

Head First into the PDA Pool: A Comparison of Librarian Selections vs. Patron Purchases

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NOTE: This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship* in 2011, available online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1941126X.2011.601224>.

Complete Citation of Published Version: Shen, L., Cassidy, E. D., Elmore, E., Griffin, G., Manolovitz, T., Martinez, M., & Turney, L. (2011). Head first into the patron-driven acquisition pool: A comparison of librarian selections vs. patron purchases. *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship* 23(3), 203-218. doi:10.1080/1941126X.2011.601224

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Abstract

Although many recent studies have been conducted on the implementation and results of patron-driven acquisition (PDA) initiatives at academic libraries, very few have focused on whether, or how, patrons' selections vary from selection choices librarians would have made. This study compares titles selected by patrons during a PDA pilot program against titles chosen by subject librarians from the same PDA list. The findings may serve as a starting point for other researchers interested in the impact of user-oriented selection initiatives on a library's collection development.

Head First into the PDA Pool: A Comparison of Librarian Selections vs. Patron Purchases

The popularity of patron-driven acquisition (PDA) has surged in the past few years, especially in the arena of electronic book (e-book) purchasing and leasing. With increasing numbers of academic libraries committing to PDA programs, there is a growing body of literature examining both positive and negative impacts of this type of acquisition model on collection management in academic libraries.

However, while many studies aim to evaluate patron-selected titles by comparing them to librarian-selected titles on criteria such as usage statistics, the majority of comparisons share the same limitation: patrons and librarians do not make selection choices based on the same set of available titles. Since characteristics of available titles for each group to make selections may be inherently different, it could be difficult to draw valid conclusions from these comparisons. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and compare characteristics of e-book titles selected by patrons during a PDA program against titles selected by subject librarians from the same PDA list.

Literature Review

Patron-driven acquisition (PDA) is not a novel concept, having been around for over a decade; however, it is growing in popularity among libraries as a way to purchase items. In the early years of PDA, Interlibrary Loan (ILL) was the initiator. At that point in time it was more about on-demand purchasing: when a patron placed a request through ILL and it met specific criteria, as determined by individual libraries, the ILL staff would order the book for the library instead of borrowing it at a cost from a different library (Anderson et al., 2010; Brug & MacWaters, 2004). Demand-driven purchasing itself is even older than PDA or ILL offices—

when a patron would place a request, the need would be met, again based on specific predetermined criteria.

A second option in use by some libraries is a pay-per-view method. While the pay-per-view method is mostly focused on paying to access an article in a journal not subscribed to by the patron's library (Baxmeyer, 2010), a number of libraries borrow e-books for the patron on a limited basis for a small fee instead of purchasing the entire book for perpetuity (Woods & Ireland, 2008; Hane, 2004). However, this paper's study focuses on books purchased for perpetuity. Another option in use, though with even less frequency due to cost, is print-on-demand (POD). POD allows patrons at a library owning the necessary equipment to literally print a book as they wait. However, the greatest problem with this, besides the cost of equipment, is the need for the books requested to be available in the public domain or for the library to otherwise have the necessary copyright permissions from authors to reproduce the book.

With the popularization of e-book platforms and the modification of existing platforms as well as the growth of distance education and online classes, e-books are a useful tool in allowing off-campus users to access needed materials. PDA is in opposition to the *just in case* model most libraries previously subscribed to, and it allows for the *just in time* model to flourish instead: patrons are now able, through PDA programs, to purchase the book they need (if it is in the list of offered titles) with the library's funds for them to use right now.

Studies have been done on the different models for demand- or patron-driven acquisitions. The studies based on ILL demands and POD, however, are reliant on hard copies of the materials in question. Furthermore, both these models are limited by criteria such as publisher availability, copyright, and other predetermined qualifications for ordering set by the libraries. Because this paper focuses specifically on e-books that publishers have made available,

copyright is not a concern. Therefore, librarians need not hunt for copyright agreements or determine public domain rights.

Patron-driven acquisition of e-books has been in use since 2000, with notable initiatives such as Pennsylvania Access, an ongoing statewide project sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Office of Commonwealth Libraries. According to Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), PDA programs serve over 3,000 libraries and provide access to all available NetLibrary titles (2007).

Some studies evaluating outcomes of PDA programs have been positive. For instance, the City University of Hong Kong's 2008 presentation of case studies of multiple libraries compared the use of e-books that were purchased by patrons versus purchased by librarians, concluding that patron-selected e-books "generally out circulate librarian selected ones" (Ferguson, Chan, & Lai, 2008). Similar findings were reported by Wayne State University (WSU) Libraries, which compared journal and e-book usage statistics between titles selected by patrons through their PDA program and titles purchased by their consortia. In the WSU study, the library's consortia collection showed less use than patron-selected titles (Sutton, 2003).

Survey of the current literature indicates libraries that implemented PDA models often used stringent criteria: purchase of reprints required librarian approval, certain publishers were excluded, books could not cost more than a certain amount, or there was a strict spending cap (Levine-Clark, 2010; Fordyce & Hasler, 2010; Hodges, Preston, & Hamilton, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2010; Lewis, 2007; Lenares, 2010; Macicak & Schell, 2008). Concerns of overspending are commonly cited as rationale for the restrictive criteria, although there is limited evidence to support or challenge such assumptions. However, Grand Valley State University in Michigan recently performed a cost-focused PDA study in which they saved money by using a short-term

loan method through Ebook Library (EBL). They only purchased 160 books over a four-month period and avoided purchasing books that no one used (Swords, 2010).

Aside from budgetary constraints, the tight control of over PDA programs may be explained by librarians' perceptions of the quality of patron-selected titles. In their 2010 study, Deborah Lenares and Emilie Delquie surveyed 74 U.S. librarians at libraries either using PDA or planning to use PDA and looked at characteristics such as institution size, degrees offered, current library practices, and satisfaction with the selection process. At least 19 librarians were concerned that the PDA model would alter current collections toward a non-scholarly slant (Lenares & Delquie, 2010).

In contrast, the Swinburne University of Technology claims to be the first library to allow unmediated loans and immediate patron purchasing by downloading MARC records of all available PDA titles from EBL. The institution did not inform patrons about this project, which ran for six months from July to December, 2006. Researchers found that usage statistics were much higher than initially expected, and patrons preferred to download content rather than just use it online. The PDA initiative also relieved some of Swinburne University's space limitations, although no decision was made as to whether or not to continue with EBL's patron-acquisition model (Hardy & Davies, 2007).

Methodology

To fully address concerns expressed by other librarians regarding quality of patron-selected titles (Lenares & Delquie, 2010), the researchers implemented a PDA model similar to the one used in the Swinburne University 2007 study. The list of titles for this project was provided by ebrary, one of the leading e-book providers for academic libraries.

The process of determining the differences between patron and librarian selections consisted of two main steps: gathering data to determine the actual titles selected by the patrons and determining those titles librarians would have selecting used traditional collection development methods. In order to determine the librarian selections, each subject librarian was provided with a list of ebrary titles relating to their subject area, from which they would select titles. The complete list of titles available in the PDA program was downloaded from ebrary and sorted by subject area.

Three types of subject specifications were used by ebrary: BISAC 1, BISAC 2, and Library of Congress (LC) Subject. BISAC stands for Book Industry Standards and Communications, and is a standard used in the book industry for classifying books by their subject. However each title did not have data for all the identified categories, so the titles were systematically parsed by each type. All titles that included a BISAC 1 classification were parsed into lists for each subject librarian. Remaining titles without BISAC 1 data were parsed by BISAC 2 and appended to the appropriate subject list. Remaining titles without either BISAC 1 or BISAC 2 data were parsed into their appropriate subject list using the LC Subject data. Finally, those items that did not include information for BISAC 1, BISAC 2, or LC Subject were individually parsed by their titles and appended to the appropriate subject list.

A new column was added to each subject list to allow the subject librarians to mark an *X* next to each title they would hypothetically purchase, assuming unlimited funds. Because the number of titles was so large, these procedures were conducted in two parts (A-M and N-Z) to make the process more manageable.

After subject librarians completed their selections, those titles that the librarians marked for purchase were compiled into a single spreadsheet. This complete list of librarian-selected

titles would then be used to compare with the actual titles selected by patrons during the pilot. Although all subject librarians were invited to contribute in the PDA project, not all subject librarians chose to take part in the study due to the sheer quantity of titles being evaluated and the voluntary nature of the participation.

The next step of the project involved integrating the ebrary titles into our catalog and acquiring patron usage and purchase data. In order to avoid potentially skewing or affecting the usage data, the library did not advertise or promote the pilot project in any way. By integrating the titles with the existing collection, the library was able to avoid *curious* browsing by patrons, the intentional purchase of items by patrons, and any other influence on genuine research needs.

On June 16, 2010, MARC records for 100,319 PDA titles were downloaded into the library catalog and made available to library patrons. A special catalog location was created for the temporary records, enabling catalogers to remove the non-purchased titles in batch at the end of the pilot. However, for the patrons, these titles were fully integrated with all other research material in the catalog with no distinguishable features.

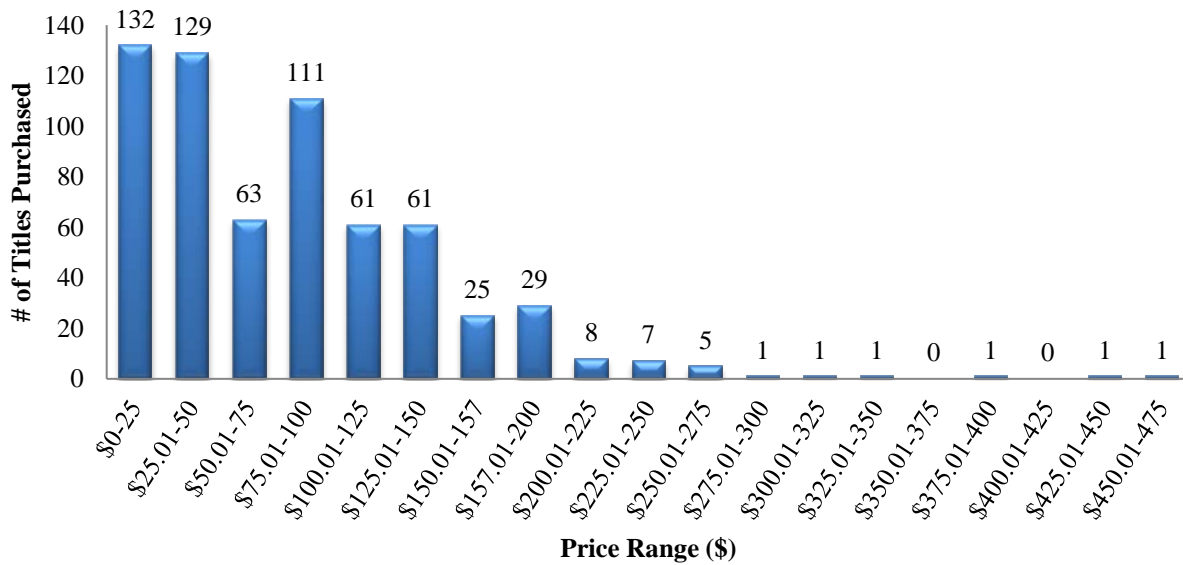
For the duration of the program, a PDA title was triggered for purchase upon accumulating more than five interactions from patrons over a week or month. An interaction is defined as one unique page viewed, printed, or copied, including pages from the table of contents and index. Purchasing statistics were tracked through weekly status report from ebrary. The PDA pilot program ended October 1, 2010, and non-purchased title records were removed from the catalog on October 7, 2010.

Results

At the conclusion of the 16 week PDA pilot program, 637 titles were purchased for a total cost of \$53,486.14, or \$83.87 per title. Although this average cost figure is slightly skewed

by the purchase of five titles ranging from \$300 to \$469, the majority (68%) of titles selected by patrons were under \$100 (Figure A).

Figure A. Price Distribution of Patron Selected Titles.



Seven of the library’s fifteen subject librarians reviewed all available ebrary PDA titles relevant to their respective areas of collection development and made hypothetical purchasing selections. A total of 8,567 titles were chosen by the librarians for an average cost of \$87.31 per title. Similar to the price distribution of patron-selected titles, 69% of the librarian selections were composed of titles under \$100.

Patron Selections

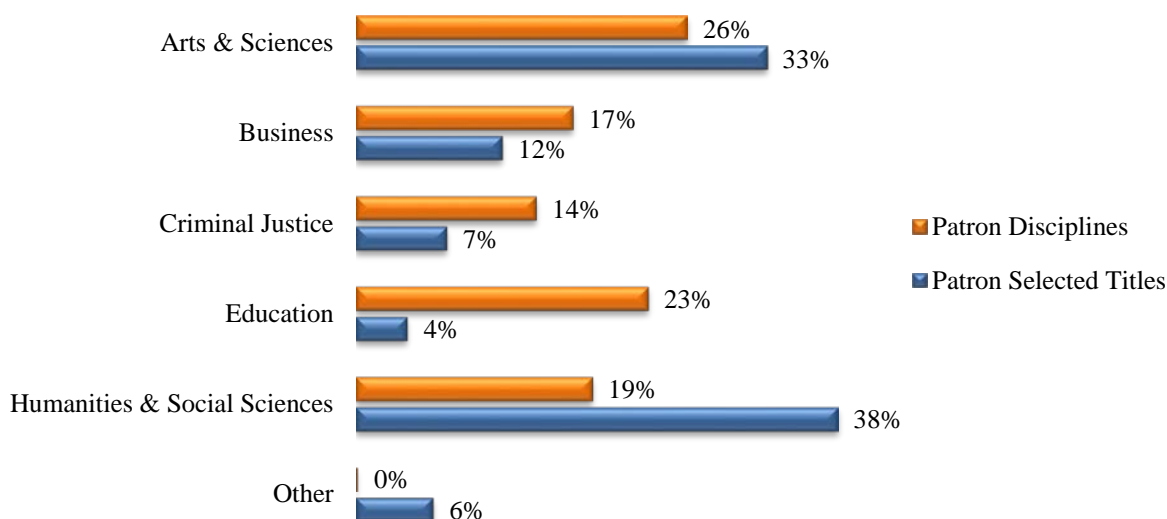
Of the 637 PDA titles purchased, science and technology titles made up the most number of patron-selected titles (179), followed by social sciences (111), literature (90), and business (74) (Figure B). Overall, there was an 88% correlation between the number of patron-selected titles and the number of all available PDA titles in a given subject area. However, one noted anomaly occurred: 14.1% of the patron selections were in literature, while only 6.7% of all available titles were in the same subject area.

Figure B. Subject Breakdown of Patron Selections.

Subject Area	# of Titles	%
Science & Technology	179	28.1%
Social Sciences	111	17.4%
Literature	90	14.1%
Business	74	11.6%
Criminal Justice & Political Science	46	7.2%
Other	39	6.1%
Fine Arts	29	4.6%
Education	26	4.1%
History	25	3.9%
Religion & Philosophy	18	2.8%
Total	637	100.0%

In contrast, significant correlations were not found between the number of patron-selected titles in a subject area and the number of patrons studying in that particular discipline. Most notably, 23% of library patrons belonged to the College of Education, while just over 4% of the patron selections were in the subject of education (Figure C). On the other end of the spectrum, 19% of patrons belonged to the Humanities and Social Sciences, while 38% of patron selections, including literature, were in the corresponding subject areas (Figure C).

Figure C. Patrons' Discipline vs. Subject Area of Patron Selections.

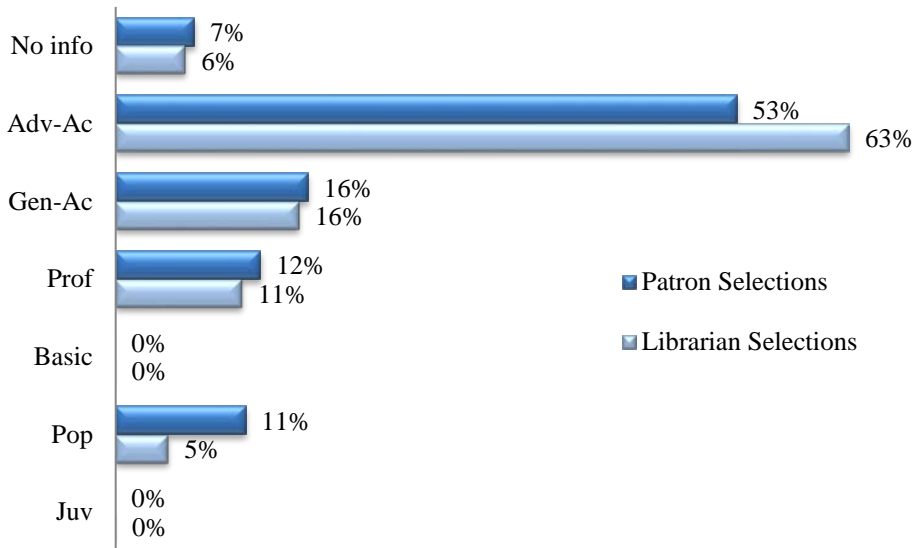


Since the PDA program was implemented during summer semesters, further analysis examining the number of course hours offered by discipline during the summer 2010 semesters was conducted in order to avoid misrepresentation of patron proportions in a particular discipline. Overall, no significant differences existed between the proportions of summer course hours by discipline and proportions of patrons studying in the corresponding discipline.

Although patron and librarian selections can be compared on various inherent characteristics, such as price and subject, more subjective measures such as content level and recommendations are equally important. This study employed the Content Level rating and YBP Select recommendations from YBP/Baker and Taylor as mechanisms for comparing titles in these areas.

In terms of the Content Level of titles, more than half (53%) of patron-selections were defined at the Advanced Academic level, followed by 17% at the General Academic level, and 12% at the Professional level (Figure D). Eleven percent of the patron selections were considered Popular by YBP. Patrons did not have enough significant interactions with titles in the Basic or Juvenile levels to trigger any purchases.

Figure D. Patron vs. Librarian Selections by Content Level.



Because the YBP Select designation is a qualitative judgment made by YBP staff, not all titles in the YBP database have YBP Select designations. Therefore, a large number of patron and librarian selections (43% and 37% respectively) had no information for this measure. As for the rest of the patron selections, 29% were designated as Research Recommended, 5% as Basic Recommended, 22% as Supplementary or Specialized, and 2% as Basic Essential or Research Essential. None of the patron selections were deemed Not Recommended by YBP Select.

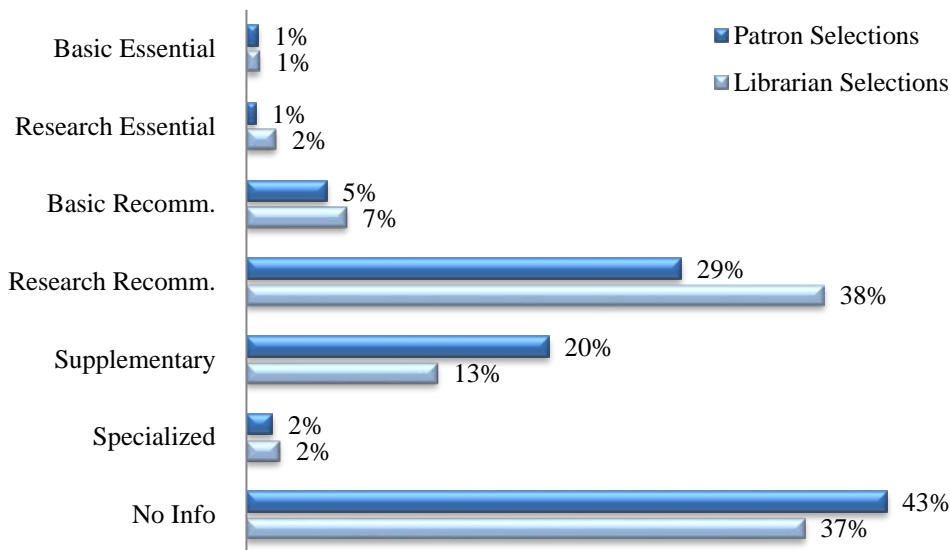
Librarian Selections

Since a limited number of subject librarians participated in this study, a complete subject comparison of the librarian selections could not be made. Nonetheless, an examination of the available librarian selections indicated significant differences between the relative proportion of titles each subject librarians selected for purchase. For instance, 27% of all available titles in literature were selected by the English subject librarian, but only 6% of the available titles in history were selected by the History subject librarian.

Compared to patron selections, a higher percentage (63%) of the librarian selections were in the Advanced Academic level, followed by 16% in the General Academic level and 11% in the Professional level (Figure D). Five percent of the librarian selections were considered Popular, which was considerably less than the eleven percent of Popular titles in the patron selections. A comprehensive comparison between the Content Level of patron and librarian selections is illustrated in Figure D.

Unavailability of YBP Select designation is an issue shared by both librarian and patron selections; this information was not available for 37% of librarian selections. As for the rest of the selections, 38% percent were designated as Research Recommended, 7% as Basic Recommended, and 15% as either Professional or Supplementary. In contrast to patron selections, higher percentages of librarian selections were identified as Research Recommended or Essential (either Basic Essential, 1%, or Research Essential, 2%) (Figure E). Additionally, a lower percentage of librarian selections were designated Supplementary as compared to patron selections.

Figure E. Patron vs. Librarian Selections by YBP Select Recommendation.



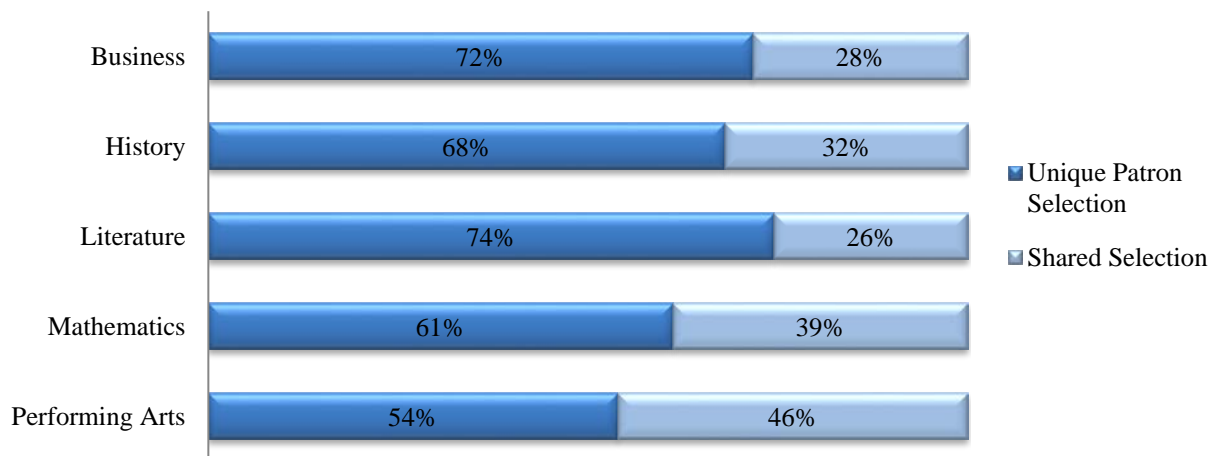
Shared Selections

Overall, 116 of the patron selections were also chosen by librarians. Of these shared selections, 28% were categorized in the Advanced Academic level, 25% in the General Academic level, 18% in the Professional level, and 9% in the Popular level.

In terms of YBP Select designations, 28% of the selections shared by both librarians and patrons were identified as Research Recommended, 24% as Supplementary, 11% as Basic Recommended, and 3% as either Basic Essential or Research Essential. Thirty-three percent of the titles in the shared selections did not have any YBP Select designation.

Closer examination of the shared selections was conducted in the five subject areas where the seven subject librarians had completed their hypothetical selections: business, history, literature, mathematics, and performing arts. Of the 238 titles from the patron selections in these subjects included in the analysis, 72 (30%) were also selected by a librarian while the rest (70%) were unique selections by patrons. A detailed breakdown of unique versus shared patron selection by subject is displayed in Figure F.

Figure F. Selected Patron Selection: Unique vs. Shared titles (by %).



Discussion

Content Level

With respect to Content Level, the researchers were somewhat surprised by the number of Advanced Academic titles selected by patrons. This assuaged initial concerns that patron selections would not be as sophisticated as librarian selections. In fact, a comparison of the numbers shows that librarian and patron selections overall were remarkably similar in their Content Levels, with the exception that librarians selected significantly fewer Popular titles than patrons. For the most part, whereas patron selections included additional Popular titles, librarian selections instead included additional Advanced Academic titles, which was not especially surprising (Figure D).

On the surface, it appears that patrons selected more academically appropriate books than researchers expected. However, this study did not collect YBP Content Level data for all available titles in the ebrary PDA program; collecting that data could provide additional insight. For instance, if 80% of all available titles were Advanced Academic, that could reflect differently on the high number of Advanced Academic patron selections than if only 20% of all available titles were rated at that Content Level.

The numbers are very similar when comparing patron selections to librarian selections. However, the picture becomes more complex if one adds the shared selections into the comparison. Although Advanced Academic titles made up the majority of both patron and librarian selections, they made up a smaller percentage of shared selections (only 44%). This suggests there were differences in which Advanced Academic titles were chosen by each group.

YBP Select

Of the selections that had YBP Select designations, the largest number of both patron and librarian selections fell into the Research Recommended rating. This group was larger for librarians than for patrons, which fit with researchers' expectations.

Unexpectedly, patron selections included more Supplementary titles than librarian selections. These titles tend to be more narrowly focused, less essential to core study on a subject, and more useful for specific niche research topics. Librarians may be less likely to select these items unless, for instance, they are aware of faculty in their subject area whose research interests coincide with the book's narrower focus. However, a student or faculty member searching for books may be more likely to select these items if they closely relate to the user's specific research topic. This suggests that Supplementary and Specialized titles might be some of the best candidates to include in a PDA project because they will be discoverable through the catalog but never purchased unless the need arises for that particular focused information. In this way, a PDA model could provide a useful supplement to, rather than a replacement for, subject bibliographers' traditional selection methods.

A disproportionately higher number of Supplementary shared selections was noted. Although neither patrons nor librarians selected many Supplementary titles, they did choose the most titles in common from within this designation. A similar pattern can be seen with the Basic Recommended titles: the percentage of Shared Selections from this designation was disproportionately higher than the number of titles that either patrons or librarians chose as individual groups. Although not conclusive, this data suggests that librarians select titles in these designations that are most likely to be useful to their user population.

Cost

In the experimental context of this study, virtually no controls were imposed on patron purchases; in a more pragmatic context, a library's dollars would clearly be stretched further by filtering the list of available PDA titles and setting a higher number of interactions to trigger a purchase, though these parameters may be non-negotiable as dictated by the PDA vendor.

Triggered purchases occurred more or less steadily throughout the program with an increase near the beginning of the fall semester. Although the funds allocated for the program were increased three times, patron selections did tend toward the inexpensive with the largest and next-largest number of purchases in the ranges of zero to \$25, and \$25 to \$50, respectively (Figure A). Overall, patron selections averaged less than \$100, as did librarian selections, indicating that patron and librarian choices were similar with regard to cost.

In some instances, however, patrons triggered purchases of more expensive books, as just over 200 books cost over \$100. The five most expensive titles purchased were mostly reference works, ranging from \$310 to \$469, and fell into the subject categories of mathematics, history, psychology, science, research, and language. Although these higher-end titles were academic in nature, their acquisition brought to the forefront another of the lessons learned in this program. The researchers acknowledge the benefit of preset price caps on purchases, especially if triggered titles could duplicate costly materials already present in a collection.

In comparison, the five least expensive titles acquired during the study ranged from \$4.38 to \$9.95 and included literature, ethics, and a study guide in physical geology. Although the costs of these and many of the other books were reasonable, the researchers were frustrated that some of the titles were available in the public domain for free.

Removing public domain titles and duplicate titles already held in a collection, setting a higher number of interactions to trigger a purchase, and establishing a price ceiling on the

purchase of individual books are all points worthy of reflection for any PDA project under consideration.

Subject Areas

Overall, patrons triggered the most purchases in science and technology, social sciences, and literature. Of the total number of available titles in these categories, patrons selected heavily in social sciences and literature but less so in science and technology.

The least number of selections were in religion and philosophy, history, and education. Of the total number of available titles in these categories, patrons selected equably in history and education but slightly less in religion and philosophy.

Patrons using the PDA program included Sam Houston State University students and faculty. Researchers held the general expectation that patrons in a particular academic field would generate a number of triggered purchases proportional to the size of the field. However, this expectation did not hold true, with discrepancies occurring in many areas. In each of the colleges of Arts & Sciences and Humanities & Social Sciences, the percentage of patron selections exceeded the percentage of university population (Figure C). The opposite occurred in Education and Criminal Justice, where the percentages of university population exceeded the percentages of purchases. In Business, the proportion of university population to purchases was relatively close.

With only five interactions necessary to trigger a purchase, the researchers theorize that new English faculty on campus exploring library resources and planning syllabi may have inflated the purchases for Humanities and Social Sciences. Similarly, the researchers were aware of at least one statistics professor who, in his preparations for the fall semester, may have boosted purchases in Arts and Sciences.

Conclusion

The researchers drew several conclusions from this study which may inform other libraries. Most notably, students and faculty performed admirably in the selection of titles appropriate to or recommended for an academic setting: patron selections closely resemble librarian selections in terms of content level and recommended use. Libraries that have avoided PDA because of concerns about purchase quality can perhaps consider this selection strategy in a new light.

This study also noted some significant differences between patrons' academic fields and the subject areas of patron selections. This bears some reflection. If certain disciplines are likely to dominate e-book purchases, then libraries may want to consider budgeting their book funds in a way that complements this imbalance, rather than dedicating equal funds across disciplines that may not demand comparable levels of e-book use.

As previously noted, this study had its shortcomings. Not all of the subject librarians contributed to the set of hypothetical librarian selections. Also, because of the sheer number of titles evaluated, those subject librarians who participated used abbreviated selection methods, compared to those employed during traditional collection development. Furthermore, titles that duplicated existing print or electronic library holdings were generally not removed. Finally, because the library catalog by default displays items in descending order by publication date, the ebrary e-book versions of some titles were displayed before print or electronic versions of the same title; this made it difficult to determine whether a user selected the ebrary version due to a format preference or simply because it was the first version encountered.

The low number of shared selections was of particular interest. This may stem in part from the different goals motivating each group: patrons generally search for titles to satisfy a

present need, while librarians must collect with a longer view of future needs for student learning, faculty research, and the preservation of knowledge. If comparisons could be drawn out over a period of years, librarian selections might be shown to match patron selections more closely than they do in the short term.

Another factor influencing the low number of shared selections may be a disconnect between traditional library ideology for collection development and current user needs and preferences. The researchers believe that this study may indicate a need to reevaluate existing collection development policies. For instance, the library should perhaps revise its philosophy concerning the purchase of popular, professional, or supplementary titles. Alternately, the PDA method of collecting could be considered as a useful means for filling the gaps with these types of titles, acting as a supplement to more traditional librarian selecting.

Based on lessons learned in this study, the SHSU library adapted the restrictions for its subsequent PDA program and would advise other libraries to consider similar restrictions, such as verifying that a PDA vendor's rules for triggering purchases are reasonable. Five interactions seemed perhaps too low a threshold for purchasing, so, in their subsequent PDA program, ebrary has raised this to 10 pages viewed or 10 minutes of use. Additionally, setting a maximum price per title can help prevent a disproportion of a PDA budget from being spent on only a few exorbitantly priced e-books: the SHSU library has now excluded PDA titles priced over \$200 to ensure that PDA funds are spent economically and with maximum benefit to the library's collection, consider excluding older materials, journals, duplicates, and titles from publishers that offer better bundle deals.

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