



## Letters

To the Editor:

We are writing with regard to an article which appeared in the January 1990 issue of *College & Research Libraries* 51:46-54. The article, by Robin B. Devin and Martha Kellogg, discusses the use of thesis and journal article citations as guidelines for setting the acquisitions budget for serials and monographs. While Devin's and Kellogg's discussion accurately reflects citation patterns in theses and journal articles, we do not think that it accounts for actual use patterns in the typical research library. Additionally, the cost of providing information out of monographs is not necessarily equivalent to the cost of providing information out of journals.

There are two areas in addition to citation patterns which we think need to be examined: use of library materials for preliminary research, and use of library materials by undergraduates. Theses, dissertations, journal articles, and conference papers are typically the end products of an extensive research process, involving preliminary studies of the literature, data collection, discussion of the data with colleagues involved in similar research, and interpretation of the data. As a result, this literature tends not to account for the full range of library materials used in the process of research, since it cites only those materials which have a more or less direct relationship to the final topic under discussion. Moreover, the process of designing an initial hypothesis often requires extensive but uncited use of secondary and tertiary literature to determine the appropriate arguments, experiments, or techniques of data collection.

Additionally, undergraduates also make extensive use of the typical university library. As indicated by Gloriana St. Clair and Rose Mary Magrill in their research note (*C&RL News* 51:25-28 (1990)), the research needs of undergraduates are rarely sophisticated enough to require extensive use of the primary literature, monographs playing a much more significant role in filling their information needs. Thus, even assuming equivalency of costs for serial and monographic information, factors such as the undergraduate enrollment and use of materials for the *process* of research need to be included in the calculation.

Devin and Kellogg suggest that "factors such as collection intensity, number of students and faculty in the area, circulation statistics, and average cost per volume should have already been taken into consideration when the original monograph (or serial) allocation was made" (p.53), and that application of their ratio formula can translate this figure into an appropriate dollar amount for the corresponding serial (or monograph) budget. This argument is at best circular, as it fails to include these factors in determining the ratio and requires complex reiteration to obtain meaningful figures.

While citation patterns reflect to some extent the proportion of serials to monographs used for advanced research, they do not determine the proportion of the prices for these two types of library material. This distinction is particularly important in fields like engineering or physics, where there is extensive use of conference proceedings (usually paid for out of the monograph portion of the budget). Moreover, citations to journal articles almost always refer to one article per volume (less than four percent of the total volume contents), while citations to monographs may refer to either the whole volume or a single section. The choice between acquisition or document delivery of a particular item depends on the economics of use. Both the price and the number of expected uses of a particular volume need to be taken into account. In this regard, aggregate journal citation data fail to distinguish between heavily used core titles with comparatively low costs per use and less frequently used specialized titles which can have comparatively high costs per use. In attempting to develop the collection optimally, decisions regarding these specialized titles can often be the most difficult. Similar problems also apply to different classes of monographs.

As in other applications of citation analysis, citation data alone provide only a partial indicator of whatever issues are under discussion. They seldom provide the simple or direct answer desired; rather, they are one among many sources of data contributing to the complete study.

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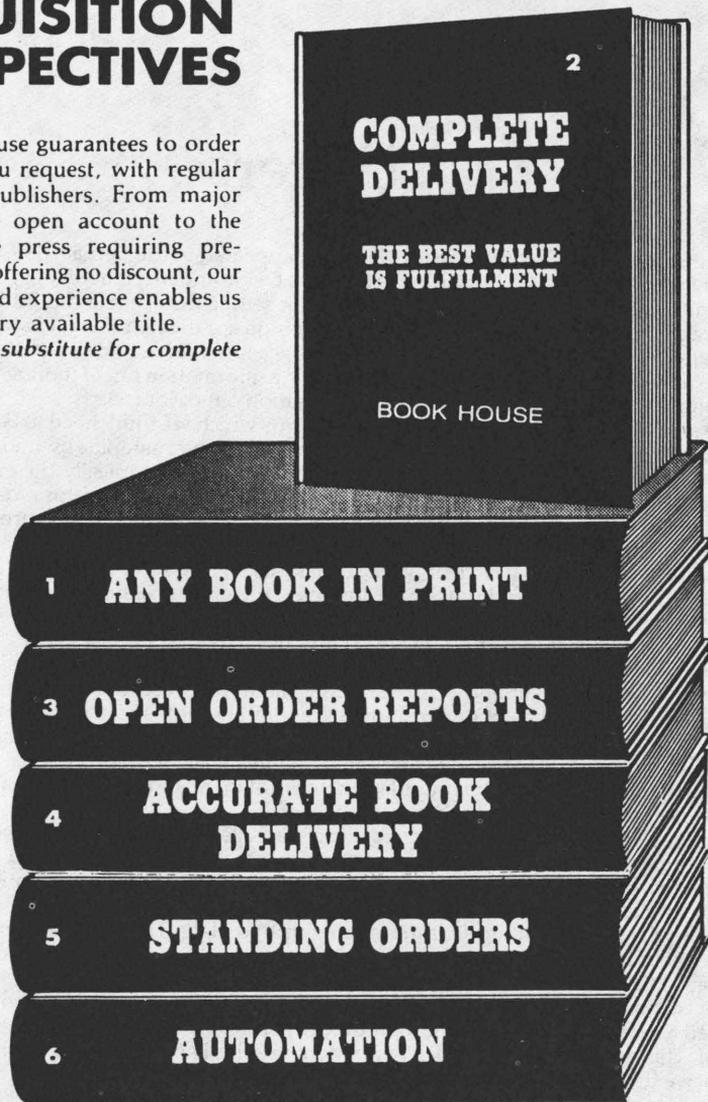
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