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Assessing the Books We Didn't Buy (the Sequel)

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Abstract

Three universities (Santa Clara University, the University of San Francisco, and Loyola Marymount University) are leveraging patron-initiated borrowing data to inform our collection development. Expanding on a pilot project that began in 2014, we have been looking at five years of recent borrowing data, along with five years of acquisition data and five years of circulation data of local collections, to help us define what a “normal” level of borrowing looks like as well as identify gaps in local collections. We are also using the data to strengthen the meta-collection of our consortium (LINK+) through the intentional and coordinated diversification of approval plan profiles. We will discuss both methodology and findings to date: how this data is being gathered, analyzed, and then used on our campuses to inform collection development decisions.

Background

Previous studies about cooperative collection development and resource sharing from consortia such as OhioLINK (O'Neill & Gammon, 2014) and GWLA (Duncan, Kochan, & Leon, 2014) have suggested that many academic libraries are buying the same books, which then have zero circulation at all of the libraries. Prompted by these studies, Santa Clara University began wondering how well its own library collection was performing against its consortial peers and what could be improved locally in terms of either automating collection development processes with its primary book vendor YBP or leveraging the vendor's tools and services to make things simpler for the subject librarians. Given that its budget had not seen any significant changes in terms of how well it supported various academic programs in at least a generation, Santa Clara was also interested to know whether it should direct some library funding toward growing programs and what impact that might have on interlibrary loan borrowing.

Some specific questions Santa Clara University wanted to address included:

- How can we assess what we are not doing in terms of collection development?
- What can we learn from consortial borrowing data to create a deeper, more browsable collection?

- What is a “normal” or “acceptable” level of borrowing?
- What improvements can we make to our autoship/approval profile?
- Should we coordinate our collection development with other members of our consortia?
- How can we measure the impact of these changes on this meta-collection?

A review of the literature suggested that there was no single best practice for this type of collection analysis. However, the excellent literature review done by Link, Tosaka, and Weng (2015) was instrumental in developing the methodology for this project. In particular, we began with the concepts of “relative use” (Jain, 1969) and “use factor” (Bonn, 1974), both of which compare local collection circulation to library holdings. Henderson (2000) and Anguilar (1986) realized that local usage data only provided part of the picture and worked to include interlibrary loan transactions to estimate total demand in a collection or particular subject area. By combining circulation of local collections and interlibrary loan borrowings, we hoped to arrive at a proxy for user needs not met by our collections by taking the ratio of interlibrary loan borrowings to total demand (circulation + ILL borrowings) for a subset of our local collections.

Beyond undertaking a local collection analysis, we wanted to compare own collection performance against peer institutions. Santa Clara University, Loyola Marymount University, and the University of San Francisco are three small urban Jesuit universities in California. Our similarities in size, academic programs, and commitment to social justice make us “fraternal triplets” ideally suited to such collection comparisons.

All three institutions are also members of LINK+, a 65-library consortium of academic and public libraries in California and Nevada with unmediated, patron-initiated borrowing via INN-Reach. Because of the variety of libraries and library types within the consortium, there is no coordinated collection development, yet it is a very diverse “meta-collection.” For example, over 50% of the 8.5 million titles contributed to the LINK+ union catalog are uniquely held among the various members. Of the three libraries involved in this study, more than 24% of the University of San Francisco’s collection is unique within LINK+, while Loyola Marymount and Santa Clara University each hold between 16 to 17% of the unique titles.

Compared to traditional interlibrary loan, most of our patrons organically discover that LINK+ exists via links in our library catalog, thus increasing our ILL borrowing activity, especially for undergraduates. Over 90% of our total interlibrary loan traffic for books is via LINK+, which makes it plausible to use this data to assess the unmet demand for all patron types. Since traditional ILL makes up such a small

percentage of total borrowing, we decided to ignore it for the purposes of this project. While overall borrowing is trending downward, likely because of factors including a decrease in the use of print, the increased availability of e-books, the introduction of demand-driven acquisition (DDA) e-book options, and the creation of popular reading collections on the three campuses which probably impacted the total borrowing for pleasure reading, LINK+ continues to be an essential element of service to our patrons.

Methodology

Each institution began by pulling data for January 2013–August 2016 for LINK+ transactions where our patrons borrowed materials from other libraries. This data serves as a proxy for user demand not being met through normal collection development. We eliminated transactions for all audio and video formats and manga, but not graphic novels, as being outside of scope, as this data would not inform what we buy. We then pulled acquisition data for print monographs purchased between June 2011 and May 2016 and included total numbers of circulations since purchase. This gave us a picture of our current level of investment and whether we were successfully meeting at least some of the demand based on local circulation of those materials. Within each call number range, each institution then compared their own unmet demand (LINK+ borrowing) to total demand (circulation + LINK+), and finally we compared the performance of the three peer institutions.

Table 1. Comparison of peer group size.

	Santa Clara University	University of San Francisco	Loyola Marymount University
Undergraduates	5,486	6,845	6,162
Graduate students	3,529	3,856	3,133
Full-time faculty	530	459	550
Part-time faculty	399	651	583
Bound volumes (without law libraries)	~920,000	~900,000	~675,000

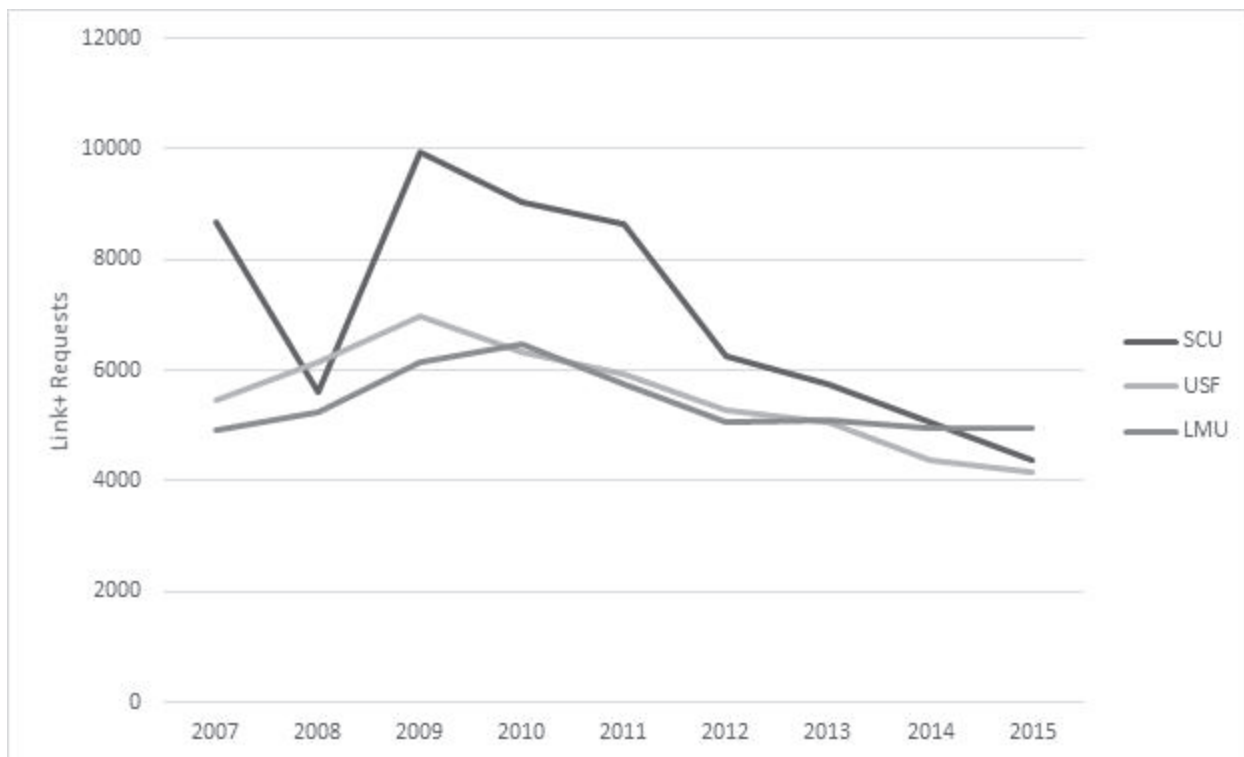


Figure 2. LINK+ borrowing trends 2007-2015.

In 2015, Santa Clara University and the University of San Francisco had begun this comparison project following the same methodology described above and discovered that the University of San Francisco’s collection appeared to be performing significantly better: nearly 60% of its purchases had circulated at least once, and no call number ranges had circulated less than 40%, as compared to Santa Clara University with only 41% of its purchases having circulated (Majors & Johnson, 2015). Based on these findings, Santa Clara University began looking at how to better meet the demands of its users. In cases where the local collection was performing well (i.e., materials had high circulation) but there was still a lot of unmet demand as reflected by large volume of LINK+ borrowing, we determined that the library should consider buying more materials in that subject area. If the local collection was not performing well and there was also high unmet demand, the library should consider buying differently. Santa Clara purchased both exact titles

and titles in selected subject areas to address obvious gaps and made dozens of incremental changes to their approval profiles. Not surprisingly, several interdisciplinary areas also emerged, such as food and culture, the intersection of science and religion, and gender studies, which would not have been covered by approval profiles, nor would any one subject librarian have anticipated the amount of borrowing.

To get an even better picture of what “normal” might be, both universities agreed that adding another peer institution was the logical next step. For 2016, Loyola Marymount University agreed to join the study. With the addition of the third institution’s data, all three libraries began delving deeper into the specifics of call number ranges that corresponded to academic disciplines. For the purposes of our presentation, we focused on religion, social sciences, and art.

Table 3. Ratio of ratio of user needs not met by collection.

	Religion (BL-BX)	Social Sciences (H, HM-HX)	Arts (N)	All
SCU bought	1,191	765	499	12,285
SCU circulated	601	365	171	6,085
SCU borrowed	1,783	1,272	941	17,219
SCU [met : total demand]	25.2	22.3	15.3	26.1
USF bought	3,848	1,581	1,903	26,320
USF circulated	1,850	909	1184	13,992
USF borrowed	901	1,246	1,289	15,209
USF [met : total demand]	67.2	42.2	47.8	47.9
LMU bought	7,734	5,349	4,073	73,661
LMU circulated	4,237	2,538	1,494	32,824
LMU borrowed	1,953	1,169	678	17,615
LMU [met : total demand]	68.5	68.5	68.7	65

In the above table, the higher the ratio of needs met to total demand, the better the collection is performing. In other words, bigger is better.

Actions and Analysis

We realized after we gathered our respective data that the “circulated” statistic isn’t measured the same for all three schools; due to a configuration choice in our Sierra/Millennium instrument landing system (ILS) systems, Loyola Marymount and the University of San Francisco both include the LINK+ lending in the total circulation numbers, while Santa Clara does not. This causes Santa Clara’s ratios to appear worse than they are; however, Santa Clara is borrowing more from other libraries than it is lending to its own patrons in every discipline.

We also acknowledge that each university has radically different levels of investment in books. Loyola Marymount University spends nearly 20% of its budget on print monograph acquisitions, the University of San Francisco currently spends about 10%, while Santa Clara University spends just about

5%. Given our findings to date, Santa Clara may evaluate whether it should reallocate its budget to buy more books and fewer databases or journals, for example. Loyola Marymount is also looking at its return on investment for some subjects where it may be overinvesting. All three institutions are interested in identifying areas where we could each commit to developing differently deeper collections, with the added benefit of also continuing to strengthen the LINK+ meta-collection.

Over the previous two fiscal years, Santa Clara has invested over \$80,000 to address gaps identified by the data about its purchasing decisions. Based on the number of times a particular title has been borrowed via LINK+, if it isn’t already owned by the library and is available at a reasonable price, Santa Clara opts to purchase it. Decisions that require more deliberation for reasons such as higher price or falling outside the normal collecting strategy are referred to the subject librarian for further consideration. The University of San Francisco has opted to purchase all titles that have been borrowed three or more times and are not currently owned by

the institution. So far, it has identified approximately 217 titles for purchase across all subject areas. While it does not currently have an approval plan, San Francisco is planning to further analyze the data collected so far to both modify its slip profiles and investigate trends in interdisciplinary borrowing. Loyola Marymount University has thus far concentrated on religion, philosophy, and history and identified for purchase 122 titles that have been borrowed from LINK+ at least three times and are within scope for their collection. In the area of religion, Loyola Marymount found that it already owned 70% of the titles it had borrowed three or more times, so some of those purchases were for e-books to supplement the print collection.

Future Directions

While each library has begun the work of addressing general gaps in our local collections, we will need to look more deeply at targeted call number areas in support of specific programs and interdisciplinary studies. Not surprisingly, we discovered that rather than Loyola Marymount closely resembling the data from Santa Clara or San Francisco, all three institutions have some unique collection issues to address. The picture became clearer with three libraries than with two, so perhaps we could

potentially consider adding more peer institutions to better understand what is “normal,” although no other libraries within our consortium so closely resemble our three Jesuit institutions.

Some of the results we hope to see as we continue this collaboration are a modest decrease in borrowing through LINK+ as we better satisfy needs through our local collection. Additionally, perhaps we will have addressed a consortial-level need through increased lending of the items we’ve purchased as part of this project. Through cooperative purchasing to avoid purchasing the same titles at all three libraries by modifying our slip and approval profiles, we also anticipate an upward trend in uniquely held materials in LINK+.

Locally, we’d also like to achieve at least “normal” levels of circulation for materials added based on this data. In order to do so, it will be important to track or somehow identify these purchases as different from standard acquisitions. As we performed our collection analysis, we realized that this has the potential to become a longitudinal study to monitor the incremental changes we are making and the impacts of those changes on circulation and borrowing locally and throughout the consortium.

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