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Susan K. Beidler, "What do Those Collection Numbers in Resources for College Libraries Really Mean?" (2010). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284314819>

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## WHAT DO THOSE COLLECTION STATISTICS IN RESOURCES FOR COLLEGE LIBRARIES REALLY MEAN?

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### ABSTRACT

This paper highlights several ways a small academic library employs *Resources for College Libraries with Bowker Book Analysis System* in its assessment efforts and makes some recommendations for future enhancements to RCL.

Snowden Library at Lycoming College subscribed to *Resources for College Libraries with Bowker Book Analysis System* when it was first released in 2006. Since that time the service has been used in various ways for assessing the collection and collection activities.

Librarians who have been practicing in the field for many years remember manually annotating standard bibliographies, such as the original *Books for College Libraries*, to determine how well their collections matched up with these basic sources. Of course, it was an incredibly time consuming and tedious process that did not really give the library any useful statistics to work with when (or if) the task was completed. Plus it was almost impossible to keep up to date.

Developments in technology allow us to automate that comparison process. But now that we have the comparison data, what do they mean and what do we do with the results?

Some basic information about the institution, the library, and the collection is in order before examining our statistics. Lycoming College is a small private, 4-year college of approximately 1400 FTE undergraduates located in Williamsport in north-central Pennsylvania. It is one of 44 US colleges/universities that have over 80 percent of their graduates in the arts and sciences and are focused exclusively on undergraduate education.

Snowden Library, the only library on campus, is staffed by 5 librarians, including the director, and 6 support staff. An active collaborative instruction program that teaches the responsible use of research sources, building the skills to find, evaluate, and integrate information is a key aspect of its mission. The Director and the Head of Collection Management Services, in cooperation with the classroom faculty, do the majority of the book selection. There are no subject specialists on staff. A broadly profiled slip approval plan from YBP Library Services is also an element of the collection development strategy. The library's goal is to be more proactive rather than reactive in collection building.

The collection includes approximately 155,000 cataloged volumes. With an institutional history that goes back to 1812, much of the collection is aged, to say the least. During the 1950's and 60's, as the College was developing its identity as a four-year institution, it seems every gift book that came through the doors was added to the collection. Given the College's affiliation with the United Methodist Church, that meant many retiring ministers' books were donated to the library. Current annual expenditures for 'books' total around \$120,000 and include standing orders, e-books, and AV materials. During the past decade, an average of approximately 2,300 new cataloged items were added to the collection annually.

*Resources for College Libraries* is the successor to *BCL3 – Books for College Libraries*, 3rd. edition. It is a bibliography of selected works spanning the college curriculum and is a

recommended core collection for all academic libraries. This version of the classic is deemed a successor, rather than a new edition, because it includes not only books, but a variety of electronic resources including Web sites, subscription databases, e-books, and other electronic materials. Additionally it was issued both in print and as a searchable, regularly updated, online database.

Although RCL retains LC classification in its entries, the primary organizational framework was developed to reflect the college curriculum and account for interdisciplinary studies as well. (Resources for College Libraries: General Introduction, 2006) Although not an exact duplication, the author's impression is that the RCL framework is closer to the CHOICE subject categories.

Bowker's Book Analysis System is an add-on to the basic RCL subscription. It allows subscribers to electronically compare their local collections to the RCL database and generates an array of statistical reports. In addition, BBAS requires an online subscription to *Books in Print*.

Statistical reports can be generated by the RCL subjects, by LC Classification or by Dewey number ranges. Reports include a table that shows the numbers of RCL titles held, not held, total number of RCL titles and the percentage held, broken down by various levels of classification and specificity.

In order to run BBAS, the library must upload a file of either ISBNs or full MARC records of holdings. Usually the file is processed within a day and then reports can be generated.

The first general reports returned simply show the number of records processed, the number of invalid ISBNs, the number of records in the input file that did not match any records in the core list, the number of records in our input file that could be converted to an ISBN-13 and the number of records in our file that are duplicated. These include alternate ISBNs for the same title.

**Statistics Lists for: Lycoming College**

[PROCESS FILE](#) [FILE DOWNLOADS](#)

File Description/File Name	Date Created	Match Completed	# Uploaded	# Invalid ISBN	# Non-Match	# ISBN13	# Dup Title
Lycoming Test2(lycoming.mrc) <a href="#">Delete</a>	12/15/2006	12/16/2006	130,881	96	129,376	73,219	594
Test(lyc0707.mrc) <a href="#">Delete</a>	08/07/2007	08/07/2007	130,234	1,375	130,162	73,130	549
Lycoming Feb 08(Lycoming_Feb_08.mrc) <a href="#">Delete</a>	02/12/2008	02/13/2008	133,588	44	138,790	80,464	642
February 2009 file(Lycoming_Feb_09.mrc) <a href="#">Delete</a>	02/02/2009	02/02/2009	134,280	45	141,258	85,859	716
Lycoming Jan 2010(Lycoming_Jan_10.mrc) <a href="#">Delete</a>	01/26/2010	01/26/2010	135,642	49	145,060	90,363	732
Lycoming Aug 2010(Lycoming August 2010.mrc) <a href="#">Delete</a>	09/08/2010	09/08/2010	138,371	49	148,021	93,396	741

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**LEGEND**  
**TITLE**  
 Click on any header name to sort descending.

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The next level of reports compares the library's collection against the RCL database by RCL subject, LC class, or Dewey number. At this level, the statistics reported include:

- Core titles in library
- Core titles NOT in library
- Total # of core titles
- % of core titles held

**Bowker's BOOK ANALYSIS SYSTEM**

HOME | FOR LICENSE ADMINISTRATORS | HELP | LOGOUT

Manage My Files | Select Statistics to View | BooksInPrint.com

**Percentages of Core Lists Selected** Total Records: 63,240

Core Lists: Resources for College Libraries

Your File: Lycoming Aug 2010 | Subject Classification System: RCL | GO

These limiters will help you narrow the scope of your comparison:

<b>Awards:</b> Any Award AAASS/Orbis Books Prize for Polish Studies	<b>Review Source:</b> Any Source API Reviews	<b>RCL Audience:</b> Any Audience Upper Undergrad.	<b>RCL Format:</b> Any Format Book
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Winners  Nominees  E-book only  In Print Title only  Exact Match Only

Publication Year: (YYYY) from to CLEAR GO

LEGEND:  
 Expand  
 Collapse  
 Expand Entire Subject

Download

RCL Classification	Core Titles in Library	Core Titles NOT in Library	Total # of Core Titles	% of Core Titles Held
<b>Grand Totals:</b>	<b>11,876</b>	<b>51,364</b>	<b>63,240</b>	<b>18.78%</b>
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES	135	528	663	20.36%
AFRICAN HISTORY, LANGUAGES, AND LITERATURES	60	450	510	11.76%
AGRICULTURE	74	704	778	9.51%
AMERICAN LITERATURE	885	1,917	2,802	31.58%
AMERICAN STUDIES	175	339	514	34.05%
ANCIENT HISTORY	154	415	569	27.07%
ANTHROPOLOGY	103	685	788	13.07%
ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES	47	384	431	10.90%
ASIAN HISTORY, LANGUAGES, AND LITERATURES	155	1,378	1,533	10.11%
ASTRONOMY	55	176	231	23.81%
BIOLOGY	213	1,928	2,141	9.95%
BRITISH LITERATURE	1,211	2,917	4,128	29.34%
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION	226	1,136	1,362	16.59%

These results can be downloaded and exported into a spreadsheet format compatible with Excel. Unfortunately the spreadsheet cannot be readily manipulated once it has been exported. Each number in the chart is a link to detailed information on each of the titles in that category.

Although Snowden Library does not seek gift collections, it does accept almost any book donations from faculty members who are housecleaning or retiring. However, we are very selective about what is actually added to the collection. After weeding out textbooks and other materials inappropriate for the collection, the librarian does a quick search in RCL as another screening mechanism. If the exact title is in RCL, that book will be added to the collection. If there is a different edition in RCL, it will usually be added, almost without question. Sometimes, the librarian browses RCL by author and retains a title if the author is well represented. Presence in RCL guarantees that the title will be added, but absence does not automatically disqualify a gift title from further consideration.

RCL's Book Analysis opens up other opportunities for collection assessment. Seldom does Snowden Library have funds for a retrospective collection development project, but in 2006-07 we made the case for enhancing the photography collection.

For years the number of circulations as a percentage of the entire photography collection had easily doubled the next most heavily used subject area in the book collection. With a one-year special allocation of \$6,000, the library had the ability to do some true collection development and retrospective purchasing. Steps taken to develop this collection included:

- A list of photographers that should be represented in the collection was solicited from the Art Department faculty. From that list the Head of Collection Management developed a list of key books by those photographers and asked the department to make selections.
- The librarian employed the WorldCat Collection Analysis Service, which at the time was a relatively new service, to compare the library's photography holdings with the standard *Books for College Libraries 3* list. Again a list of those titles we did not have was generated as a selection tool for the department.
- Finally, upon Bowker's release of the new *Resources for College Libraries with BBAS*, our photography holdings were compared with that standard list and a "don't have" list was generated.

The faculty members who participated in the project were most grateful for the ready-made selection lists.

The library added about 115 books to the photography collection as a result of this project. Obviously not all of the additions were directly related to RCL, but a significant number were. Coverage of titles included in RCL went from 27.74% in 2007 to 51.82% when we processed our new holdings file in February 2008, shortly after the conclusion of the project.

Lycoming has a fairly long tradition of involving faculty in weeding the book collection in order to remove books that are outdated or no longer relevant to the curriculum. Each year several academic disciplines are selected and their faculty are invited to the spring 'weeding party.' Individual faculty members from those departments are sent to the stacks with a book truck and a set of general guidelines. They are asked to put anything they believe should be withdrawn on the truck. When our faculty colleagues have finished their part, a student worker arranges the de-selected items in call number order.

The collection management librarian then generates a list of the 'held' titles from BBAS, sorts them by LC call number, and does a quick scan of the volumes on the truck against the RCL list. Anything found on the list is immediately returned to the shelves. The book in hand is marked that it is in RCL with the date to assist in future decisions. A handful of titles has been returned to the shelves for this reason each year since we've had our RCL subscription. It is a quick and painless way to ensure that a key title is not inadvertently withdrawn.

Just as several academic departments are targeted to participate in the weeding activity each year; two to three departments are selected annually for more in depth discussions related to the book collection. In preparing for those meetings, the librarian carefully reviews the BBAS statistics of the LC classification for that area in addition to the circulation statistics. Depending on the size of the collection and faculty interest, the BBAS list of 'titles not held' has been used to prepare review lists for those departments that request them. Although response from those who requested the lists has been negligible, BBAS makes it quick and painless to prepare such a report and it is great public relations for the library.

Each time a new holdings file is uploaded for BBAS processing, the librarian updates statistics on inclusion rates over time. Using RCL as a screening mechanism for gifts is one way inclusion statistics have been improved. However there are some challenges associated with this process.

Because the inclusion reports are generated in real time, even when a local holdings file from 2007 is compared in BBAS today, it runs the comparison against today's RCL list. RCL is updated quarterly. Therefore, it is imperative that reports are exported and saved when they are run so that the statistics are frozen in time and can then be compared longitudinally. And herein lays the other challenge. Because the numbers that display in the statistical charts are

actually links to the lists of individual title records included in that category, they do not export in a way that they can be manipulated in Excel.

For example, because Lycoming has a traditional liberal arts focus and the collection is totally curriculum driven, there are some subject areas of the LC or RCL classifications that are not actively collected. It seems that including areas such as engineering or agriculture, subject areas that are generally ignored, gives an inaccurate picture of the overall strength of the collection. If the report has been exported and the irrelevant rows are deleted, Excel does not recognize the data in the remaining cells as numbers. It is not able to recalculate the totals or percentages.

The author suggested that while the existing statistical reports are useful to determine changes in one institution's inclusion rates over time, an even more useful capability would be to compare or benchmark one's own holdings percentages with those of similar types of libraries. In this 'age of assessment' comparable statistics would allow the librarian to apply context to determine whether the local holdings are good, adequate, or totally inadequate relative to libraries with equivalent resources.

## **WORKS CITED**

*Resources for College Libraries: General Introduction.* (2006). Retrieved September 14, 2010, from <http://www.rcinfo.net/RCLintro2006.pdf>