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## Using *Choice* as a Mechanism for Allocating Book Funds in an Academic Library

*College and university libraries have long used a variety of criteria to allocate funds for book purchases. This article reiterates the need for a "literature-size" approach to book fund allocations and presents a case for using reviews from Choice magazine as a useful and hitherto ignored means of determining literature size. Data from one calendar year (eleven issues) show the number and percentages of titles and the dollar amount and percentage represented by each subject category. Suggestions for updating the information are offered.*

OVER THE YEARS academic libraries have employed various criteria for allocating book budgets. Several of those criteria have been related to the activities of the local academic departments: number of faculty, number of student credit hours, number of majors, usually with a consideration of the level of courses and students. Another criterion involves local demands made on the collection, gauged by circulation of materials according to subject classification. In addition, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allocation based on the size of publication output by subject (in terms of titles and dollars) was, according to Schad, "often taken as an index of budgetary need."<sup>1</sup>

Although the "literature-size" approach to the allocation of book funds is apparently much less common nowadays than it once was, it has nevertheless had some champions in recent years.<sup>2</sup> In 1970 Massman

and Patterson observed, perhaps a bit too single-mindedly:

An academic library's holdings can be determined only by the quantity and range of the materials being published which are relevant to the academic programs it is supporting, not by the traditional number-of-students criterion. . . . The only relevant reality is the reality of the number and quality of books being produced. . . . Is there any college in the United States which does not need substantial coverage on such questions as the war in Vietnam, racial problems, student unrest, Shakespeare, the Civil War, Russian history? If there is, is that institution really worthy of being called a college?<sup>3</sup>

A year later Dillehay echoed the sentiment, emphasizing "the number and cost of books being produced," and in 1975 Voigt made the same point.<sup>4</sup> In 1967 McGrath provided a breakdown of books listed in the 1965 volume of *American Book Publishing Record, BPR*, giving for each subject category the number of titles and their cost. He then calculated the share of titles and of dollars accounted for by each subject, and he noted that perhaps one reason some academic departments fail to spend their allocations was that "not many books having relevance to

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their work have been published each year."<sup>5</sup>

Impressed by arguments on behalf of the literature-size approach as one important criterion for allocation, the collection development officer at the University of Mississippi Libraries began in 1979 to seek a more balanced approach to the allocation of book funds. At that time a majority of those funds were allocated by the university administration among academic departments on the basis of a traditional "head-count" formula, specifically the number of student credit hours weighted according to level. Leaving those funds with the departments, the collection development officer wished as an experiment to divide the few remaining book dollars, for which librarians were responsible, along very different lines. He wished to allocate for each discipline a share that would resemble its share of academic book publishing in a given year. Hence for the first time some of the criteria for dividing the university's book budget would originate off campus.

There is no entirely satisfactory source of information about the number of academic books published each year, by discipline, or their dollar cost. The best-known data are those published in the *Weekly Record of Publishers Weekly*, cumulated annually in the *American Book Publishing Record, BPR Cumulative* (the source of McGrath's data), and reprinted in *The Bowker Annual of Library and Book Trade Information*. There are several major problems with these sources. First, they report all U.S. book publishing, much of which (e.g., medical and law texts, fiction, and highly popular treatments) would not be appropriate for most academic libraries. Second, foreign imprints are not included. And finally, the categories as cumulated in *BPR* and the *Bowker Annual* are insufficiently precise for allocation purposes. For example, "Science" is reported as a single category, as are "Philosophy/Psychology" and "Sociology/Economics."<sup>6</sup>

Other attempts to determine literature size, those by Massman and Patterson and by Dillehay, examined reviews in selected professional journals for one and two years respectively. Their reliance on reviews in scholarly journals is probably more

appropriate for most academic libraries than McGrath's use of *ABPR*. Yet the subject-breakdown and cost data supplied by Massman and Patterson, drawn from reviews in 1967, are probably quite outdated by now and have relatively little application directly as allocation information. (Dillehay provided readers with no data showing breakdown of titles or costs by subject.) Moreover, the authors included only titles that they considered received favorable reviews and also were "of undergraduate significance."<sup>7</sup>

*Choice* magazine, published eleven times a year by the Association of College and Research Libraries, appeared to be a valuable and neglected source of information about the size and composition of the academic literature. This selection was confirmed in conversations with bibliographers at several large and small universities. Since 1964, *Choice* has published short reviews of books selected by its editors as "serious literature" and as "significant current publications . . . in the literature of [a] field and in an undergraduate library collection."<sup>8</sup> Despite its avowed bias toward undergraduate items, reviews frequently note a title's suitability for graduate work, and *Choice's* coverage of university presses and the commercial academic publishers such as Wiley, Sage, Free Press, and Elsevier seems quite comprehensive.<sup>9</sup> The reviews, arranged in forty-eight subject categories, provide complete bibliographic information, including price. It was decided to compile the number of titles reviewed in one calendar year and their cost, for each of the forty-eight subjects.

Unfortunately, the data had to be compiled manually from *Choice*. The journal does produce lists for in-house use, showing for each issue the number of titles by subject area, and these figures have been cumulated for each volume year. But thus far the data have not been widely available. Moreover, the *Choice* staff has not yet produced financial data showing the dollar amounts of titles reviewed, either in the aggregate or broken down by subject.\* Consequently, the collection development officer and a student assistant compiled the

\*Such data should be readily at hand once the journal goes to computer-assisted publishing.

information from *Choice* for 1978, title by title. The number of titles and the prices were subtotaled for each *Choice* subject category each month, then added together to get a yearly total for the subject category.\*

Table 1 gives the results for all subjects combined. It shows that in 1978 a library could have purchased every book reviewed in *Choice*, including a large number of reference items, for \$124,931.

TABLE 1  
RESULTS OF CHOICE STUDY: ALL TITLES

	No. of Titles	Dollar Amount	Avg. Amount per Title
All subjects	6,636	\$124,931	\$18.83

Two adjustments were deemed necessary before percentages and average prices could be satisfactorily figured for each subject area. First, four titles were excluded from consideration because of their highly unrepresentative prices. Three of these were reprint sets and the other a set of documents in facsimile.† Table 2 shows the result after eliminating these four titles.

The second adjustment dealt with reference materials. As table 3 shows, *Choice's* "reference" category accounted for almost 13 percent of the total cost of the reviewed books. Principally because of the category's mixture of general and subject-specific

\*The authors worked strictly from the bibliographic information provided in the reviews themselves and did not include items cited in the bibliographic essays.

†These items were: *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, ed. Morris M. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, Scholarly Resources, 12 volumes, \$595; *Studies in Fascism: Ideology and Practice*, AMS Press, 50 volumes, \$1,016; U.S. Congress, *Congressional Journals of the United States, 1789-1817*, Michael Glazier, 65 volumes, \$2,316; *Lost Race and Adult Fantasy Fiction*, Arno, 69 volumes, \$1,500.

TABLE 2  
RESULTS OF CHOICE STUDY:  
LESS FOUR TITLES

	No. of Titles	Dollar Amount	Avg. Amount per Title
All subjects	6,632	\$119,504	\$18.02

items, it was excluded for purposes of determining each subject's share of the scholarly literature, and other means were used to establish locally a dollar figure for reference purchases.

Proportions were calculated, and allocations to the reference bibliographers determined, largely on the basis of each subject's dollar share of the literature. Table 4 shows the distribution among the remaining subject areas defined by *Choice*. Excluding the four titles noted above and the reference category, 6,179 titles were reviewed during 1978, costing \$104,024, for an average per-title cost of \$16.83.

Using data from *Choice* to determine academic book publishing output is by no means flawless. One inevitable problem is the categorization of titles. Many schools have programs and departments, such as black studies or American studies, that are not explicitly represented in the *Choice* categories, although numerous books in these areas are reviewed by the journal. Special arrangements must be made in such instances. Also, as universities become more narrowly vocational, they may need more library materials that are not defined as traditionally academic, and the *Choice* titles may not adequately reflect those needs.

Nevertheless, Massman and Patterson, Voigt, and others have already made a good case that book allocations for an academic library should reflect, to a significant degree, the proportions of books published by discipline and their costs. The manner in which they do so will likely depend on the individual library's perceived mission and its ability to act on that perception. At present *Choice* seems to be a useful, and untapped,

TABLE 3  
RESULTS OF CHOICE STUDY: REFERENCE MATERIALS

	No. of Titles	% of Titles	Dollar Amount	% of Total Amount (\$119,504)	Avg. Amount per Title
Reference	453	6.83	\$15,471	12.95	\$34.15

TABLE 4  
RESULTS OF CHOICE STUDY:  
LESS FOUR TITLES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Subject	No. of Titles	% of Titles	Dollar Amount	% of Total Amount	Avg. Amount per Title
General	47	0.76	\$ 717	0.69	\$15.25
Humanities, General	92	1.49	1,485	1.43	16.14
Art	315	5.10	8,378	8.05	26.60
Communication Arts	71	1.15	997	0.96	14.03
Language and Literature	97	1.57	1,298	1.25	13.38
Linguistics	22	0.36	332	0.32	15.07
Classical	18	0.29	241	0.23	13.41
English and American	834	13.50	10,357	9.96	12.42
Germanic	51	0.83	629	0.60	12.35
Romance	101	1.63	1,239	1.19	12.27
Slavic	46	0.74	608	0.58	13.22
Other	67	1.08	873	0.84	13.03
Performing Arts	16	0.26	241	0.23	15.07
Dance	21	0.34	272	0.26	12.95
Film	80	1.29	1,256	1.21	15.70
Music	138	2.23	2,084	2.00	15.10
Theater	34	0.55	471	0.45	13.84
Philosophy	197	3.19	2,800	2.69	14.21
Religion	300	4.85	3,595	3.46	11.98
TOTAL HUMANITIES	2,500	40.45	37,156	35.72	14.86
Science and Technology	102	1.65	2,174	2.09	21.31
History of Science and Technology	85	1.38	1,477	1.42	17.37
Astronautics and Astronomy	22	0.36	523	0.50	23.78
Biology	231	3.74	5,468	5.26	23.67
Chemistry	95	1.54	2,716	2.61	28.59
Earth Science	84	1.36	2,519	2.42	29.99
Engineering	241	3.90	6,207	5.97	25.75
Health Science	92	1.49	1,369	1.32	14.88
Information Science	53	0.86	1,080	1.04	20.37
Mathematics	70	1.13	1,577	1.52	22.54
Physics	47	0.76	1,352	1.30	28.77
Sports and Recreation	73	1.18	753	0.72	10.32
TOTAL SCIENCES	1,195	19.35	27,215	26.17	22.77
Social and Behavioral Sciences, General	156	2.52	2,554	2.46	16.37
Anthropology	102	1.65	1,731	1.66	16.97
Business, Management, Labor	136	2.20	1,952	1.88	14.36
Economics	242	3.92	4,270	4.10	17.65
Education	129	2.09	1,610	1.55	12.48
History, Geography, Travel	116	1.88	1,887	1.81	16.26
Ancient (including archaeology)	67	1.08	1,460	1.40	21.79
Africa	38	0.61	621	0.60	16.34
Asia and Oceania	78	1.26	1,484	1.43	19.03
Europe	308	4.98	5,088	4.89	16.52
Latin America and the Caribbean	47	0.76	744	0.72	15.82
Middle East, North Africa	40	0.65	672	0.65	16.80
North America	275	4.45	4,423	4.25	16.08
Political Science	281	4.55	4,141	3.98	14.74
Psychology	142	2.30	2,185	2.10	15.39
Sociology	280	4.53	4,114	3.95	14.69
TOTAL SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES	2,437	39.43	38,936	37.43	15.98
GRAND TOTAL	6,179	99.99	104,024	100.01	16.83

source of literature-size information for college and university libraries. Until *Choice* adopts automated typesetting and can update the data in that fashion, or until ACRL or some other agency can do so manually, the information presented here should be of considerable use to academic institutions that wish to incorporate literature-size criteria into their allocation processes.\*

\*In the meantime, a reasonable shortcut to updating the data presented above would be to obtain from *Choice* (or through ACRL if it would perform this useful service) its monthly and annual figures on the number of titles reviewed, by subject area, and multiply the number times the average price reported here, adjusted by a rate of inflation. If desired, the *Bowker Annual* could be used to gain an approximation of the various rates of inflation in the several subject areas.

## REFERENCES

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6. *The Bowker Annual of Library and Book Trade Information* (24th ed.; New York: Bowker, 1979), p.322.
7. Massman and Patterson, "A Minimum Budget for Current Acquisitions," p.85.
8. Descriptive material sent by editor Louis B. Sasso to the authors, 1979.
9. At the same time, it should be noted that *Choice* does not review material that the editors consider *strictly* graduate level. Personal communication to the authors from editor Jay Poole, May 20, 1980.