

Letters

Evaluation of an Approval Plan

To the Editor:

A 1976 study at the University of Iowa Health Sciences Library was reported in *C&RL* (Nov. 1978, p.385-91), and I was coauthor of the article. That study's results were considered satisfactory. However, upon arrival at the State University of New York, Upstate Medical Center (UMC) Library, in Syracuse in 1978, I decided to duplicate the study. I wanted to see if the methodology originally employed could be replicated; to compare two approval vendors; and to determine the quality of the plan serving SUNY UMC.

The same vendor has served the UMC library for seven years. The profile was updated immediately preceding the study and included all medical, basic science, and certain associated subjects intended for upper-level students and clinicians. Prior to and during the study, book reviews in ten health sciences journals, publishers' flyers, and *Weekly Record* were read, searched against the public catalog, typed, and ordered.

The results of the study were more than satisfactory and answered all of my questions. The original study could easily be modified and replicated; comparison between two vendors could be made; and the specific quality of this vendor could be quantified.

During the course of the study, book reviews generated requests for forty-five books. All of the books were either in the library (thirty-eight, 84 percent) or were received from the vendor (seven, 16 percent) during the two-month hold that the vendor recommended we maintain. Publishers' flyers, previously shown to be a timely method of ordering, generated 116 requests. More than half of the books (sixty-seven) were already in the library, and forty-nine (42 percent) were received during

the two-month hold. Seven orders (5.5 percent) were ultimately typed and placed with the vendor. Of the 327 requests that came from *Weekly Record*, 197 (60 percent) were already in the library. During the two-month hold or shortly after ordering, 121 (37 percent) were received. Nine (3 percent) had to be ordered.

Due to the outstanding results, book reviews are no longer read; only uncovered publishers' flyers are examined; and *Weekly Record* is skimmed for the unusual publisher or the essential new editions. The time savings is ample and can be applied to in-hand evaluation of the approval books, etc.

SUNY UMC Library depends heavily on the approval plan for collection development. Ninety-two percent of current monograph acquisitions are received through the approval plan. We are pleased with the service and personal concern shown by the vendor.

Because the results from the original study could be taken by some as good and by others as mediocre, and, therefore, not conclusively in favor of approval plans, I felt the need to affirm that a good vendor can support a growing collection and that dependency on that vendor is not an abrogation of the collection development responsibility of a library.—Linda A. Hulbert, *Collection Development Librarian, Upstate Medical Center Library, Syracuse, New York.*

Use of Newspapers on Microfilm

To the Editor:

I do not believe that the data presented in "Undergraduate Use Patterns of Newspapers on Microfilm," by W. J. Maher and B. F. Shearer (*C&RL*, May 1979, p.254-60), support their conclusion that "a user

satisfaction level of almost 85 percent can be attained with a twenty-year backfile of twenty titles." This conclusion is true only if the patrons who request the twenty titles also limit their requests to the most recent twenty years. Given the newspaper titles cited in the article, it would appear likely that some of the twenty title requests would be for newspapers older than twenty years and that some of the requests for the most recent twenty years would be for titles that are not in the top twenty. Thus overall user satisfaction should be computed as 84.6 percent of 84.5 percent, or 71.5 percent—a substantial reduction from 85 percent.

Table 1 illustrates the desirability of identifying four distinct patron groups when working with two variables.—*Jo Bell Whitlatch, Access Coordinator, Library, San José State University, San Jose, California.*

TABLE 1
USE OF NEWSPAPERS

Titles Used	Total (Percent)	Most Recent 20 Years (Percent)	Older Than 20 Years (Percent)
Total	100.0	84.5	15.5
Top 20 titles	84.6	71.5	13.1
Remaining titles (21-49)	15.4	13.0	2.4

Response

To the Editor:

Jo Bell Whitlatch has noticed an error in our logic: not all requests for the "top twenty" titles may be for the twenty most recent years. However, it would be just as inaccurate to assume that only 84.6 percent of the requests for the past twenty years were for the twenty most popular titles. The nature of these titles and of undergraduate use is such that the coincidence of use by title and by date is remarkably high (as can be seen in tables 3 and 4). Our original data show that 91.1 percent of the twenty most requested titles were requested for dates within the past twenty years. If one then multiplies the percentage of "top twenty" titles (84.6) by the percentage of requests for the past twenty years of these "top twenty" titles (91.1), the level of satisfaction for the combination of these factors would be 77.1 percent (not the 71.5 percent derived in isolation from the data). Thus the 85 percent user satisfaction we quoted on page 260 is too high. However, a careful reexamination of the original data suggests that a 77.1 percent satisfaction level would not be unrealistic.—*William J. Maher and Benjamin F. Shearer.*

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