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Approval plans, discipline change, and the importance of human mediated book selection

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Abstract

This study examines holdings of 21 members of the Association of Research Libraries for books reviewed in *American Historical Review*. The study asserts that approval plans are inadequate for collecting from small publishers or from scholarship that crosses disciplinary boundaries. Although approval plans increase efficiency in collection development, the need for expert selection cannot be overstated. Results indicated that small publisher's books were less likely to be in libraries than university press publisher's books, and that history monographs are frequently classified outside disciplinary boundaries, and are therefore invisible to approval plans that define disciplines based on classification systems.

Introduction

This study identifies a trend in monograph collection that suggests a limitation or an oversight in automated collection methods such as approval plans. Collection development and collection management practices require a complicated balance between those practices which are automated and those practices which are intellectual. In the contemporary academic library, the routine activities surrounding the selection and acquisition of monographs are largely accomplished through mechanical and computational methods. From the standpoint of administrators, automation allows for a reduction in human processing and, in turn, faster workflows and a more efficient organization. Automation also releases the bibliographer from a large number of operational tasks. The automation of collection development and acquisition via approval plans and shelf-ready books reorients the bibliographer's critical eye, placing it at an abstracted level from which sophisticated collection development decisions are more difficult to

make. Thus, while the tools of mechanical selection increase the efficiency and accuracy of operations and provide fund managers a detailed metric for budget analysis, the bibliographer has less contact with the incoming materials and fewer opportunities to influence the direction or quality of the collection. This study attempts to identify a pattern in library collections where books falling outside traditional disciplinary boundaries and books produced from small publishers, or publishers that are not affiliated with a university, are absent or held in fewer libraries. This pattern, the author asserts, is possibly due to an over-reliance on automated collection plans that base their subject coverage on Library of Congress classes and subclasses. If this is the case, then bibliographers must regularly monitor, adjust and supplement automated collection plans in order to maintain a current collection in any given academic discipline. Classification systems are descriptive of existing knowledge. Libraries classify and maintain existing knowledge. Research libraries support scholars who are creating knowledge. In order to support the creation of knowledge, research libraries need to acquire scholarship relevant to the subject of study by the historian, whether or not that subject of study is designated as "history" under the rules of the classification system.

An analysis of history monograph holdings was performed to test the breadth of subject coverage in libraries that employ approval plans as a primary collection development tool. The monographs selected for analysis were reviewed in the journal *American Historical Review* (*AHR*). The author suggests that books reviewed in a highly respected review journal should be in academic library collections by virtue of the fact that the books are being given serious attention by a top journal. Worldcat records of the sample from issues of *AHR* from the one year period between October 2007-October 2008 were collected, and the holdings records were

compared against two groups of ARL libraries. If the books were not widely held, qualities of these books such as the subject classification or the publisher might account for their absence from research library collections.

Review of the Literature:

The American Historical Review

Among the many journals in history that review large numbers of monographs, *AHR* stands out as a particularly important resource for collection building. It is the official journal of the American Historical Association, has been published since 1895 and publishes over 1,000 reviews per year. Dalton and Charnigo remind us that there are several citation studies in the literature that are based in part on *AHR* and, "when asked how they (historians) found information, more tended to check book reviews than any other source" (Dalton & Charnigo, 2004). Comparative data spanning 23 years in that study confirm that "in research, informal means of locating information, especially ... book reviews continue to be prominent" (Dalton & Charnigo, 2004). Carlo, Duchin and Natowitz refer to *AHR* as one of the "most important journals for specialists in American History" (Carlo, Duchin, & Natowitz, 1998). Sarah Lowe makes a case for *AHR* in her description of the American Historical Association (AHA): "(The) AHA serves as the umbrella organization for historians working in every period and geographical area. In the 2000 *ISI Journal Citation Reports* the *AHR* ranked first in the history subject category in ... immediacy index, total citations and impact factor" (Lowe, 2003).

The book review as a collection tool

Book reviews allow bibliographers to monitor the developments of the discipline(s) for which they are responsible in a way that reliance on a subject-heading-based approval profile cannot. It

has been long established in the library literature that book review sources are valuable tools for collection development. Even a cursory review will reveal dozens of scholarly articles that investigate this area. Such a review is better suited to an article-length examination. For an introduction to some of the more influential publications see Budd 1982; Sabosik 1988; Blake 1989; Serebnick 1992; Jordy 1999; Calhoun 2001. Rather than covering this ground again, this study utilized literature about book reviews from authors who ordinarily write for non-librarian audiences. This was done in order to further emphasize the importance of book reviews to scholars in their research as well as their importance to librarians as collection tools.

Three papers given by Barringer, Kitchen and Pinfold at the 2006 Conference of the UK African Studies Association examine the value of book reviews from the perspective of the editor, publisher and librarian. Barringer surveyed publishers' attitudes toward the value of book reviews and reviewers motivations for reviewing a book. Kitchen's contribution from the publisher's perspective underscores the essential role reviews have for the marketing and exposure of highly specialized books from small foreign publishers. Pinfold, in response to David Henige's 2001 evaluation of book reviews and the reviewing process, asserts that reviews do indeed play a valuable role in selection, especially when economic hardships require bibliographers to select the most important books as opposed to blanket coverage of a discipline (Barringer, 2007; Kitchen, 2007; Pinfold, 2007).

Lin, Huang and Yang examine the characteristics of Internet book reviews as they affect the consumer's intention to purchase. Their conclusions are directed at book retailers, but the results are important to bibliographers since Internet reviews, although primarily volunteered rather than

solicited (outside of reputable scholarly Internet resources such as H-Net.org), could aid in determining a monograph's potential popularity and possibly its disciplinary impact. Lin et al. conclude that Internet book reviews increase purchase intention significantly, up to approximately seven reviews per book. Conversely, negative reviews have a detrimental effect on purchase intention *only* when the negative reviews are within the first several reviews and are of a comparable length to positive reviews (Lin, Huang, & Yang, 2007). Perhaps, given their value as a selection tool, a similar effect occurs with book reviews in print publications. Whether or not this is the case, reviews from *AHR*, regardless of their positive or negative opinion, serve as an important source for history bibliographers.

Mechanical selection and discipline shift

Interdisciplinary research poses a problem for subject selectors who find themselves in the position of purchasing outside their areas. Wilson states that "the trend toward interdisciplinary research and the need to shape library practices accordingly, has sharpened concern over the configuration of university library collections and services" (Wilson & Edelman, 1996). If important scholarship in one discipline is being classified in a subject area not generally considered a part of the bibliographers "domain," not only will the likelihood of that scholarship coming across the bibliographer's desk be diminished, but s/he is actually discouraged from making that purchase because the book's comes different budget line. Budget allocations are frequently divided along the lines of academic discipline(s). As disciplinary boundaries blur, these financial divisions are rendered inconvenient at best and at worst, censorial.

Classification systems are, on balance, fixed systems. Scholarship on the other hand is an open-

ended pursuit. Library collection development provides support of scholarly pursuits and should therefore also be open-ended, such that the growth and development of library collections can anticipate and respond to variations within scholarship and between scholars from different disciplines. As an alternative to subject-based collection development, Bodi proposes a method that employs characteristics of postmodernism such as blurred boundaries, reduced centralization, and emphasis on nonlinear patterns of connection. This method is not based on subject disciplines or classification systems but on curricular learning outcomes, collection assessment interviews and holistic budgeting (Bodi & Maier-O'Shea, 2005). Recognizing the blurring of boundaries and identifying non-linear patterns of connection are exactly the sophisticated decision-making and cognitive practices that only bibliographers can make. Approval plans must have a highly developed filter placed upon them to be effective, but the power of that filter to sort and organize is also too blunt a tool for high-level selection. Charles Brownson, writing in 1988, observed,

> "A second (sic) source of unease with mechanical selection undoubtedly derives
> from a vague feeling that to grant it validity would be to question the purpose of
> expertise. But what is the business of the selector? Is it primarily the evaluation of
> individual books, or is it primarily the evaluation and improvement of method?
> What is the proper proportion of these two functions in the daily work of the
> subject specialist?" (Brownson, 1988).

Twenty years after Brownson, Beth Jacoby reports on the status of approval plans, indicating their widespread use in college libraries and calling them effective and efficient tools for book selection (Jacoby, 2008). Jacoby is no doubt correct, although Brownson's observations are as keen today as they were in 1988. Major technological advances have improved the efficiency of

mechanical selection and greatly increased the power of the librarian employing such techniques to control how the plan is executed. But approval plans can no more understand the content of the literature than they could when they were created.

Small publishers

In 1988, Henry Berry recognized the growing importance of the role of small publishers in the U.S. book trade. Additionally, Berry stressed that review publications for librarians were starting to pay more attention to the books published by small presses (Berry, 1988). Judith Serebnick and John Cullars analyzed book reviews and library holdings to investigate the prevalence of information on small publishers available to book selectors (Serebnick 1984). Serebnick, in another study, sought to test the diversity of publishers whose books were reviewed in core journals (Serebnick, 1984). Again in 1992, Serebnick gauged the influence of reviews on the holdings of small publishers' books (Serebnick, 1992). Since these articles were published there have been major changes in publishing and in book collection that are directly related to the issues raised in Serebnick's and Cullar's articles. The advent of the Internet has allowed small publishers a much more flexible and far-reaching platform to communicate with bibliographers. Our communication networks in general have sped up exponentially, allowing a greater diversity of books to flow to reviewers.

John Calhoun provides a thorough literature review of book reviewing, publishers (both large and small), and mechanical selection. In it he finds that "patterns of reviews, holdings, and presses and publishers associated with notification-slip approval plans (to) represent major factors in academic library book acquisitions" (Calhoun, 2001).

Study design/Methodology:

There is little question of the value that book reviews have as a tool for bibliographers. Reading book reviews allows bibliographers to monitor the developments of the discipline(s) for which they are responsible in a way that approval plans cannot. This is due in part to the fact that approval plans base their subject definitions upon classification systems and in that way are limited to that which is considered history, not by the historians but by the classification system. The historians are the makers of history scholarship. History scholarship is not made by the classification system. To test the subject coverage of approval plans, an analysis of history monograph holdings was performed. The monographs selected for analysis were reviewed in the journal *American Historical Review*.

The study analyzes the holdings of the twenty largest research-library collections, as ranked by the 2005-2006 ARL statistics, and the holdings of the member libraries of the Committee for Institutional Cooperation (CIC). Five of the twenty-seven surveyed libraries belong to both groups. The ARL libraries were selected because their size suggests that they represent the most aggressive and comprehensive collection policies. The CIC consortium was tested because it counts among its members many of the most highly ranked public research institutions in the United States. All but one of the libraries examined used approval plans as collection tools.

A sample of the books reviewed in the *AHR* between October 2007 and October 2008 were searched in OCLC Worldcat to determine which were held by the libraries in the ARL member subsets. If many of the reviewed titles were missing from research collections, their absence might be accounted for by an over-reliance on approval plans that "miss" these books because

they do not include small or new publishers. Additionally, books that were classified outside the boundaries of traditional history (LC classes D, E and F) are not included in a discipline profile. If most or all of the sampled books were in the collections of the ARL libraries, it could be concluded that bibliographers and approval plans are successfully collecting books representing the current direction of scholarship in history.

The sample book records were analyzed for their publisher, their classification and the number of libraries in which they were held. Comparisons of these values across the entire sample and within the ARL sub-groups, i.e., the largest collections and the CIC libraries, were made to determine if the data supported the author's view.

The searches were performed between January and April 2009. Over 87% of the sample books were published in 2006 (42%) and 2007 (45%) with the remaining books being published in 2004 or 2005. Only eight of the sample books were published on 2008. Given the lag time between the publication of a monograph and its review coming out in a journal, the sample books had time to be delivered and processed for the libraries surveyed. Certainly this variable time between publication, library access and review publication has some effect on the study results, but when considering shelf ready delivery of approval books, priority cataloging given to firm orders and the allowance of one to two years since publication, the variability of these factors is mitigated.

The *AHR* reviews many hundreds of books a year. Each issue consists of reviews organized into conceptual and geographic divisions (see table 1). *AHR* also publishes non-review articles and

reviews of books of collected essays. For the purposes of this study, only reviews within the geographic/period divisions, *Comparative and World History* division, and the *Theory and Methods* division were included in the sample. This study used a disproportionate stratified sampling method to determine a sample with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5. The geographic and conceptual divisions used by the *AHR* represent each stratum. Strata with fewer than fifty books were searched in their entirety. The total population was 1032. The total number of books searched was 658.

Results

Holdings

Upon review of the data it became apparent that some of the libraries had to be removed from the sample. The three-letter OCLC member code associated with a book record indicated where the book was held. The OCLC member code for Michigan State University (MSU), part of the CIC, is EEM. That code was not in any of the holdings records for the sampled books. Performing a search on a few books in the Michigan State University library catalog determined that sample books were indeed held in the MSU libraries. Michigan State University, a CIC institution, was therefore removed. The other libraries removed were The Library of Congress, New York Public Library, Boston Public Library, The Library and Archives of Canada, and The National Research Council Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (NRC-CISTI). Each of these are members of the Association of Research Libraries and rank among the top 20 libraries by size of collections, but they are not Ph.D.-granting institutions, and their missions and collections are very different from those of university libraries.

No single library held all of the books. The University of Chicago came the closest, holding

95.45%, with Pennsylvania State following at 93.94% (see table two). Harvard University placed

third with 92.88%. Only two other libraries scored in the 90th percentile. University of

California Berkeley and Cornell University had 92.27% and 91.82%, respectively. Table 2 shows

all libraries with the corresponding percentage of sample books they held, the size of their

collection, their rank in the study and by the number of fields in which the university offers a

Ph.D.

The University of Chicago ranks seventh by its collection size in the ARL, and sixteenth out of

twenty-one in the number of Ph.D.s offered (see tables 3 and 4). If the number of Ph.D.s offered

at an institution represents the need for a broad scope in collection development, then the

University of Chicago ranks high among its peers. The University of Chicago outpaces Yale, The

University of Toronto and The University of Illinois at Urbana, libraries that have comparatively

much larger collections. In the case of Yale and Illinois, they also offer a similar number of

Ph.D. fields.

Thirteen out of fifteen of the large ARL libraries held more than 75% of the sample (see table 5).

The CIC libraries fared less well in that only six out of twelve held more than 75% of the sample

(see table 6). When the CIC libraries that are also in the large ARL library group were removed

from the comparison, only two out of the remaining seven libraries (28%), Northwestern

University and Penn State, own more than 75% of the sample books (see table 6). Only one

library fell below the 50% mark for the sample. In the bottom 25% of all the 21 libraries, the

holdings percentages were 49.5%, 58.7%, 61%, 65%, and 68.6% (see table 2). Owning only 60%

of the books reviewed in a journal such as *AHR* suggests the possibility of some holes in the collection. Seen from a different perspective, eleven out of twenty-one libraries own 80% or more of the sample books. Nevertheless, the *American Historical Review* is a standard bearer for historical scholarship, and libraries should try to understand why so many books its editors selected for review did not make it into the libraries collections.

Knowing whether a library owns the sample books is helpful for a general comparison of research collections. But there are other characteristics of the books that could be more helpful to bibliographers in identifying important scholarship that might otherwise go overlooked. Characteristics such as a book's publisher offer justifications to acquiring a book. Additionally, the way the book was classified can indicate the direction a discipline is moving. An understanding of this information will assist in developing collection strategies and adjusting collection approval profiles.

Publishers

If approval plans were insufficient to collect the scholarship represented in *AHR*, analyzing the number and types of publishers in the sample could provide insight into the reasons why. University press books were expected to be widely held. Books from other publishers, whether they were commercial, academic, niche, or small publishing houses, were expected to be less widely held. Smaller, younger or subject specific publishing houses might be too small and/or unknown for large book distributors to cover. Alternatively, the publishers could be known to the distributor but not covered if they are not proven sellers, therefore representing a greater financial risk to the distributor. Presses are absent from a booksellers covered list for many reasons, Some small presses require contractual terms that booksellers are unwilling or unable to

meet. If non-university press publishers are not covered by large distributors, then only those bibliographers who diligently examine journals and publishers will have the opportunity to acquire the books.

Table seven shows the total number of publishers, types of publishers, and the average number of books per publisher in the sample. The data suggest that non-university press publishers are more likely to be overlooked in the collection process. Ninety university presses published 529 (80%) of the books. While this is an overwhelmingly larger number of books in the sample, the number of publishers responsible is only 51% of the total 177 publishers (see table 7). Only 22 (12.5%) of the 177 publishers had seven or more books in the sample. Twenty-one of those publishers were University presses. Of those 21, 17 had ten or more books in the sample.

The publishers with the greatest number of books in the greatest number of libraries are clearly university presses. But in addition to the fact that they are the predominant publisher of scholarly monographs held in libraries, we can also tell that there is a much wider variety of publishers producing books that garner review in prestigious journals. If those non-university publishers show a disparity in the number of libraries in which they are held compared to university press books, then it is possible that collection plans are consistently missing important scholarship.

Among the university press books, 96% were held in 12 or more out of 25 libraries (see table 8). One Hundred and three books (16%) of the total sample were held in 15 or fewer libraries. Fifty-two of these were from non-university presses (see table 8). The total number of non-university press books was only 129, out of 658 total sample books, and 42% of these were held in 15 or

fewer libraries. Compare this to the 51 books published by university presses held in 15 or fewer libraries. This is only 9.6% of total university press books in the sample. This suggests that non-university press books are far less likely to be owned by a large number of libraries. Additionally, these 52 non-university press books represent 42 different publishers demonstrating the diversity of non-university press publishers that are producing books reviewed by top scholars in the field.

Discipline shift

Subject areas, as defined by a classification system, are a common way that libraries divide collection responsibilities. When the literature of an academic discipline begins to describe subjects that are classified in subject areas outside that discipline, then the bibliographer assigned to collect for that discipline can be blind to scholarship that is potentially valuable to the collection. The data suggest that scholarship classified in subject areas outside traditional disciplinary boundaries appear in fewer libraries than books classified as history.

By examining the classification features of the sample from the *American Historical Review*, the number and diversity of subjects that are considered history scholarship by *AHR* can be seen. Additionally, the number of libraries holding books with LC classes that are outside traditional history scholarship can indicate areas that need closer attention from bibliographers.

Classification systems are descriptive of existing knowledge. But in order to support the creation of knowledge, research libraries need to acquire scholarship relevant to the subject of study by the historian, whether or not that subject of study is designated as "history" under the rules of the

classification system.

Within each of the ten *AHR* topic divisions based on geographic, historical era, and theory and method (see table 1), there are a greater or lesser number of LC classes. Table 9 shows each division, the number of books in each division, and the classes and subclasses for the books in each division. It is clear from this data that what is considered history scholarship stretches far beyond the subclasses assigned by the LC classification system. Certainly approval plans are not so blunt as to define a discipline using only those classes described as history by the classification system they are sophisticated tools. Nevertheless, this observation underscores the pitfalls of collection schemes that describe disciplines too narrowly and the diversity of subjects falling under the label History as determined by the historians.

The LC classification system assigns history to the D, E and F subclasses. Other classes contain subclasses pertaining to the history of the subclass, such as LA, the history of Education; HC, Economic history and conditions; HM, the history of Sociology; R131-687, the history of Medicine. There is no question that these subclasses are firmly grounded in traditional history scholarship, but when a bibliographer or selector is responsible for History, the shape that responsibility takes may be limited to classes D, E and F and a few others rather than subclasses across the classification system. The diversity of subclasses present in any *AHR* division demonstrates how selection responsibility, when assigned by main LC class, is inadequate. On average, there are nearly half (48.6%) as many classes in a division as there are books in that division (see table 10). Some divisions in the sample had fewer than fifty books. Those with fewer books had a greater likelihood of subclass diversity; for example, the *Theory and Methods*

division had 15 books and 12 different subclasses, the *Sub-Saharan Africa* division had 25 books and 13 subclasses. When divisions with fewer than 50 books are removed from the comparison the average remains high at 35%.

Tables 11 through 11.3 show the number of books in the sample per subclass, and the average number of libraries in which the books appear. Viewing the number of books per LC class shows that there are some predominant classes in the sample. There are 97 subclasses in the sample, but only fifteen of them have ten or more books in them (see table 12). Within those fifteen subclasses, the average number of books is over 27. Subclasses DS, *The History of Asia*, and subclasses E and F, *History of America and the Western Hemisphere*, represented the greatest number of books, with 40, 70 and 66 respectively(see table 12). It is not surprising that these three classes comprise the majority of books. The books in these three geographic areas account for 45% of the entire sample. There is only one subclass, DS, used to classify the history of Asia, and E and F do not have dual-letter subclasses. It is notable however, that of the 221 books from the two *AHR* divisions encompassing the History of Europe (see table 9) (*Europe ancient and medieval* and *Europe, early modern and modern*), only 36% are classified as D-DK (see table 11), which are the subclasses for European History. Table 9 shows that the other 141 books in the European History divisions are scattered across 53 different subclasses.

Taken alone, these facts describing the diversity of the literature of history suggest the need for a close examination of collection plans that rely primarily on LC classification for subject division. If the books classified outside LC history subclasses (D, E and F) are also held in fewer libraries, then this suggests to an even greater degree that automated selection methods do not adequately

select for libraries and should be considered supplemental to expert bibliography rather than considered the standard from which collections are built.

The data indicate that 285 books (43%) of the sample are classified in the eighteen history classes -- D, its fifteen subclasses, and E and F. Those eighteen history subclasses account for only 19% of the total subclasses represented in the sample. The other 373 books (57%) of the sample are distributed among 79 non-history subclasses, 81% of the total subclasses (see table 13). In addition to containing proportionally more books per subclass, the books in the history subclasses are held by more libraries than books from other subclasses (see table 13).

In the eighteen history classes the lowest holdings-averages were fifteen and sixteen libraries (see table 14). Those holdings represent eleven books from three subclasses; DJ, DP, and DU. By contrast, in the 79 subclasses other than history, thirteen books from eleven subclasses averaged eight, twelve, thirteen and fourteen libraries (see table 15).

At the high end of the range, twelve out of eighteen history subclasses were in 19, 20, 21,or 22 libraries. Tables fourteen and sixteen show the subclasses and number of books held in 19 or more libraries. The twelve history subclasses had 68% (195) of total books in 19 or more libraries, compared to 41 other subclasses, that had 65% (243) of total books in 19 or more libraries.

Discussion:

Journals that are considered to be at the pinnacle of their academic discipline are bellwethers for the direction of research. Scholarship included in their pages is worthy and indeed important to

have in research libraries. *AHR* is considered the best review journal in historical scholarship according to the 2007 ISI *Journal Citation Reports* Database (ISI Web of Knowledge, 2007). Books reviewed in such a highly respected journal should be included in academic library collections by virtue of the fact that they are being given serious attention by a journal of *AHR*'s caliber. *AHR* also reviews books that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries. Approval plans that are based on subject divisions, whether from the Library of Congress classification system, or an alternative system, such as bookseller's thesaurus terms, become problematic when scholarship crosses disciplinary boundaries. In the case of plans based on a bookseller's thesaurus, a greater level of faceted classification is possible and hence a greater level of interdisciplinarity can also be accomplished. Nevertheless, a thesaurus, while potentially more malleable than LC classification and subject headings, is still a closely controlled list of subjects. All controlled vocabularies must retain some level of stability in order to remain useful. As the focus and/or breadth of a discipline changes, the tools used to collect that scholarship must also change.

Libraries must be aware of these discipline shifts and they must respond to these shifts in order to continue to provide sophisticated classification and access. Libraries must also adjust and re-form the tools and methods of collection development and bibliographic description. Based on this study, approval plans appear to need continual modification in order to perform at optimum levels. But even with frequent adjustment, good collection development practice still requires the selection skills of an expert bibliographer. During the selection process, the bibliographer uses her/his education, experience, faculty contacts and cognitive ability to compare the intellectual content of a monograph against all that they know about their institution and its needs regardless

of the LC class the book has been assigned or the size or prominence of the publisher. The selection criteria used by bibliographers are far more sophisticated than a classification scheme profile. Their sophistication and complexity of thought make bibliographers essential to an intellectually relevant and contemporary library collection both for their ability to identify important scholarship and for their ability to manage and fine-tune the apparatus of mechanical selection. Other collection apparatus such as publisher based plans and firm order options can circumvent some of the problems associated with subject-based plans, and indeed, few large libraries depend entirely on one form of approval plan. Publisher based plans can be employed as a default mechanism based on a presumption of need. For example, a university library may select certain university presses based on reputation. However, this safeguard does not consider the occurrence of important scholarship coming out of small, new or untested publishers. Firm orders might solve problems associated with approval plan shortcomings. They serve as a corrective measure for the books which have "fallen through the cracks" of the plan.

Suggested research:

There are legitimate reasons why a research library would not have the books in their collections unrelated to the approval plan or the bibliographer. A likely possibility is the longstanding trend of reducing expenditures for monographs in order to cover the inflated costs of serial subscriptions. This, however, is a variable that is beyond the control of most if not all experimental methods. If, in the unlikely event that all the financial data were available, it would be exceedingly difficult to determine what decisions were made that precluded the purchase of specific monographs.

Another factor affecting the study and one that deserves additional research is the inevitable variation in time from order to completion of cataloging. This factor is compounded by the method in which the books are acquired and the size of the publisher. Are approval books likely to be cataloged more quickly than books acquired through firm orders? How does the size of the publisher affect the speed with which a book is fully cataloged? For example, other differences aside, does a large publishing house with the resources to provide partial cataloging of its books get their titles on library shelves faster than a small publishing house?

An additional concern is the time between publication and review. Traditionally, the publication of a scholarly book review follows the publication of the reviewed book by many months and often more than a year. It would be quite interesting to discover whether the reviewing practices of electronic journals are different enough from print journal reviewing practices that they decrease the time between book release and the publication of a scholarly book review. Would that reduction affect the collection rates for books falling outside approval plan profiles?

How many books among the sample were shipped by the vendor only to be rejected by the surveyed libraries prior to an *AHR* review? This kind of information would inform the investigation invaluably were it collected. If there was a uniformity of rejection across the libraries for particular subjects, this could indicate a shift in scholarship that libraries had not yet incorporated into their classification or collection practices.

Additional illuminating information would come from an examination of every surveyed library's approval plan to see how interdisciplinary classes are handled by each. Comparing that

information to the Ph.D. offerings of each university would also provide an interesting assessment of library collection practices and their alignment with college departments.

The absence of a Ph.D. program in a discipline or sub-discipline might contribute to reasons a library did not have a book from the sample. For example, if a university does not grant a Ph.D. in East Asian studies, is it reasonable to expect the library to have an extensive collection in that area? Conversely, if books are reviewed in a major book review journal as opposed to a highly focused area-studies journal, is it unreasonable to expect that the books be in the library at an institution that offers a Ph.D. in history, even if it does not offer the degree in a sub-discipline? It is often the case that, when an institution does not offer a Ph.D., their collection in that area is not comprehensive. By contrast, the size and the importance of the research libraries surveyed for this study justifies, if it does not necessitate, the acquisition of monographs that are reviewed in highly regarded journals.

Additional studies on academic library collections selected using different criteria might provide insight. Reproducing this study using earlier *AHR* volumes presents several problems. Results would be skewed by older titles. The potential for a book to be removed or missing from a collection increases the longer a book is owned by the library. Studies could be performed using other humanities or social science discipline(s) as their focus, although with each discipline comes a unique set of issues that shape the study and its results. A study of multiple history journals seeking to identify trends in the discipline might inform bibliographers as to new areas of research that merit exploration. Comparing those trends (as defined by Historians and reviewers) to the subject area in which the books are classified might also inform the approval

plan review process. To reiterate Brownson, " ... what is the business of the selector? Is it primarily the evaluation of individual books, or is it primarily the evaluation and improvement of method? What is the proper proportion of these two functions in the daily work of the subject specialist?" (Brownson, 1988). This study is in essence about the need to continually examine that proper proportion. Rather than struggling *against* the march of technological progress like a misguided John Henry, it is the author's intention to identify collection methods that best utilize the technological power available in contemporary libraries. The best direction is not necessarily the one employing the most technology. The best direction is one in which our individual knowledge and intelligence leverages the power of that technology in order to fulfill our institutional missions.

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Table 1: AHR divisions and sample size

AHR section	Number of reviews	Sample size
Asia:	reviews: 57	50
Canada and the US:	reviews: 388	193
Caribbean and Latin America:	reviews: 63	54
Comparative/World	reviews: 90	73
Europe ancient and medieval	reviews: 57	50
Europe early modern and modern	reviews:308	171
Methods, Theory	reviews: 16	16
Middle East and Northern Africa	reviews: 26	26
Oceania and the Pacific Islands	reviews: 3	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	reviews: 24	24

Table 2: Libraries, size of collection; percentage of sample held; and number of Ph.D.s offered.

line	Institution	% of sample	Rank	Ph.D.s	Collection size
1	University of Chicago (ARL / CIC)	95.00%	1	64	7,765,583
2	Pennsylvania State University (ARL / CIC)	93.94%	2	118	5,069,854
3	Harvard University (ARL)	92.42%	3	74	15,826,570
4	University of California at Berkeley (ARL)	92.27%	4	82	10,094,417
5	Cornell University (ARL)	91.82%	5	82	7,785,263
6	University of California at Los Angeles (ARL)	89.39%	6	79	8,157,182
7	Indiana University (ARL / CIC)	88.18%	7	90	7,374,784
8	Columbia University (ARL)	86.82%	8	108	9,455,312
9	University of Washington (ARL)	85.00%	9	80	7,111,065
10	University of Illinois at Urbana (ARL / CIC)	81.82%	10	84	10,524,935
11	Northwestern University (CIC)	81.36%	11	58	4,687,828
12	University of Michigan (ARL / CIC)	78.64%	12	111	8,273,050
13	University of Toronto (ARL)	78.03%	13	98	10,536,868
14	University of Texas at Austin (ARL)	76.06%	14	91	9,022,363
15	University of Illinois at Chicago (CIC)	71.67%	15	57	2,324,857
16	University of Iowa (CIC)	71.52%	16	61	4,592,560
17	University of Minnesota (CIC)	68.64%	17	107	6,713,629
18	Ohio State University (CIC)	65.00%	18	91	6,180,744
19	Yale University (ARL)	61.06%	19	61	12,368,757
20	University of Wisconsin at Madison (ARL / CIC)	58.79%	20	108	8,015,081
21	Purdue University (CIC)	49.55%	21	59	2,511,097

Table 3: ARL libraries by collection size

line	Institution	Collection size
3	Harvard University (ARL)	15,826,570
19	Yale University (ARL)	12,368,757
13	University of Toronto (ARL)	10,536,868
10	University of Illinois at Urbana (ARL / CIC)	10,524,935
4	University of California at Berkeley (ARL)	10,094,417
8	Columbia University (ARL)	9,455,312
14	University of Texas at Austin (ARL)	9,022,363
12	University of Michigan (ARL / CIC)	8,273,050
6	University of California at Los Angeles (ARL)	8,157,182
20	University of Wisconsin at Madison (ARL / CIC)	8,015,081
5	Cornell University (ARL)	7,785,263
1	University of Chicago (ARL / CIC)	7,765,583
7	Indiana University (ARL / CIC)	7,374,784
9	University of Washington (ARL)	7,111,065
17	University of Minnesota (CIC)	6,713,629
18	Ohio State University (CIC)	6,180,744
2	Pennsylvania State University (ARL / CIC)	5,069,854
11	Northwestern University (CIC)	4,687,828
16	University of Iowa (CIC)	4,592,560
21	Purdue University (CIC)	2,511,097
15	University of Illinois at Chicago (CIC)	2,324,857

Table 4: Number of Ph.D.s offered and rank by percent of sample held

Institution	Rank	Ph.D.s	% of sample
Pennsylvania State University (ARL / CIC)	2	118	93.94%
University of Michigan (ARL / CIC)	12	111	78.64%
Columbia University (ARL)	8	108	86.82%
University of Wisconsin at Madison (ARL / CIC)	20	108	58.79%
University of Minnesota (CIC)	17	107	68.64%
University of Toronto (ARL)	13	98	78.03%
University of Texas at Austin (ARL)	14	91	76.06%
Ohio State University (CIC)	18	91	65.00%
Indiana University (ARL / CIC)	7	90	88.18%
University of Illinois at Urbana (ARL / CIC)	10	84	81.82%
University of California at Berkeley (ARL)	4	82	92.27%
Cornell University (ARL)	5	82	91.82%
University of Washington (ARL)	9	80	85.00%
University of California at Los Angeles (ARL)	6	79	89.39%
Harvard University (ARL)	3	74	92.42%
University of Chicago (ARL / CIC)	1	64	95.00%
University of Iowa (CIC)	16	61	71.52%
Yale University (ARL)	19	61	61.06%
Purdue University (CIC)	21	59	49.55%
Northwestern University (CIC)	11	58	81.36%
University of Illinois at Chicago (CIC)	15	57	71.67%

Table 5: ARL top 15 libraries

Institution	Rank	% of sample
University of Chicago (ARL / CIC)	1	95.00%
Pennsylvania State University (ARL / CIC)	2	93.94%
Harvard University (ARL)	3	92.42%
University of California at Berkeley (ARL)	4	92.27%
Cornell University (ARL)	5	91.82%
University of California at Los Angeles (ARL)	6	89.39%
Indiana University (ARL / CIC)	7	88.18%
Columbia University (ARL)	8	86.82%
University of Washington (ARL)	9	85.00%
University of Illinois at Urbana (ARL / CIC)	10	81.82%
University of Michigan (ARL / CIC)	11	78.64%
University of Toronto (ARL)	12	78.03%
University of Texas at Austin (ARL)	13	76.06%
Yale University (ARL)	14	61.06%
University of Wisconsin at Madison (ARL / CIC)	15	58.79%

Table 6: CIC Libraries

Institution	Rank	% of sample
University of Chicago (ARL / CIC)	1	95.00%
Pennsylvania State University (ARL / CIC)	2	93.94%
University of California at Berkeley (ARL)	4	92.27%
Indiana University (ARL / CIC)	7	88.18%
University of Illinois at Urbana (ARL / CIC)	10	81.82%
Northwestern University (CIC)	11	81.36%
University of Michigan (ARL / CIC)	12	78.64%
University of Illinois at Chicago (CIC)	15	71.67%
University of Iowa (CIC)	16	71.52%
University of Minnesota (CIC)	17	68.64%
Ohio State University (CIC)	18	65.00%
University of Wisconsin at Madison (ARL / CIC)	20	58.79%
Purdue University (CIC)	21	49.55%

Table 7: Publisher information

Publishers		Number of books in sample	Average number in libraries	7 or more books in sample	10 or more books in sample	1 or 2 books in sample
University Press	90	529	5.9	21	17 (19%)	33(37%)
Other	87	129	1.5	1	0	67(77%)
Total	177	658	n/a	22 (12.5%)	17 (9.6%)	100 (56%)

Table 8: Number of books held in number of libraries with publisher information

Number of libraries	Number of books	Univ. press	Non-Univ. press
24	1	1	0
23	29	29	0
22	81	77	4
21	108	96	12
20	104	92	12
19	77	68	9
18	70	57	13
17	43	29	14
16	42	29	13
15	33	18	15
14	21	14	7
13	10	5	5
12	12	8	4
11	5	1	4
10	3	1	2
9	4	1	3
8	5	0	5
7	1	1	0
6	0	0	0
5	5	1	4
4	1	0	1
3	1	1	0
2	1	0	1
1	1	0	1
	Total: 658	529	129

Table 9: *AHR* sections and LC classes

AHR Section	Number of books	LC classes	Number of classes
Asia	51	BL, BQ, BV, DS, GT, HC, HD, HE, HF, HQ, JQ, KN, KP, LA, LC, PL, PN, PR, R, RA, U, Z	22
Canada and the US	195	B, BL, BM, BP, BR, BT, BV, BX, D, E, F, G, GF, GT, GV, HD, HM, HN, HQ, HT, HV, HX, JC, JK, JV, K, KF, LC, ML, N, PN, PS, QC, QH, QL, RA, RC, T, TG, TX, Z	41
Caribbean and Latin America	55	BR, E, F, GT, HC, HD, HF, HG, HN, HQ, HT, HV, JL, KHA, R, RA	16
Comparative /World	72	BF, BM, BP, BR, BT, BV, CC, D, DA, DJ, DP, DS, E, F, HA, HD, HF, HG, HT, HV, JZ, K, PN, Q, RA, RC, RM, T, V	29
Europe ancient and medieval	50	BF, BL, BP, BR, BT, BV, BX, D, DA, DC, DE, DF, DG, DP, DS, GA, HQ, HT, HV, KJA, KD, ML, PN, RC	24
Europe early modern and modern	171	B, BD, BF, BM, BR, BT, BV, BX, CT, D, DA, DB, DC, DD, DG, DJ, DK, DP, DR, DS, DX, F, GA, GN, GR, HB, HC, HD, HF, HN, HQ, HV, HX, JA, JC, JN, JV, KB, KD, ML, N, ND, NE, P, PN, PQ, PR, Q, R, RA, RC, TA, VA, VB	54
Methods, Theory	15	BD, BF, CD, D, E, GA, GF, HM, HT, JC, PN, PT	12
Middle East and North Africa	21	BL, BR, DS, DT, HD, HQ, JC, KMQ, RC	9
Oceania and the Pacific Islands	3	DU, G, RA	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	25	BL, BX, D, DT, G, H, HD, HN, HQ, HT, PR, RC, UB	13

Table 10: Percent subclasses to books in *AHR* divisions

AHR Section	Number of books	Number of classes	Percent diversity
Asia	51	22	43%
Canada and the US	195	41	21%
Caribbean and Latin America	55	16	29%
Comparative /World	72	29	40%
Europe ancient and medieval	50	24	48%
Europe early modern and modern	171	54	32%
Methods, Theory	15	12	80%
Middle East and North Africa	21	9	43%
Oceania and the Pacific Islands	3	3	100%
Sub-Saharan Africa	25	13	52%

Table 11: Books per subclass and average library holdings

Subclass	Books	Libraries
1 B	4	19
2 BD	2	21
3 BF	5	18
4 BL	8	19
5 BM	5	20
6 BP	4	17
7 BQ	1	22
8 BR	17	17
9 BT	5	16
10 BV	9	18
11 BX	30	17
12 CC	1	21
13 CD	1	22
14 CT	1	19
15 D	22	19
16 DA	26	17
17 DB	4	17
18 DC	9	17
19 DD	8	20
20 DE	1	19
21 DF	2	21
22 DG	8	19
23 DJ	3	15
24 DK	6	21
25 DP	7	15
26 DR	2	20
27 DS	40	19
28 DT	9	19
29 DU	1	16
30 DX	1	21
31 E	70	21
32 F	66	19
33 G	2	14

Table 11.2

Subclass	Books	Libraries
34 GA	3	21
35 GF	3	18
36 GN	2	12
37 GR	1	20
38 GT	3	19
39 GV	3	19
40 HA	1	20
41 HB	1	17
42 HC	7	17
43 HD	34	19
44 HE	1	18
45 HF	7	19
46 HG	3	20
47 HM	2	22
48 HN	10	19
49 HQ	34	19
50 HT	12	20
51 HV	11	17
52 HX	5	19
53 JA	1	22
54 JC	8	17
55 JK	2	19
56 JL	1	14
57 JN	4	18
58 JQ	1	20
59 JV	2	14
60 JZ	1	12
61 K	2	14
62 KB	1	8
63 KD	2	16
64 KF	8	16
65 KH	1	14
66 KM	1	13

Table 11.3

Subclass	Books	Libraries
67 KN	1	19
68 KP	2	16
69 LA	1	15
70 LC	5	18
71 ML	6	19
72 N	3	18
73 ND	1	15
74 NE	1	21
75 P	2	20
76 PL	3	21
77 PN	18	19
78 PQ	1	22
79 PR	5	21
80 PS	5	21
81 PT	1	8
82 Q	4	19
83 QC	1	22
84 QH	2	21
85 QL	1	15
86 R	4	15
87 RA	10	15
88 RC	10	15
89 RM	1	15
90 T	3	20
91 TA	1	19
92 TG	1	20
93 TX	1	20
94 U	3	18
95 V	1	14
96 VA	1	20
97 Z	2	20

Table 12: Subclasses with ten or more books

Subclass	Books	Libraries
BR	17	17
BX	30	17
D	22	19
DA	26	17
DS	40	19
E	70	21
F	66	19
HD	34	19
HN	10	19
HT	12	20
HQ	34	19
HV	11	17
PN	18	19
RA	10	15
RC	10	15

Table 13: History as compared to all other subclasses

Classes (total=177)	Number of books (total=658)	Pecent of sample	Average no. of libraries, (Standard deviation)
History, D-F (18)	285	43%	18.6, (2)
All others (79)	373	57%	17.7, (3)

Table 14: The number of books and average library holdings for LC classes D, E and F,

Subclass	Books	Libraries
E	70	21
DK	6	21
DF	2	21
DX	1	21
DD	8	20
DR	2	20
F	66	19
DS	40	19
D	22	19
DT	9	19
DG	8	19
DE	1	19
DA	26	17
DC	9	17
DB	4	17
DU	1	16
DP	7	15
DJ	3	15
Total	285	18.6

Table 15: classes in 15 or fewer libraries

Class	Number of books	Average number of libraries
RA	10	15
RC	10	15
DP	7	15
R	4	15
DJ	3	15
LA	1	15
ND	1	15
QL	1	15
RM	1	15
G	2	14
JV	2	14
K	2	14
JL	1	14
KH	1	14
V	1	14
KM	1	13
GN	2	12
JZ	1	12
KB	1	8
PT	1	8

Table 16: classes in 19 or more libraries

Class	Number of books	Average number of libraries
HM	2	22
BQ	1	22
CD	1	22
JA	1	22
PQ	1	22
QC	1	22
E	70	21
DK	6	21
PR	5	21
PS	5	21
GA	3	21
PL	3	21
BD	2	21
DF	2	21
QH	2	21
CC	1	21
DX	1	21
NE	1	21
HT	12	20
DD	8	20
BM	5	20
HG	3	20
T	3	20
DR	2	20
P	2	20
Z	2	20
GR	1	20
HA	1	20
JQ	1	20
TG	1	20
TX	1	20
VA	1	20
F	66	19
DS	40	19
HD	34	19
HQ	34	19
D	22	19
PN	18	19
HN	10	19
DT	9	19
BL	8	19
DG	8	19
HF	7	19
ML	6	19
HX	5	19
B	4	19
Q	4	19
GT	3	19
GV	3	19
JK	2	19
CT	1	19
DE	1	19
KN	1	19
TA	1	19