

# Translation of Quantitative Results to Collection Development Policies

The results of a quantitative analysis project often bring about a greater understanding of how budgets are allocated to build e-book collections, general usage trends, and impact. This knowledge can be applied to the improvement of library services or the creation of policies surrounding collection development priorities and activities.

At Columbia University Libraries (CUL), results from projects like the E-book Program Development Study are used to inform best practices that guide decisions related to the selection and acquisition of e-book materials. Study results, combined with knowledge of the local user community, suggest that e-book collections are particularly supportive of “just in case” collection development activities; patrons often turn to e-book materials to support current teaching and learning activities.

To expand on this idea, Collection Development recommends that subject specialists on campus consider at the time of purchase whether materials will be used for continuous (e.g., reading for extended periods of time, conducting in-depth research, exploring subjects in depth) or discontinuous (e.g., reference, citation confirmation, searching for keywords, skimming chapters) reading. The answer to this question will be a strong indicator regarding which format is most appropriate. Based on study results, it is recommended that print serve continuous reading needs and electronic serve discontinuous reading needs. The results were consistent across the major disciplines observed during this study (i.e., humanities, social science, science, and fine arts).

Over the coming years, there will be greater pressure placed on available financial resources as information is made available through a growing variety of formats and services. It is not expected that the

budget will grow alongside demand for these services. As a result, Collection Development is establishing an assessment framework that promotes continuous evaluation of collection materials. This is particularly relevant to new and current subscriptions. It is recommended on campus that subscriptions be evaluated every five years to monitor general usage trends, duplication, annual costs, and quality of content. As research interests shift and courses develop (particularly due to the growth of online programs), usage statistics will be systematically collected to ensure that the collection budget is invested in resources that support the growth and development of research, teaching, and learning activities.

## Defining a Future Path: Collection Development Goals

The overarching theme that has emerged in my research over the past several years is intent of e-book use. The findings suggest that collection development activities, ranging from the selection of business models and formats to the negotiation of license agreements and the development of preservation strategies, hinge on one central question: what is the intent of use?

In reality, no e-book solution simultaneously meets both the “current use” and “future use” requirements.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, it makes economic sense for libraries to purchase titles in electronic formats without consideration for long-term access. In other cases, it is appropriate to purchase materials for preservation purposes despite levels of current user demand.<sup>2</sup> Today, it seems that the success of collection development initiatives relies on a balance between “just

in case” and “just in time” strategies. As a result, it is imperative for librarians to have a comprehensive understanding of how patrons intend to use specific e-book packages, subscriptions, and even titles. With this knowledge, librarians gain the insight required to determine when it makes economic sense to invest resources in high-use materials for current users and when it is appropriate to purchase materials that may have low use but add to the long-term value and legacy of the collection.

Based on the results of quantitative investigations, the following goals and recommendations support activities related to resource allocation and collection management activities at CUL:

1. Allocate the materials budget and perform selection in a systematic manner that maximizes coverage, minimizes gaps, and avoids unnecessary duplication.
2. Anticipate and respond to users’ needs based on evidence surrounding usage trends.
3. Consider the complete life cycle of e-books at the time of purchase.
4. Continually evaluate collections and monitor research trends on campus.

To achieve these goals, I am experimenting with methods to map intent of e-book use to collection depth indicators. Evidence from quantitative analysis projects has consistently suggested that e-books support discontinuous reading behaviors (e.g., power searches, citation verification) as well as teaching and learning activities. At this time, the following recommendations have been made to align selection and acquisition activities with collection depth indicators:

1. **Basic Collection: E-books Recommended**  
Supports lower-division undergraduate research; includes the core of the discipline or subdiscipline as it relates to the curriculum. This level describes materials that serve to introduce and define subjects, including selected databases, fundamental materials, introductory works, historical surveys, and reference works. ILL is expected to augment the collection.
2. **Extensive Collection: E-books Recommended**  
Supports graduate course work; information is adequate to maintain knowledge of a subject required at less than research intensity. Examples of content include primary and critical resources, reference resources, specialized databases, and bibliographical resources. ILL is expected to augment the collection.
3. **Research Collection: Print Recommended**  
Supports research leading to a doctorate, faculty research, or independent study. It includes resources supporting the framework for the

methodology and implementation of original doctoral research. ILL is expected to augment the collection.

### Criteria for Acquiring E-book Materials

Based on the body of evidence generated through quantitative analysis projects, below are the recommended criteria at CUL that guide decisions to purchase e-book packages and titles:

1. Intent of use
  - a. Research: Print format recommended
  - b. Teaching and learning: Electronic format recommended
2. Intended audience
  - a. Basic collection: Electronic format recommended
  - b. Extensive collection: Electronic format recommended
  - c. Research collection: Print format recommended
3. Access at least equivalent to print
  - a. Format preference: PDF (supports both continuous and discontinuous reading behaviors)
4. Sufficient access (e.g., multiple user access for course reserves)
5. Cost history/cost per use
6. Availability of usage statistics for collection evaluation purposes
7. Relevance of the content to the full collection (e.g., fill existing gaps, align with collection priorities)
8. Degree of overlap
9. Courses and programs supported
10. Price and price comparison with competitors

### Disseminating Quantitative Analysis Results to Stakeholders

Because of the many stakeholder groups that make use of e-book collections, any analysis project requires strong communication channels with the individuals who will implement or be impacted by change. Based on my experiences over the past several years, I put together a workflow that I use to disseminate quantitative analysis results and provide opportunities for feedback:

1. Alert Collection Development, division directors, and subject specialists when an offer, subscription, or package is flagged for evaluation.
2. Present project goals and objectives to relevant subject selectors for feedback.
3. Work with subject selectors to coordinate feedback from the user community regarding a specific subscription, package, or offer.

4. Compile results related to goals and objectives into a brief report that can be distributed to internal stakeholders.
    - a. Present report to relevant subject selectors for feedback.
    - b. Present report to relevant division directors.
    - c. Present report to the Director of Collection Development.
  5. After internal stakeholders have provided feedback, post results in the Academic Common and distribute link to external stakeholders for review.
  6. Present findings to publisher, vendor, or aggregator.
2. Increasingly, e-books are made available as PDF files that are sold by publishers or authors. How will libraries acquire electronic texts that are not made available through a host platform? How will this material be made widely available to patrons?
  3. How will open-access initiatives change the way e-books are acquired, discovered, and accessed in the future? What types of financial commitments and collection development activities will individual libraries take on?

Despite these questions, I feel optimistic that continued discussions with stakeholders, information managers, and publishers and vendors will lead to solutions that provide evidence and allow all parties involved to better understand how e-books serve patron communities.

## Unresolved Areas

It is important to note that e-books are still an evolving format; libraries and content providers are grappling with the development of sustainable acquisition and discovery models and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. There are currently several challenges that are under investigation at CUL, and further experimentation will be required before standardized assessment models are developed:

1. How will librarians acquire e-books that they currently do not have the technical capacity or legal rights to do so?

## Notes

1. Greg Eow, Todd Gilman, Jill Jascha, Caitlyn Lam, Melanie Maksin, Scott Matheson, Colin McCaffrey, and Nathan Rupp, *The eBook Strategic Plan Task Force: Report of Findings and Recommendations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Library, March 1, 2013), [www.library.yale.edu/departments/collection-development/Yale-ebook-task-force-rpt.pdf](http://www.library.yale.edu/departments/collection-development/Yale-ebook-task-force-rpt.pdf).
2. Ibid.