Journal Usage Survey

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The Richard H. Hagemeyer Learning Resources Center of Central Piedmont Community College serves the students of a comprehensive community college and the local community. Since the school's curriculum is both academic and trade oriented, the center's library collection includes materials in the college-transfer area, trades and industry, and the arts.

During the past few years, the library has been confronted with several interrelated difficulties stemming from the information explosion, inflation, and restrictive formulas in the state-allotted budget. Since the budgetary formula as set forth by the state legislature is particularly restrictive on the periodical collection of a large community college, the question arose — how could a manageable yet relevant collection be maintained?

It was decided that a survey would be the most useful way to evaluate the library's journal collection. The survey was designed to answer specific questions: (1) which periodicals were being used, and (2) which periodicals could possibly be deleted in order to add new ones.

Preliminary Investigation

Before devising the survey, a review of the available literature on journal usage was conducted. The most popular of these methods included studies of photocopy requests, circulation figures, questionnaires, and the reshelving of periodicals. The operating policies of the center's library precluded using any one of these methods exclusively. The periodical collection is open to all users. The photocopy machines are self-service. Classes are located on and off campus. Any survey would have to work around these procedures.

Method

The periodical collection of the Richard H. Hagemeyer Learning Resources Center contains approximately 450 titles. Because of demands on staff time, the survey did not include abstracts, index journals, and newspapers. As a result, 350 of the total 450 titles were surveyed.

Several methods were used to gather data. First, in order to study the use of current periodicals, a mimeographed sheet listing all current titles was prepared. Signs were then posted in the current periodicals

reading room asking patrons not to reshelve periodicals. At a specific time each day the periodicals were reshelved, and a check was placed beside the titles on the mimeographed sheet.

Secondly, to gather data on the unbound periodicals, users checked these out from the circulation desk. The check-out sheets were counted weekly and the titles checked on the mimeographed sheet.

Next, a daily count of microfilm was taken by titles. Users were asked not to refile the microfilm.

Since the survey was intended to cover normal usage during the period from December 1974 through March 1975, it was felt that little publicity should be given to the survey. However, signs were placed in the current reading room and the microform area asking patrons not to reshelve the periodicals.

Record-Keeping System

The record-keeping system was simple and straightforward. As journals were reshelved in the current reading room, the titles were checked off. At the end of each month, a new mimeographed sheet was used. The same procedure applied to reels of microfilm. At the circulation desk, the check-out sheets accumulated for a week, then the titles were checked on the mimeographed sheet. Totals for each title were first compiled in the three areas of current titles, microfilm, and unbound periodicals. By adding totals from these three areas, a grand total was compiled for each title.

It was decided that faculty input was needed to make the survey more valid. The periodical collection was divided according to department (with some overlapping). Then a sheet listing these titles for each department was prepared. Beside each title, usage figures from the above survey were provided for the faculty. Space was also provided for faculty recommendations and comments. Each department was visited. The survey and the usage figures were explained. After the faculty recommendations were returned, a list of possible deletions was compiled. This list was then evaluated by the library staff and adjustments were made.

Effectiveness

Was the survey useful for the Richard H. Hagemeyer Learning Resources Center? It was possible to delete 44 titles, representing a 13% reduction in the collection surveyed, or a 9% reduction in the total collection. Cancellation of the 44 titles led to a savings of $610.30 which was then used to purchase new titles and absorb price increases. Meeting with the faculty and using their recommendations strengthened the library's public relations and produced a periodical collection more relevant to the needs of the students. New titles were added to strengthen the collection and to support new curriculum programs.

Conclusion

Any evaluation of the survey must recognize that it was conducted with certain restrictions. For example, the time period encompassed one scholastic quarter. It was difficult to acquire the exact total usage figure because several students could have used a journal before it was reshelved or reshelved it themselves. However, the survey was intended only as an aid, not as a means of dictating decisions.

Despite these limitations, the survey is believed to have been a success. The data allowed the staff and faculty to evaluate the users' needs. As a result, the collection is more relevant to the curriculum. Keeping in mind the state formula for purchasing periodicals, librarians in the community college system must continually evaluate their periodical collections. A usage survey enables them to gather facts on which to base decisions.