemic, Oswalt et al. called on institutions to "create a supportive culture" to promote the mental health of students, and subsequent events have confirmed the necessity of this approach.[41] Because of an established ethos of care, academic libraries do not need to "create" this culture, only to continue to cultivate and expand it to provide students with support.[42] Additionally, the centrality of the academic library to its campus community makes it ideally placed to support faculty and staff who may have been affected by trauma before and after the expiration of the pandemic.[43]

In the absence of specific research concerning the application of a trauma-informed lens to collection development, the psychology subject librarian employed SAMHSA's key principles of a trauma-informed approach to the process—keeping in mind safety; transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; as well as cultural, historical, and gender issues.[44] The relative dearth of COVID-19–specific mental health material available early in the pandemic necessarily complicated the libraries' ability to collect as responsively and inclusively as would be ideal; however, as the literature grows, the libraries continue to acquire more texts that serve the needs of all of its users and reflect the intellectual production of a diverse range of authors. In addition, the subject specialist librarian has included a link to a Qualtrics form on the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide that allows patrons to provide anonymous feedback on the collection and suggest new titles to be added, which allows for greater collaboration and empowerment of patrons.

Safety was and is a primary concern, since texts about COVID-19 could potentially re-traumatize those suffering the mental health effects of living through the pandemic. The majority of titles in the micro-collection are research-focused and aimed at identifying and tackling the negative psychological impacts of COVID; however, to address issues of safety and offer restorative and elevating resources, the decision was made to also acquire practical self-help texts. Additionally, the psychology subject librarian provided advisory language on the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide and shared contact information for local and campus mental health resources to moderate the possible deleterious effects of the collection on users.

Few existing selection tools were applicable in this new field. Consequently, titles were selected based on notification slips sent from GOBI Library Solutions; reviews (when available) from Choice360, the American Psychological and Psychiatric Associations, Goodreads, and Amazon; faculty recommendations; appearances in bibliographies; reputation and expertise of the author, editor, and/or contributor; reputation of the publisher; inclusion in other libraries' catalogs; and patron suggestions. Because most patrons using this collection are affiliated with Northern Illinois University, the subject specialist primarily selected content for general academic, advanced academic, and professional level; however, some material for a broader reading audience was chosen to provide historical context and to allow for the inclusion of books addressing self-care and well-being. While the continuing threat of lockdowns earlier in the pandemic encouraged the adoption of texts in an e-book format, few of the titles selected for the micro-collection were available as e-books or with unlimited-user licenses—the preferred purchase option. Further, ordering e-books meant consortial and other interlibrary loan borrowers would be excluded from borrowing these texts. Ultimately, the core collection was primarily print-based, but as it has continued to grow, more unlimited-user licensed e-book titles have been added to meet the needs of Northern Illinois University patrons who desire or require digital access.

Results

The Micro-Collection: Access, Assessment, and Promotion

The original "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection included twenty-one titles: primarily scholarly works published during the pandemic and one evidence-based self-support text. Five of the books acquired comprise Routledge's *Psychological Insights for Understanding COVID-19* Series—which collected previously published material. Three titles were narrative nonfiction works or other creative responses to the coronavirus that focused on hope and resiliency, with the purpose of supporting well-being. Thirteen additional texts have been acquired since spring 2023, including monographs and edited collections on the impact of COVID on student mental health, resilience in the face of disaster, preparing practitioners to provide effective service in a time of crisis, memory and commemoration, activism and coping, global perspectives on the effects of the pandemic, vaccine safety, and living with long COVID.

The collection exists in multiple formats—a combination of unlimited-user e-books and print (both cloth and paper), with the latter being requestable by patrons across the state via the Consortium of

Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois and across the globe via interlibrary loan. The collection was designed with Northern Illinois University's patrons in mind, but the libraries wanted to ensure that it can be used by those who need these resources, regardless of geographic location.

Although the University Libraries has stand-alone collections—Popular Reading, Graphic Novels, and Student Success—all shelved on the main floor and adjacent to the Learning Commons, the "Coping and COVID-19" collection is not shelved separately but is blended within the larger collection, mostly located in the BF, HQ, and RC Library of Congress call number ranges. Discrete shelving would potentially make the texts more findable, but also more visible, which could be uncomfortable or even triggering for some patrons who have experienced pandemic-related trauma, working against efforts to make the library a space "of restoration and the promotion of well-being."[45] As Williams and Antobam-Ntekudzi note, "Ensuring *safety* means providing and maintaining an environment that is both physically and psychologically secure."[46] By allowing patrons to elect to explore texts from the micro-collection through the libraries' catalog or in the stacks—with assistance from the research guide—they are both empowered and made safe.

Traditional methods to assess a collection—such as circulation statistics or e-book usage and downloads—are likely insufficient for assessing this particular collection, especially in the short term. As an article in the *Dallas Morning News* aptly put it, "Even with all the tragedy and trauma inflicted by the coronavirus, it seems like just about everyone is sick of thinking and talking about it."[47] Given these circumstances, it may not be surprising that, thus far, usage of materials in the micro-collection has been relatively low: fifteen of the titles have circulated, been viewed, or downloaded.

Circulations and clicks can be constructive but must be used in concert with data about research guide usage and conversations with clinicians, faculty, and students in psychology—and related fields—about what in the collection works and what needs work. In the three years since the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide was published, there have been ninety-three views; however, the vast majority of these date from the most recent nineteen months, with 86 percent of the total views recorded between September and November 2024—following on the heels of the largest summer COVID-19 surge since July 2022. The majority (69 percent) of circulations of print items in the micro-collection were recorded between July and October 2024, again coinciding with the uptick in infections. To date, no comments or recommendations have been submitted via the Qualtrics form on the research guide, although the psychology subject librarian has received purchase recommendations via email, chat, and in-person exchanges with students, faculty, staff, and members of the public, including the suggestion to acquire a reliable and current text on vaccines. The e-book, *Vaccination: Examining the Facts* has been used nine times between its activation in September 2024 and November 2024. Eight additional texts have recently been ordered at the behest of library patrons on topics such as stress management for students, mental health and addiction, and teletherapy, as well as resource guides for mental health professionals working in the post-pandemic era.

Marketing a micro-collection of this type is also not without complications; it does not lend itself to the same kinds of outreach and marketing as a cookbook or graphic novel collection that can

benefit from displays and publicity through social media, especially if the aim is to "actively resist re-traumatization."[48] However, some of the usual channels of communication on campus are still potentially effective: conveying information to departments via subject specialists, offering details about the collection in library instruction sessions for the most appropriate disciplines, partnering with researchers on campus who are engaging in scholarly activities focused on COVID-19 and mental health to provide programming, and sharing the research guide with campus clinics so they can disseminate it to clients or colleagues who they think might benefit from it. To boost awareness and use, the psychology subject specialist librarian has reached out to local chapters of the Psi Chi: International Honor Society in Psychology, the Association of Black Psychologists, and the Student Psychology Association to collaborate on a book discussion of one of the titles in the micro-collection. Nonetheless, promoting a collection focused on pandemics and mental health in a world—and on a campus—eager to think about neither obviously poses a challenge. The increased usage of the guide and the books during the fall 2024 semester suggests that the steady though subdued approach to promotion is having an impact. And because this collection is not simply a product of the COVID-19 emergency, but for grappling with the enduring impact of that emergency and any future emergencies, its utility has less to do with its novel nature than with its value for patrons in the months and years to come.

Discussion

In March 2023, half of adults aged eighteen to twenty-four who participated in a Kaiser Family Foundation/CNN survey described symptoms of depressive or anxiety disorders—with data demonstrating poor mental health and elevated rates of substance use and abuse among young adults and people of color as a result of disruptions and stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.[49] That same month, the Pew Research Center and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that nearly half of the high school students they surveyed felt sad and hopeless during the pandemic, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning plus (LGBTQ+) students reporting even more negative mental health effects.[50] These young people who have struggled with high levels of psychological stress during the pandemic are now our students. Dave, Jaffe, and O'Shea rightfully point out that "College health programs play an incredibly important role in the health and wellbeing of students," especially in the aftermath of the coronavirus.[51] But as Salimi et al. note, academic support is also central to cultivating student well-being.[52]

College and university libraries, and resources like those in the "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection, have a vital role to play in helping faculty and students living with the aftereffects of the pandemic.[53] Providing this support is especially important at campuses like Northern Illinois University: 66 percent of the incoming class for fall 2024 identified as people of color and 50 percent as first-generation college students—groups who "report a notably lower sense of belonging than their peers, further negatively impacting academic and wellness outcomes."[54] But patrons must know support exists to take advantage of it. To that end, the "Coping and COVID-19" research guide has been shared with campus diversity and cultural resource centers and programs, the university honors program, and campus clinics, as well as with faculty and students in the behavioral sciences. Anecdotal evidence

gleaned from research consultations and instruction sessions suggests that students and faculty are using the texts *within* the library, even though circulation statistics show that they are not necessarily checking them out. Academic library staff are often hesitant to divulge their mental health challenges, and patrons too may equate borrowing with disclosing.[55] Adopting a trauma-informed approach to collecting means acknowledging that offering safety and choice to patrons may complicate assessment of usage and the success of promotional efforts. But in fall 2023, a member of the psychology faculty used selections from a book in the micro-collection for a graduate course aimed at preparing future clinicians.[56]

Fostering inclusion and providing support to those most likely to experience negative mental health outcomes was an early aim of the "Coping and COVID-19" micro-collection. However, one of the major limitations of the earliest incarnation of the project was its general and homogeneous nature. Moving forward, the emphasis will be on seeking out diverse authors and texts centered on more diverse populations, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+, Latine, persons with disabilities, and other frequently underrepresented groups, as well as works written in languages other than English. Future COVID micro-collection development would benefit from greater campus feedback through anonymous surveys, focus groups, or the creation of working groups that would allow greater collaboration with units outside the University Libraries.

Being responsive to patron needs means embracing change—and some changes are already on the horizon. Although print had originally been the default format choice, usage statistics demonstrate a preference for digital: 52 percent of all circulations in the micro-collection were associated with just three e-book titles, and at the time of writing, no external patrons had submitted requests for Northern Illinois University Libraries' print copies. Interest in electronic resources is likely to intensify as campuses across the country continue to expand their graduate and undergraduate online degree programs and their outreach to adult learners who require flexible program formats to balance work, life, and education. Unlimited-user e-book licenses, when available and affordable, will become the standard so that these resources can meet students, faculty, and staff where they are.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions across the United States invited people to share their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and make their struggles and triumphs part of the collective memory.[57] Documenting those personal narratives is incredibly important and provides a window into a historic moment when we were both fundamentally together and simultaneously separated. One account captures a sense of the fear and the isolation that a pandemic can engender: "We were almost afraid to breathe, the theaters were closed down so you didn't get into any crowds. . . . You felt like you were walking on eggshells, you were afraid to even go out. . . . you had to stay home and just be careful."[58] This memory of the pandemic is moving, partly because of how universal it feels. However, it is not a remembrance of *our* pandemic, but of the H1N1 influenza outbreak that spread worldwide during 1918–1919—a catastrophic period for which there is a dearth of contemporary resources to draw upon,

especially for those interested in its psychological impact. In the preface to *Psychiatry of Pandemics,* Huremović notes:

> Content that a crisis was avoided or prevented, individuals and communities alike would long to return to their daily routines and banish the plague from their conscious thoughts. . . . This process of etching the memory of a disease into our antibodies, yet erasing it from our thoughts, appears to be natural and to foster self-preservation.[59]

Although forgetting unwanted memories is a normal and even necessary part of an individual's emotional well-being, COVID's impact is global and nearly universal, not simply personal.[60] An editorial in *The Lancet* warned of the dangers of disremembering entirely: "The country may move on for now, but unless it faces up to the root causes of the harm COVID-19 did in the USA—health inequities, lack of access to health care, non-communicable diseases, a poisonous political discourse, and mistrust in public health institutions—it will likely find history repeating itself when the next pandemic comes."[61] As Hirschberger points out, "the process that begins with a collective trauma, transforms into a collective memory . . . culminat[ing] in a system of meaning that allows groups to redefine who they are and where they are going."[62] Remembering the pandemic—and contemporary attempts to cope with COVID-19—then, is essentially an act of literal and figurative preservation, and academic libraries, like other cultural heritage institutions, have a duty to be stewards of "collected memory."[63]

The value of this micro-collection cannot be accurately calculated while the desire to forget is still so powerful, but the creation and curation of a small-scale topic-specific collection offers college and university libraries an opportunity to deliver patron-responsive service to their campuses. Academic libraries can and should take steps to support the mental health of their communities in a post-pandemic world by not only assembling titles written about COVID-19 and mental health between the virus's first appearance and the official end of the public health emergency in May 2023, but also by adopting trauma-informed approaches and building on that core collection as students, faculty, and clinicians process the after-effects and find new ways of coping *with* COVID so that we learn from history, rather than repeat it.

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Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications. By Monica Berger. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024. 350p. $115.00 softcover (ISBN 978-0-8389-8955-5); $80.00 e-book (ISBN 978-0-8389-8956-2).

Predatory publishing has proven to be a complex, mutable phenomenon in scholarly communication, with numerous debates and controversies surrounding its definition and measurement (operationalization). A cursory search of the LISTA (Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts) database results in more than 400 academic treatments of predatory publishing since 2010 (with Beall's coining of the term "predatory publishing"), with more than ninety appearing just since 2023.[1] Monica Berger's *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications* presents an expertly and thoroughly researched critical appraisal of predatory publishing that places the practice into the context of larger scholarly communication debates, such as open access; tenure, promotion and reappointment norms; and the geopolitics of research dissemination (e.g., "Northern" domination of scholarly protocols and distribution mechanisms). The primer is particularly notable for its deep wrestling with the debates and assumptions of the field, while remaining relatively agnostic as to the best approach or the "correct" definition of predatory publishing. Although Berger applies this overall agnosticism to the phenomenon—as Kevin Smith notes in the work's foreword—and states that it is best to "use a comprehensive and pedagogical approach" (15), it is evident that she understands and supports a more nuanced, empirically based conversation around predatory publishing as a by-product of larger contemporary scholarly communication trends. It is indeed a very worthwhile and comprehensive addition to the literature and builds upon previous monograph-length work on predatory publishing.[2] Despite the work being very well-organized and including extremely helpful summaries at the conclusion of most chapters, it does suffer from some repetition that I feel could have been edited without losing value or message. With that said, the notes that accompany each chapter are quite exhaustive and comprehensive!

A helpful analogy for Berger's work lies in approaching the predatory phenomenon as a pathology. Although I do not think that this was Berger's intention, the breakdown of the text lends it to this implicit sort of analysis. In other words, Berger attempts to review the origins and nature and symptoms of this "ailment" and how to best "diagnose" its presence in the first few chapters (1–6), and then subsequently considers treatments, which run the gamut from pedagogical training to journal lists and criteria, such as Think. Check. Submit. (chapters 10–12). In between these sets of chapters, Berger takes on geopolitical epidemiology of predatory publishing within the context of the "Global South" and the overall norms of academic publishing. These "Northern" or "Western" publication and scholarly communication norms is a running theme and lens through which Berger views the phenomenon.

For Berger, there is a philosophical-practitioner ("scientist") tension in defining predatory publishing (3–4), which has some of its roots in the adoption of neoliberal practices in scholarly communication (45–49). Berger also notes frequently that the language we use around "predatory publishing" can itself be problematic. In addition, as her review of the critique of Beall's initial investigations and lists makes

clear, there continues to be some conflation of open access with predatory publishing, along with the common narrative that this is a "Global South" problem rather than an international issue. Although there have been many attempts to define predatory publisher via a set of characteristics (see table 4.1, pages 83–86, for a thorough review of the principal elements), there is still some significant discussion regarding whether these considerations are more/less necessary or sufficient in classifying a journal as predatory. Table 4.1 is particularly useful for the exceptions that it accentuates, for example, some small journals that are not in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) or new journals that are not yet indexed in the major bibliometric services. As Berger notes—in alignment with the pathology approach above—"the onus of judgment ultimately falls to authors who must evaluate through reading, close analysis of the journal and publisher, and feedback from expert colleagues" (76). Transparency is key in any system or methodology that classifies journals, along with noting how these criteria are revised over time (again, see the discussion of the DOAJ's revisions). I find that this critique of rubrics, along with questioning the use of blacklists (which may have some negative racial connotation), to be one of the strongest elements of the work. Most interestingly, one characteristic that has dramatically changed is the "pay to publish" model that was once associated with predatory journals, particularly as article processing charges become a dominant feature of open access publishing for most commercial publishers.

In the latter chapters of the book, Berger tackles a number of methods for treating the "puzzle" of predatory publishing, while acknowledging that none of these approaches are foolproof and that they often must be employed together. The approaches discussed include open peer review, which Berger notes has "tremendous potential to reduce predatory publishing as well as to benefit the quality of all scholarly publishing and science" (247), and scholarly communication information literacy and pedagogy, which has its ultimate goal "to empower stakeholders to think critically about how their work fits into the scholarly communications ecosystem" (302). Berger also critically reviews collaborative tools such as Think.Check.Submit., COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) best practices, and various governmental journal and nonprofit industry whitelists (DOAJ, Cabell's). Finally, Berger notes that it might be more worthwhile to have conversations with researchers about publication quality, rather than using the "predatory" language (269), and recognize that multiple factors go into researcher choices for publication venues.

Finally, I think one of the most interesting, although not completely novel, discussions in Berger's work pertains to the structural incentives for authors to publish in questionable journals, such as the need to publish (especially in "international" journals), the focus on bibliometrics, and the frequent pursuit of quantity over quality scholarship. There are many misconceptions as well regarding motivations for publishing in predatory journals. By extension, we should treat such research behavior on a spectrum, rather than on a binary. The section on "predatory journal myths" (275) makes the argument (among several) that predatory publishing is not a singular challenge for one set of publishers in one geographic region or for one group of researchers over another. This statement is echoed in other recent publications, especially from Latin America, that call for a more nuanced understanding of predatory

journals and research integrity as a global problem.[3]—*Chris Palazzolo (cpalazz@emory.edu), Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia*

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Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction. Second Edition. By Marie Keen Shaw. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024. 229p. $125 hardcover (ISBN: 978-1538186763).

The fundamentals of MARC cataloging have not changed in about fifty years. These fundamentals are described soundly in this textbook by Marie Keen Shaw. I can see the years of work and training on which this book is based, but as a professional cataloger with almost two decades of experience working with library, archive, and museum metadata, I can also see where this textbook went wrong as Shaw seeks to make sense of library-managed metadata through a MARC-based framework. MARC is necessary knowledge for anyone working with library metadata, but it is not a good framework from which to understand the increasingly interoperable future of library cataloging.

It is this reviewer's assertion that any book on library cataloging should briefly explain the history into which numeric (e.g., MARC) and semantic (e.g., XML, HTML) encoding standards emerged before describing how to use them for library work. This textbook does not do so. Especially since this book was updated to incorporate BIBFRAME, it is important to explain the distinction between numeric and semantic encoding standards correctly so that new catalogers have a technical understanding of why semantic schemas are interoperable on the web but numeric standards are not. It is pivotal knowledge for understanding how to use BIBFRAME, Dublin Core, and other web standards in tandem with MARC21, as well as for how to apply descriptive frameworks (i.e., AACR2, RDA) and the whole array of library-created controlled vocabularies in a useful manner.

My objection to how Shaw explains library cataloging can be summed up by my objection to how she begins her chapter on metadata:

> This chapter introduces the concept of metadata and how it is used as alternate systems [from MARC21] to help patrons find and locate digital objects . . . Metadata as it relates to technology is commonly defined as 'data about data.' This definition confounds and confuses; it appears to be more doublespeak than helpful. (88)

I have seen it many times, where library workers developed the idea that MARC is for books in library catalog systems and "metadata" is for digital objects in digital asset management systems (89).

In fact, MARC records are a type of metadata. If one starts with the understanding that library resources (i.e., books, journals, archival collections, e-books) are containers for data themselves, and that MARC is a numeric encoding standard for describing that data in an easily indexable way, then hopefully one can also see how a MARC record is data about data (i.e., metadata). What many people like Shaw see as a distinction between MARC records and "metadata" records is actually a distinction between numeric encoding standards developed in the 1960s and the semantic encoding standards developed in the 1990s. Technically these encoding standards are interchangeable in a modern ILS for describing any kind of library resource.

Absent this understanding, Shaw tries to describe why BIBFRAME will replace MARC so that library records can "reach out on the internet or link to websites" (40). This description misses the important concept of search engine indexing and collocation that BIBFRAME is really enabling. Additionally, Shaw makes the definitive statement several times that BIBFRAME will replace MARC in the coming years, as it is important "to provide a much greater amount of information about [a library] item and its relationship to other people, places, subjects, and more" (40). Although BIBFRAME is undeniably an important standard that library systems are experimenting with and using, I think it is a mistake to assume it will be the primary replacement for MARC in the future. Shaw seems to be under the assumption that the Library of Congress is driving the train here with the development and adoption of BIBFRAME, but I cannot agree with that framing.

An additional problem with this book as a guide for learning library resource cataloging is that it makes no mention of inclusive description projects. Shaw includes whole sections on Melvil Dewey, Charles Cutter, and the origins of the Library of Congress classification system, but she makes no mention of the Anglo-Christian framing of these classification systems that have come under rightful scrutiny in recent years. Dewey in particular she seems to view with rose-colored glass, only nodding to his divisive life and legacy by saying that because he was "always on the edge of recalcitrance, his was a life not without controversy" (106). But she does not mention how these controversies have led to many of the reparative cataloging and classification efforts that are so important to the cataloging community today.[1]

Shaw makes a few additional incorrect statements in this book, as in the paragraph claiming "U.S. copyright law was established under the direction of Librarian of Congress Ainsworth Rand Spofford in 1870" (122). In fact, US copyright law was established in the US Constitution (article I, section 8, clause 8) in 1787. If one looks at the webpage Shaw cites for her statement, they can see that Spofford is credited not with establishing the law, but with the "centralization of U.S. copyright registration and deposit at the Library of Congress."[2] It's a strange mistake that stood out to me among a variety of others that make this book problematic.

That said, given the pace of technological change and the length of time it takes to write a book, teaching library cataloging from a textbook is probably going to be challenging in the next few years no matter what book you choose. In the opinion of this reviewer, it would be better to go to the ALA Research Guides online and consult the information in the Cataloging Tools and Resources area, which is more heavily referenced and more frequently updated.[3] If one is looking for a printed textbook, however, Arlene G. Taylor's *Introduction to Cataloging and Classification*, now in its eleventh edition, is my recommendation.[4]

The next five years will likely be a real inflection point in library metadata practice. Anyone who wants to start in the field now is going to need to know how MARC and BIBFRAME records are created and standardized, but more than that, they are going to need to know about the whole metadata ecosystem that those records will be expected to engage with. Library schools and library certificate programs should be training new catalogers to understand this whole environment.—*Jill Strykowski, MSLIS, MA (jill.strykowski@sjsu.edu), San José State University, California*

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