
Letters

To the Editor:

You and your two contributing editors are to be commended for assembling such a variety of useful observations on the theme of collection development in the Spring 1985 issue.

I found Harry Tuchmayer's lead article of particular interest but wish that he had confined his observations to public libraries, with which he is obviously more familiar than academic libraries.

On the one hand, Mr. Tuchmayer rightly rejects the notion that "the quantity of titles is more important than the appropriateness of the volumes" in any library. Yet, on the other, he supports the acquisition of multiple copies of some books in a college library. My experience both as a reference librarian and library administrator in several academic libraries, leads to the conclusion that there is a positive correlation between a weak book collection and the number of duplicate copies in that collection. Generally speaking, the more duplicate copies, the weaker the collection. Stated another way, you don't build a strong collection by buying multiple copies of books. For this reason most academic libraries have a policy requiring written justification from any faculty member who requests more than one copy of any book. Not surprisingly, such justification is seldom provided.

I am in complete agreement with Mr. Tuchmayer's position that faculty selection of books for an academic library is far from the most desirable method of collection development. In most instances, trained librarians, using such selection tools as *Choice* and *Library Journal*, can do a much more effective job of collection development than faculty members, most of whom approach their task from a narrow perspective. With this kind of perspective, it is impossible to achieve a balanced collection, the professed goal of all librarians.

Alva Stewart
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Harry Tuchmayer replies:

Mr. Stewart and I obviously agree on the need to make all library collections responsive to the clientele they serve. In addition, we concur that "quality collections" are in fact established by the appropriateness of the volumes held. Our difference seems to revolve around the issue of how best to obtain the appropriate volumes in an academic library.

I maintain that in most college and university libraries the basic mission is to serve the undergraduate. Consequently, what makes good collections is the *constant availability* of the *best titles* in a particular field. The surest way to guarantee this is not to think that all scholarly works on a topic are equal but to recognize that standard interpretations exist in all fields and that these titles become the yardsticks by which scholars measure the worthiness of new interpretations. It is these known standard titles that should be purchased in multiple copies to insure to all undergraduates the availability of quality material in preparing papers.

The real need of owning the more obscure and esoteric titles rests with major research institutions supporting Ph.D. programs. The arguments found in these and many other sound titles are often found in the numerous scholarly journals that accompany most academic disciplines. The historiographical needs of the undergraduate and masters level student can therefore be satisfied by the serials holdings of most institutions.

With this in mind, I fail to see the "correlation between a weak book collection and the number of duplicate copies in that collection."

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