Collection Building

A method for determining faculty preferences for monographs

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Abstract

Methodologies for determining patron preferences for monographs are a neglected area in library literature. This article describes a method for determining faculty preferences for monographs using subject headings from a print bibliography. Faculty members from the colleges of business at three public universities in Iowa (Iowa State University, University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa) were asked to rank 100 subject areas in business administration based on their perceived importance to programs of study within their colleges or departments. A total of 58 percent of the surveys were returned and 46 percent were included in the analysis. Faculties were grouped by department, and subject areas were grouped into categories by discipline. The survey results show that, with some exceptions, faculty ranked subject groups corresponding to their departments higher than other areas. The implications of this study for collection development librarians are noted.

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Introduction

Methodologies for determining faculty preferences for monographs in academic libraries are a neglected area in library literature. Conventional wisdom dictates that academic libraries purchase monographs to support the teaching and research needs of their patrons, yet few articles examine how faculty preferences influence collection development.

This article describes a method for determining faculty preferences for monographs using subject headings from a printed bibliography. The expected result is that faculty will rank subjects within their area of expertise higher than subjects within competing areas or subjects within the general business category. This method has the advantage of being relatively easy to administer and analyze, and can be adapted to many disciplines and library environments. Using subject headings as a proxy for individual titles, a librarian can determine whether there is a set of subjects on which to concentrate monographic collecting efforts.

As a collection evaluation tool, journal preferences have been extensively researched. Nisonger's (1992) guide to collection evaluation methods contains several chapters on journal preference studies. Preference studies of journals are a popular way of evaluating library collections. Journals provide a finite, easy-to-define data set, and citation indexes make analyzing journal data a manageable task. As sources for current research, journals are among the items in highest demand in libraries. Their focus on current research means that they can be considered a good gauge of the research needs of library users.

Duplicating journal preference studies for individual monographic titles would prove to be prohibitively expensive and time consuming because of the number of monographs published each year. In business subject areas in 1996, more than 2,000 new books and editions were published or imported (Census, 1998).

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However, determining whether there is a set of core "subjects" on which a library should collect monographs is a much more manageable task. The results of a subject ranking provide the basis for both gathering more information and making selection decisions. Regardless of the method used, the challenge for collection development librarians becomes knowing which categories of monographs are important to their clientele and whether their holdings are sufficient to meet the teaching and research needs of their institution.

The proliferation of journals and studies (Perrault, 1994; Holleman, 1997) describing decreases in monographic acquisitions by research libraries leads to inevitable questions as to why bibliographers should focus attention on monographs[1]. The reasons are simple. While journals focus on current research, monographs provide a synthesis of ideas and a historical context for a discipline and provide research depth within a library collection. Also, when there is less money to spend on monographs, selection decisions require more thoughtful evaluation.

Literature review

Studies of periodicals have established that there are core groups of journals for many fields. Nisonger's (1992) bibliography of collection evaluation methods mentions a number of methods for evaluating library collections. Core journal studies may involve contacting a group of key agents in the discipline (such as business college deans) and asking them to rank journals (Coe and Weinstock, 1984). White and McCain (1989) and Borgman (1990) explore the topic of co-citation analysis using Institute for Scientific Information's *Journal Citation Reports*. A recent study by Kushkowski *et al.* (1998) suggests that core journal lists could be generated from bibliographic databases and that this method would be particularly effective in analyzing interdisciplinary subjects.

Using similar methodologies for monographs would present several difficulties. The universe of monographs published each year is far larger than that of journals. One difficulty lies in simply identifying and selecting individual titles. A second difficulty is the sparse coverage of monographic materials in citation indexes and databases.

Methodologies for identifying monographs of interest to faculty are at best an inexact science. Mosher (1984) and MacEwan (1993) provide an overview of the most common collection evaluation methods: use (circulation) studies, list checking and user surveys. Over the last 30 years, academic librarians have explored the relationship of the curriculum to library holdings (McGrath, 1968, 1972). Whaley (1981) and Saunders *et al.* (1981) describe the difficulties in making linkages between Library of Congress classification numbers and curriculum course descriptions. Course descriptions may be inaccurate and are often poor indicators of the research needs of faculty members. In a recent study, for instance, Lochstet (1997) included faculty research as a component of his analysis of the University of South Carolina's mathematics, physics and statistics departments.

National initiatives, such as the RLG Conspectus, provide a framework for analyzing monographic collections. Bushing *et al.* (1997) published a useful guuide to the Conspectus and its uses. The OCLC/Amigos collection analysis CD is available for comparing monographic holdings across institutions and provides useful information about existing collection levels. Grover (1999) discusses the use of the National Shelflist Count as a method for assessing collections in large academic libraries.

Methodology

The data for this project come from a survey that was sent to college of business faculty at three public universities in Iowa: Iowa State University, University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa. The survey population excludes economics faculty at Iowa State University, who are members of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The survey used the *Harvard Business School Core Collection (HBSCC)* (Chatfield, 1993), an annual publication of books "reflecting the research, teaching, and general business reading interests of the Harvard Business School" as its

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data set. The survey asked faculty to rank the top 100 subject areas listed in the *HBSCC*, based on number of entries for each subject, by their perceived importance to programs of study within their college or department.

The 100 subject areas used in the survey were grouped into categories: accounting; economics; finance; general business; management; and marketing, to facilitate analysis. Each category contains a minimum of five subjects. The subject area groups are shown in the Appendix.

Participants were mailed the survey and up to two follow-up letters using methods described by Dillman (1978). The survey asked faculty to rank the subject areas on a five-point Likert scale. It also asked a number of demographic questions about the faculty member's home department, age, gender, teaching experience, highest degree and other questions. A total of 278 surveys were distributed to faculty in the colleges of business at the three schools. The overall response rate after two follow-up letters was 58 percent (162) and a total of 46 percent (128) of the surveys were included in the analysis.

The survey data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Excel. The data analysis involved checking the data file for coding errors. Next, means and standard deviations for individual subjects and for the subject groups were calculated and ranked in descending order. Finally, data were examined across departments at the three institutions to see whether there were subject areas preferred regardless of department. Results are reported for three areas: demographic data; subject group means; and commonalties between departments.

Table I Demographic profile of institutions surveyed

	ISU	Iowa	UNI
Faculty respondents by department			
Accounting	10	9	7
Economics	0	12	8
Finance	7	7	5
Management	11	6	9
Marketing	8	4	4
Trans/Log	3	1	0
Other	6	6	5
Total	45	45	38
Gender		*Percentages*	
Male	82	82	92
Female	18	18	8
Age			
<30	0	5	3
31-40	27	27	30
41-50	49	23	51
51-60	22	32	14
61+	2	14	3
Highest degree obtained			
PhD	87	91	66
DBA	7	2	3
MBA	2	4	16
MA/MS	4	2	3
Other	0	0	13
Faculty rank			
Professor	20	47	24
Associate professor	51	20	21
Assistant professor	22	24	32
Instructor	4	7	24
Other	2	2	0
Years teaching experience			
1-5	13	21	16
6-10	20	16	32
11-15	27	16	16
16-20	16	16	16
21-25	18	11	8
26+	7	21	13

Note: Totals exceed 100 percent because of rounding

Results

Demographic data for the survey respondents from the three institutions are shown in Table I.

These data show the breakdown of respondents by department, gender, age, highest degree, faculty rank and teaching experience. Male faculty accounted for more than 80 percent of the survey respondents, an indication that, in this limited sample, business schools are predominantly male institutions. The other area of interest is the highest degree earned. A large majority of faculty (>85 percent) at both Iowa State University and the University of Iowa have earned doctorates. This is a reflection of the overall mission of these two schools, both of which are Carnegie Research I institutions.

The mean scores and standard deviations for each subject group by institution and department are shown in Table II.

Table II Mean subject scores by institution and department

	Total		Accounting		Economics		Finance		Management		Marketing		Trans/Log		Other	
Subject area	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Iowa State University	*n* = 45		*n* = 10		*n* = 0[a]		*n* = 7		*n* = 11		*n* = 8		*n* = 3		*n* = 6	
Accounting	4.16	1.00	**4.58**	**0.53**	n/a	n/a	4.23	0.80	4.24	0.87	3.30	1.10	**4.87**	**0.34**	4.00	1.26
Economics	3.20	1.09	3.22	0.95	n/a	n/a	3.45	0.85	3.12	1.17	3.09	0.84	3.00	0.75	3.28	1.64
Finance	3.62	1.13	3.69	1.01	n/a	n/a	**4.39**	**0.70**	3.44	1.14	3.19	1.03	4.12	1.00	3.24	1.33
General	2.81	1.17	2.70	1.10	n/a	n/a	2.75	1.00	2.87	1.31	2.90	0.95	2.93	1.22	2.81	1.37
Management	**4.27**	**1.15**	3.90	1.15	n/a	n/a	3.94	0.93	**4.68**	**1.14**	4.42	0.80	4.56	1.05	**4.07**	**1.50**
Marketing	3.74	1.17	3.18	1.09	n/a	n/a	3.23	1.12	4.12	1.03	**4.55**	**0.55**	3.93	1.24	3.43	1.27
University of Iowa	*n* = 45		*n* = 9		*n* = 12		*n* = 7		*n* = 6		*n* = 4		*n* = 0[b]		*n* = 7	SD
Accounting	3.91	1.08	**4.02**	**0.71**	3.85	1.15	4.03	1.11	3.67	1.26	3.70	1.31	n/a	n/a	4.09	0.87
Economics	3.67	1.19	3.31	0.81	**4.03**	**1.14**	3.14	1.58	3.42	1.27	3.79	1.12	n/a	n/a	4.15	0.60
Finance	3.57	1.15	3.14	1.02	3.37	1.13	**4.36**	**1.02**	3.21	1.13	3.70	1.32	n/a	n/a	3.91	0.81
General	2.74	1.13	2.32	0.86	2.71	1.11	2.76	1.21	2.92	1.25	2.61	1.28	n/a	n/a	3.17	0.94
Management	**4.03**	**1.12**	3.58	0.87	3.97	1.11	3.63	1.19	**4.44**	**1.21**	4.22	1.19	n/a	n/a	**4.70**	**0.80**
Marketing	3.69	1.12	3.29	0.81	3.58	1.19	3.05	1.31	4.20	0.87	**4.60**	**0.73**	n/a	n/a	4.06	0.79
University of Northern Iowa	*n* = 38		*n* = 7		*n* = 8		*n* = 5	SD	*n* = 9		*n* = 4		*n* = 0[c]		*n* = 5	SD
Accounting	3.89	1.08	**4.09**	**0.61**	3.08	1.21	**4.36**	**0.93**	3.82	0.90	4.65	0.48	n/a	n/a	**3.80**	**1.26**
Economics	3.83	0.92	3.33	0.67	**4.25**	**0.75**	4.20	0.83	3.63	1.01	4.17	0.80	n/a	n/a	3.60	0.95
Finance	3.23	1.12	3.46	1.01	2.97	1.11	3.92	1.00	2.87	1.05	3.83	0.88	n/a	n/a	2.87	1.06
General	2.71	1.15	2.67	1.19	2.50	1.13	2.79	1.08	2.87	1.08	3.37	0.87	n/a	n/a	2.63	1.19
Management	**4.10**	**1.07**	3.39	1.02	3.55	1.09	4.14	1.04	**4.52**	**0.86**	**4.75**	**0.84**	n/a	n/a	3.79	1.09
Marketing	3.24	1.15	3.09	1.10	2.83	1.20	3.08	0.89	3.62	0.93	4.65	0.57	n/a	n/a	2.88	0.95

Notes: [a] Economics faculty at Iowa State are not members of the College of Business
[b] The sole Transportation/Logistics faculty member at University of Iowa is included in the "other" category
[c] There is no separate Transportation/Logistics Department at the University of Northern Iowa

Figures in bold display the highest mean subject score for each department. The results provide evidence to support the hypothesis that faculty prefer their own subject areas to others. With the exception of Finance and Marketing faculties at the University of Northern Iowa, faculty members at the three schools ranked their own subject areas higher than other departments. The exceptions may be explained by differences in programmatic emphasis at the three institutions. Mean subject group scores provide information about how faculty members perceive the importance of subject groups.

It is also important, however, to look at the rankings of the individual subjects. Group scores illustrate general trends in the data, not individual subject detail. Despite belonging to distinct departments with different perceptions about which subjects are important, faculties at the three institutions share some common interests. Subject lists for each department in each institution were ranked by mean score in descending order and the top 25 from each department were selected. Items appearing in Table III reflect subjects areas selected by three or more departments at each institution. Subjects that were selected by more than one institution are shown in italics.

The common subject selections reflect core areas of study in business administration. For example, basic knowledge of accounting is required by most business programs, just as knowledge of calculus is required for physics students. These common subject interests can be explained by the relative homogeneity of graduate and undergraduate business programs. There are differences between the programs, but each requires proficiency in core subjects such as accounting and management. In addition, each institution's business college is accredited by the International Association for Management Education (AACSB), an accrediting agency for undergraduate and graduate business administration and accounting programs. AACSB accreditation standards affect the curricula offered by each institution.

Conclusions

This study has broad implications for collection development. It is a method of determining

Table III Common highly-ranked subject areas within and between institutions

Iowa State University	University of Iowa	University of Northern Iowa
Accounting	*Accounting*	*Accounting*
		Auditing
Cost accounting	*Cost accounting*	*Cost accounting*
	Financial statements	*Financial statements*
Managerial accounting	*Managerial accounting*	*Managerial accounting*
	Economic forecasting	
	Economics	*Economics*
	Managerial economics	*Managerial economics*
	Microeconomics	*Microeconomics*
Capital investments	Portfolio management	
Finance	Stocks	
Investment analysis		
Options (finance)		*Options (finance)*
Securities industry		
	Communication in management	*Communication in management*
		Competition
Decision making	*Decision making*	
	Management	*Management*
Management information systems	*Management information systems*	
Strategic planning		
Consumer behavior		*Consumer behavior*
Marketing		
Market research		

preferences for monographs that is based on subjects, not individual titles. The use of subjects provides a more flexible basis on which to judge preferences for monographs. Use of a subject list instead of individual monograph titles reduces the effort required to obtain useful data. It is also independent of national initiatives like the RLG Conspectus and can be used by both large and small libraries. Collections librarians can tailor the survey to include subject areas and users of interest to their collections.

This methodology is a useful tool for discerning faculty preferences for monographs. In order for this methodology to be most effective it needs to be used in conjunction with other data. In addition to preference data, librarians need information about how the discipline being studied fits into the role and mission of their institution. A librarian needs to know the institutional context in which the survey was administered before making selection decisions. What types of degrees are being offered? Are they graduate or undergraduate? How much emphasis is placed on faculty research? Are there research institutes affiliated with the department or program?

There are some future avenues for research in this area. One area that needs study is whether alternative methods of generating subject areas – Library of Congress Subject Headings, controlled-vocabulary from electronic indexes, or keywords selected from abstracts of faculty publications – provide an adequate basis for a survey instrument. Another area for future research involves determining whether preferences for monographs differ based on teaching experience, age, or gender.

Note

1 Holleman (1997) recalculated the data using the 1995 Amigos collection evaluation CD and found that book acquisitions by ARL libraries actually increased between 1985 and 1989. The original, award-winning study by Perrault (1994), using the 1991 data, contained a "subtle" methodological flaw which undercounted monographic acquisitions.

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Appendix. Subject areas grouped by discipline

Accounting
Accounting
Auditing
Cost accounting
Financial statements
Managerial accounting

Economics
Economic forecasting
Economics
Industrial organization (economic theory)
Macroeconomics
Managerial economics
Microeconomics

Finance
Bonds
Capital investments
Commodity futures
Finance
Finance, personal
Financial futures
Financial institutions
Investment analysis
Investments
Options (finance)
Portfolio management
Real estate investment
Securities industry
Stock exchange
Stocks

General business
Artificial intelligence
Automobile industry and trade
Banks and banking
Business and politics
Business consultants
Business cycles
Business enterprises
Business ethics
Business forecasting
Businessmen
Capitalism
Chief executive officers
Commercial statistics
Computer industry
Computers
Computers and civilization
Corporate turnarounds
Corporation law
Corporations
Corporations, nonprofit
Customer service
Data processing
Decision making
Employment
Entrepreneurship
Executive ability
Executives
High technology industries
Industrial management
Industries
Industry
Industry and state
Joint ventures
Petroleum industry and trade
Research, industrial
Savings and loan associations
Service industries
Small business
Success in business
Technological innovations
Technology
Trade regulation
Venture capital
Women executives

Management
Communication in management
Compensation management
Competition
Competition, international
Conflict management
Consolidation and merger of corporations
Corporate planning
Employees
Industrial productivity
Industrial project management
Industrial relations
Labor productivity
Management
Management information systems
New business enterprises
Organization
Organizational behavior
Organizational change
Organizational effectiveness
Personnel management
Production management
Psychology, industrial
Quality control
Strategic planning

Marketing
Advertising
Consumer behavior
Marketing
Marketing research
New products