

Benjamin G. Jahre. Analysis of the Decision to Implement an Approval Plan at the R. B. House Undergraduate Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: A Case Study. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April, 2013. 35 pages. Advisor: Barbara B. Moran.

This case study reflects on the process of investigating the appropriateness of pursuing an approval plan at the R. B. House Undergraduate Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. The study highlights the thought processes of library administration, the approach that was taken to analyze the collection and determine areas of strength and weakness, and the steps the library plans to employ now that the decision has been made to adopt an approval plan. The study is intended to serve as a guide for other undergraduate libraries with similar concerns about their collection and considering the implementation of an approval plan.

The study used a list of the holdings of the collection at the undergraduate library generated from the Integrated Library System. The list was then analyzed to determine checkout rates, call number ranges, and the extent of duplication between the undergraduate collection and the collection for the main campus library.

#### Headings:

Approval plans in library acquisitions

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Undergraduate libraries

ANALYSIS OF THE DECISION TO IMPLEMENT AN APPROVAL PLAN AT THE  
R. B. HOUSE UNDERGRADUATE LIBRARY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH  
CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL: A CASE STUDY

by  
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Approved by

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## INTRODUCTION

Providing a collection that accurately fits the needs of its users has always been at the center of a library's role. As such, collection development is one of the most crucial functions a librarian can fulfill. It is a librarian's job to determine who constitutes the patron base, what the needs of that group are, and how best to meet those needs without exceeding budgetary or spatial limitations.

Simply because collection development is a central function for a librarian, however, does not mean that the process of collecting has been completely mastered or solved. Due to the constantly changing demands and tastes of library users, as well as the rapidly evolving technological landscape, the means of collecting are frequently updated or changed. Recent financial constraints have only made the librarian's task more difficult: it is not uncommon to be asked to trim the budget while continuing to provide high quality collections and services. In order to work within such limitations while ensuring that the library's collection adequately reflects the needs of the users, librarians must be aware of and evaluate a number of different collection development methods and make informed choices about which are best for their situation. This case study details one library's process of weighing its options, the approach the library took to evaluate its collection, and how this helped determine the best course for the library to take. The goal of the study is to provide an outline to follow for other libraries interested in making a similar determination.

Some of the more common methods in use for collecting monographic materials in libraries today are firm orders, standing orders, and approval plans. Firm orders may be thought of as the traditional library purchase model: a desired item is requested, paid for, and received. Standing orders differ from firm orders in that they entail ongoing payments for a series of items as they are released. Firm orders and standing orders are similar in that they both include an active decision on the part of a librarian at the initial point of purchase. An approval plan differs from the two in that it is more of an automated system. To put an approval plan in place, a library creates what is known as a “profile.” This profile details at a very granular level exactly what types of materials the library will always want to purchase, what materials the library never wants to add to its collection, and what titles should be forwarded to the library for further consideration. Using an approval plan, the decision of whether or not to purchase an item is most often made by a computer, based on parameters outlined previously. The only time an item will be forwarded for a human decision is if that title falls into predefined grey areas that require a more scrutinized assessment.

The main collection system for monographic material for the R.B. House Undergraduate Library (UL) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) has for the past 20 years been a strict firm order platform. Based on a loose profile, the library’s vendor sends a batch of slips—each detailing an individual book title for sale—once a week. These slips are then divided among the active selectors at the UL based on call number range and subject area. Selectors review each slip individually and decide on a case-by-case basis whether to purchase the item, flag it for discussion with a supervisor or peer, or pass on the item by deleting its corresponding slip.

This firm order system proved to work well enough to meet the UL's basic needs. The slips are delivered in a timely manner and are easy to process when a decision on a title has been made. However, the Head of the UL (referred to in this case study as the Director) has had a growing sense over the last several years that certain inefficiencies were present, and that there was room for the collecting process to be further streamlined. Some of the major inefficiencies identified were:

- Due to a recent agreement with a publisher to automatically receive all of their titles in eBook format, selectors were deleting any slip from this particular publisher on first sight.
- The UL staff monitors the material the library receives. The material received from a small group of publishers had been studied and vetted over time, and was deemed to be below the level of quality the library wishes to offer to its patrons. Staff members have come to the decision that they no longer wish to purchase titles from these specific publishers and thus would prefer not to receive slips for such items, similar to the example in the previous bullet.
- The library's collection development policy specifically calls for an effort to avoid collecting biography, reference materials, photographic works, and technical guides, except in certain outstanding cases, but slips for these subjects and formats invariably get included with other slips, especially in areas such as history.
- Although the library's collection is meant to be unique and geared directly towards the interests, needs, and pursuits of undergraduate research, there was a general feeling among selectors that many of the items being purchased for

the UL's collection were duplicates of what was being collected at Davis Library, the main research library on campus.

- Perhaps most significantly, with a pending change in the staffing model that would lead to fewer selectors at the UL, there was concern that there would be increased demands on the time of those who continued to be involved in collection development.

The general feeling among librarians and other selectors was that many of these problems and inefficiencies could be corrected by moving to a hybrid model that would incorporate the pre-existing firm order system into an approval plan. In this way, it was reasoned, much valuable time and effort could be saved by having an approval plan pre-select or dismiss items according to a stricter profile based on the criteria outlined in the bullets above, with selectors only receiving slips for items that fell into grey areas or predetermined categories where the library would prefer to have a selector make a decision.

Before taking action, however, it was necessary for the library to conduct an analysis of the collection to determine areas for improvement, research other potential solutions to the problem, and discuss possible approaches with the vendor. In the summer of 2012, the decision was made to begin investigating whether an approval plan was the right choice for the library. Although at the time of writing the library is still in negotiations with the vendor, this paper will describe the steps that were taken to analyze the collection and thus come to the determination to pursue an approval plan. It is hoped that this paper may serve as a case study for other libraries wishing to consider a similar approach.

## Library Background

Undergraduate libraries have existed as separate entities from the main university collection since before the 1940s, but “have been commonly accepted only since 1945” (McAnally, 1953, p. 1). These libraries were initially envisioned to fill a need in large research universities that were thought to provide insufficient support for undergraduate research. According to McAnally, the main issues identified were that, “Books were not very accessible to the undergraduate and reserve room service, which was about all most of them got freely, was not very satisfactory educationally” (p. 1). The solution most arrived at was to create a library where the primary purpose was to cater to the needs of the undergraduate student.

The UNC University Library system is made up of three main divisions: the Law Library, the Health Sciences Library (HSL), and the Academic Affairs Libraries (AAL). The latter division is the largest part of the library system, and serves the greatest number of patrons on campus. The central research library on campus is Davis Library, which houses the majority of the AAL collection. There are a number of smaller branch libraries throughout campus, such as the special collections library, art library, music library, science library, etc. The UL, as part of the AAL, functions as the main point of access to the library system for undergraduate students at UNC.

When it was first opened in 1968, the original collection development objective of the House Undergraduate Library at UNC-Chapel Hill was to provide a duplicate collection to the holdings in the main branches of the campus library system. Titles that were held elsewhere, but were seen as useful for undergraduates, would be collected at the UL as well. This model eventually became unsustainable, as evidenced by the



language in the most recent Collection Development Statement: “due to space constraints and a focus on the particular needs of undergraduates, the collection now strives to collect unique materials of interest to undergraduates” (House Undergraduate Library, 2011, p. 3).

The UL aims primarily to meet the research needs of freshmen and sophomore students by exposing them to the vast array of resources available to them at UNC, helping them understand how to make use of those resources, and offering instruction sessions to prepare them for college-level scholarship. The stated mission of the UL is to “collaborate across libraries, disciplines, campus units, institutions and communities to create an intellectual crossroads for students, faculty and the community,” by, among other things, “helping undergraduates and the faculty that support them navigate the new terrain of the Information Age” (p. 1).

First opened in 1968 and redesigned in 2002, the Undergraduate Library consists of three floors. The lower level contains a large computer lab, a Help Desk extension of UNC-Chapel Hill’s Information Technology (IT) Department, and the Media Resources Center (MRC). The IT Help Desk functions as a triage center for appointment and walk-in technology assistance for the campus at large (note that this service is not intended solely for the use of the UL). The MRC purchases and provides physical and streaming media content that is intended to support research and instruction throughout the campus libraries, and contains a small computer lab specifically designated for the creation of multimedia projects. The MRC operates semi-autonomously from the UL. Its budget is held under the umbrella of the general UL budget, but the allotment of these funds is

overseen by the Media Resources Librarian. The MRC administers its own circulation desk with divergent loan policies from those of the UL.

The main floor of the UL houses the research desk, public computing space, main circulation/reserves desk, administrative offices, reserves reading room, design lab, and the reference and popular reading collections. The UL reserves desk is the primary reserves service point for undergraduate classes. The design lab is a small computer lab dedicated to scanning and the production of posters, images, and web content.

The upper floor of the UL contains the main print collection split into two sections, each with accompanying large public study/reading areas. This floor holds 10 study rooms available for reserve for group study. There are also a number of instructional classrooms that double as lecture, meeting, and movie screening rooms.

The UL is staffed by five full time librarians: the Director; the Undergraduate Experience Librarian; the Research Services Librarian; the Head of the Media Resources Center; and the Circulation & Reserves Librarian, who also acts as the Assistant Head of the library. To directly support the technology needs of the library, there is a Systems Administrator with an office in the UL. Although he officially reports to Library Systems, he takes an active role in UL activities, participating in meetings and sharing his vision for the library. In addition there are seven Circulation and Reserves staff members and five staff working in the MRC. The library employs 11 graduate students (including the author of this case study) from the UNC School of Information and Library Science (SILS) to staff the research desk and design lab, teach library instruction courses, and participate in special projects. These graduate students represent 4 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions, meaning that their part-time work combines for the equivalent of the

work that would be done by 4 full-time librarians. There are also a number of undergraduate students employed at the UL circulation desk in a work-study capacity.

The five full-time librarians and the 11 graduate students actively participate in collection development activities at the library, each receiving firm order slips in the subject in which they select. This description of the library and its employees is presented as context for the setting in which this case study was carried out.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is not an extensive literature focusing on collection development practices at undergraduate libraries. In fact, studies of undergraduate libraries in general are few in relation to the literature on libraries as a whole. Many of the studies that do exist tend to look at issues such as the information literacy levels of incoming undergraduates, how to structure library orientation sessions, or how to reduce the noise levels in an undergraduate library. While these studies are of interest to those involved in undergraduate librarianship, they do not directly relate to this case study.

In an effort to provide a background for collection development as it relates to undergraduate libraries, this review will highlight the following: (1) collection development historically; (2) approval plans; (3) undergraduate library collections; and (4) undergraduate approval plans.

While collection development has been a central function of libraries since their inception, this review begins at a time when libraries were starting to realize that they were facing a tighter economic future and could not simply purchase everything that they wanted. Baughman (1977) wrote about the new challenges libraries were experiencing. He indicated that a “structured approach” (p. 241) to collection development could solve the problem of constricting budgets and a lack of the amount of space needed to house all the items librarians wanted to buy outright. His structured approach method included ideas relevant to the UL’s investigation such as analyzing subject areas to note common

themes and areas of overlap, and that a core group of publishers typically make up a majority of a library's collection.

Studies such as Baughman's indicated a turning point where libraries became aware of a need to change their practices and led to new trends. The concept of a written collection development policy, while not new, began to be seen as more of a necessity, and as something that could act as a "valuable planning tool for the library and campus administrators" (Buzzard, 1979, p. 326). Futas and Intner (1985) understood that "times have changed, and now emphasis is on maintaining the collection as well as building it. Since budgets have become so crucial, the selection of new material becomes much more difficult" (p. 237). In the same year, working off of Baughman's original point about structure and common threads in a collection, there was talk of the "the links and connections between collections, parts of collections, and the users of collections" (McGrath, 1985, p. 242).

Once the basic idea that collections needed to be maintained was established, and a realization formed that the links between parts of a collection could be understood and used to benefit the library, the critical question was how best to approach the upkeep of the collection. Since this case study is primarily interested in weighing the merits of an approval plan and the factors that must be accounted for prior to implementing one, that is where this literature review will focus.

Approval plans gained in popularity and began to be commonly adopted in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The main points in their favor at the time were the same as those that make them popular now, as illustrated in this passage from Carpenter's (1989) study:

Using an approval plan can also help the harried selector cope with cuts in the acquisitions budget. Certain subject areas can be de-emphasized or dropped from an approval plan. Per volume dollar limits can be placed on individual titles to be shipped for examination ... In short, both subject and non-subject parameters of an approval plan can be quickly modified in response to changing collection development needs (p. 42).

Although he does not mention time management outright, it is important to note that Carpenter refers to the “harried” selector, indicating that another mark in an approval plan’s favor is its ability to relieve some of a librarian’s time-related stress.

The use of approval plans has not waned since the time of Carpenter’s writing. Jacoby (2008) conducted a study to determine how widespread the use of approval plans was. Her results indicated that more libraries were adding approval plans than were dropping them (p. 231), and that “[an approval plan] continues to be an effective, time-saving tool for librarians who are increasingly pressured to devote their time to activities other than book selection” (p. 235).

In libraries it is especially true that all new endeavors must be examined to determine their impact, and decide whether or not the decision to change was sound. With this idea in mind, more thought has been given in recent years to assessing approval plans. One concept that shines through is that it is not enough to simply put an approval plan in place. A good approval plan must have a profile that is constantly managed and maintained in order to avoid duplication and get the most out of the service (Fenner, 2004, p. 236). As Alan, Chrzastowski, German, and Wiley (2010) state, there is a “...need for regular assessment of the approval plan profiles and necessary adjustments based on user needs and fiscal constraints” (p. 75).

Some libraries came to realize that they did not need to fully switch their entire collection management approach over to an approval plan. When asking the question, “Is

there a way to take advantage of approval plan services in at least some areas of your collection and hand-select others?” Appavoo (2007) says the answer is yes. She concludes by saying, “Book approval plans can take a good portion of the burden away, and still leave you in control of your budgets and the integrity of your collection” (p. 240). This hybrid concept is critical to this case study, since the library was not desirous of replacing its firm order model, but simply of supplementing it to make the selection process more efficient.

### Undergraduate Libraries

Although the literature related to analyzing the collections at undergraduate libraries is sparse, there is some material that can be considered. Hardesty and Mak (1994) wrote of the attempt to build a core collection for an undergraduate library; a collection they deemed “the Holy Grail.” The authors’ ideal is that all undergraduate libraries would have similar collections with a large amount of overlapping material, arguing that undergraduates at all schools should have similar basic needs (p. 362). Their study shows that in fact there is a large amount of disparity in undergraduate collections. The authors recognize that because of the differing missions of schools, this is in part unavoidable (p. 369), and end by recommending that libraries “strive to achieve a better balance between diversity and coherence in our collections” (p. 370).

This idea of balance is reflected in the case study of the construction of a new undergraduate library collection at Wayne State University. In this case, the librarians felt the need for a core collection with broad appeal, but also identified three main subject areas on which they wished to place a “special emphasis” (Pearson, 1999, p. 37).

An assessment of the collection at the University of Illinois' undergraduate library revealed some interesting statistics, especially in regards to duplication. Ward and Teper (2005) found that throughout the 1990s, titles from the undergraduate library's collection that were duplicated elsewhere on the Illinois campus never made up less than 47% of the undergraduate collection. These duplicate titles circulated about 7% less frequently than unique titles (pp. 18, 20). These findings are significant in that they indicate that duplicate titles are still heavily used, and the "data suggests that an ongoing, judicious purchasing plan that includes duplicates will continue to generate a high-use collection for undergraduate students" (p. 25).

The question of approval plans in undergraduate libraries is not heavily considered in the literature, but one study does stand out. Koufogiannakis, Campbell, and Ziegler (2007) discuss the process of crafting an approval plan directly aimed at the undergraduate population at the University of Alberta. The initial reasoning for making their decision was that "it was recognized that there were a number of standard undergraduate books that selectors would purchase, and automating this process would reduce selector workload" (p. 2). The librarians went through the process of crafting profiles based on user needs and projecting the potential cost of putting the approval plan in place. After just the first year of adoption, statistics indicated "a marked increase in circulation for titles purchased on the undergraduate book approval plan" (p. 6). The authors point to four main goals that were achieved with the adoption of an approval plan:

First, a large portion of undergraduate materials have been acquired in a systematic way. Second, selectors' time that would have been dedicated to choosing undergraduate materials has been released. Third, the undergraduate collection has been renewed in areas where the UAL had not been systematically



collecting. Fourth, based on circulation statistics, staff know that the material acquired on the undergraduate book approval plan is highly relevant (p. 6).

These goals, and the steps that were taken in achieving them, closely paralleled the experience that the UL wanted to achieve with the undertaking of an approval plan. The next sections will outline the steps taken by the UL and their results.

## **APPROACH**

This case study is intended to provide a model for other undergraduate libraries that are considering the move to an approval plan. In the case of the UL, before a decision could be made regarding the appropriateness of adopting an approval plan, the library first needed to assess its collection. The identified goals and steps were decided on mainly by the Director, in consultation with the author of this study in the capacity of a graduate assistant. The goals of the analysis were threefold: (1) to determine the level of duplication between the library's collection and the AAL collection at large; (2) to assess how frequently the library's duplicated material circulated; and (3) to identify which subject areas comprise the majority of the library's collection and to confirm that the subject breakdowns were in keeping with the library's mission. This section will outline the steps that were taken in order to conduct this analysis.

The first step necessary was to generate a report of all titles held by the library that were duplicates of titles held elsewhere on campus. This report was created by running a list using the library's Integrated Library System (ILS). The criteria used for identifying titles was:

- All titles in the library that are also listed as being held in any other AAL branch library. This included titles duplicated across HSL and the Law Library, but not those held in the Business Library. Items on reserve and those from the MRC were also left off the list.

- Only active titles. This included titles in the temporary popular reading collection, but not those titles that had been removed from the collection or sent to the Library Service Center, the long-term high-density archive.

This list was then exported to a spreadsheet, where some of the major fields for analysis beyond identification information were:

- Date the title was acquired;
- Last checkout date;
- Number of total checkouts since purchase;
- Number of copies of title held on campus; and
- Call number (Library of Congress classification).

The spreadsheet was then analyzed to determine the extent to which the library's collection duplicates the holdings of the rest of campus, where this duplication is greatest, and how well these duplicated materials circulate.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### Extent and Breakdown of Duplication

The first question to answer was how much of the UL's collection was a duplication of material held in other AAL libraries on the UNC campus. The library's full collection houses 80,000 titles. Of these, 64,317 were duplicates of titles held elsewhere on campus. This equates to 80% of the collection being made up of duplicates.

Of the 64,317 duplicate titles in the UL's holdings, an overwhelming majority—approximately 37%—are in the P call number range for Language and Literature. Much of the remaining 67% is comprised of titles in the B's (Philosophy, Psychology, Religion), D's (World History), E's (History of the Americas), and H's (Social Sciences). A full breakdown by Library of Congress call number can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Number and Approximate Percentage of Duplicate Titles by Call Number**

<b>LC Call #</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Number of Titles</b>	<b>Percent of UL Duplicate Titles</b>
A	General Works	802	1.2%
B	Philosophy, Psychology, Religion	4604	7.2%
C	Auxiliary Sciences of History	370	0.6%
D	World History and History of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, etc.	7081	11%
E	History of the Americas	5393	8.4%
F	History of the Americas	1571	2.4%
G	Geography, Anthropology, Recreation	2149	3.4%
H	Social Sciences	7318	11.4%
J	Political Sciences	1436	2.2%
K	Law	828	1.3%
L	Education	922	1.4%
M	Music and Books on Music	1005	1.6%
N	Fine Arts	1278	2.0%

P	Language and Literature	23758	36.9%
Q	Science	2562	4.0%
R	Medicine	1363	2.1%
S	Agriculture	205	0.3%
T	Technology	749	1.2%
U	Military Science	651	1.0%
V	Naval Science	66	0.1%
Z	Bibliography, Library Science, Information Resources	206	0.3%

### Circulation of Duplicate Titles

The duplicate titles held have amassed a total of 401,684 checkouts since 2004, the year the library began using its current ILS to track circulation statistics. This figure indicates that each of the titles included in the analysis circulated, on average, approximately 6.2 times. This average does not take into account, however, the 11,373 titles that had never been checked since they were acquired. In order to get a better sense of how often the items that get checked out do circulate, the average number of checkouts was calculated for duplicated material that had circulated at least once. This result was approximately 7.6 checkouts per item.

The above averages are useful for getting a sense of how well material has circulated since 2004. It was also necessary to determine how well recently purchased items were circulating. Using the date of acquisition, checkout numbers were calculated for material that had first arrived at the library within the last two years (between 2011-2012) and the last three years (between 2010-2012).

Duplicate items that were acquired sometime in the last two years have been checked out 2,954 times, for an average per book of 1.2 checkouts. Discounting items with no circulation, the average per book is 2.6 checkouts.

Duplicate items acquired within the last three years (2010-2012) have been checked out 6,564 times. The average circulation per book for these duplicate titles is 1.6 checkouts overall, and 3.2 checkouts for items with circulation greater than 0.

Overall, the main results of the analysis – specifically the extent of the duplication and the fact that the majority of the duplicated materials were those in the Language & Literature call number range – were not a big surprise. The Director of the UL had expected this to be the case, owing to the fact that items in the P call number ranges historically make up a large majority of the collection, and also tend to be heavily collected at the main campus library. The director was satisfied that the results bore out her assumptions and feelings about the collection.

What was especially useful and instructive was discovering that for books acquired in recent years there is a moderately high level of checkout. Based on previous internal analyses of the collection, it is generally believed at the UL that an item is doing well if it receives at least one checkout per year. Averages of 2.6 checkouts over two years and 3.2 checkouts over three years for items that have circulated at least once are more than satisfactory in terms of demonstrating value in the collection. Even when including material that had zero checkouts, averages of 1.2 checkouts per item over two years and 1.6 checkouts per item over three years are numbers which indicate that, for the most part, the collection is meeting the needs of the library's patrons and is being utilized. It is expected that these circulation averages will increase slightly over time, allowing for items acquired towards the end of 2012, for example, to have a chance to be discovered in the catalog. The Director knew that duplication was necessary in many areas in order to meet the instructional and research needs of undergraduates at UNC, and

the collection analysis tended to back this up. However, the librarians were aware that some areas were not seeing the same high amount of use. It was therefore instructive to see which subject areas had relatively high levels of material that had not seen any circulation (see Table 2). For example, while only 12-14% of the items in the B's, R's, and T's has never circulated, and even the largest area in the P's has a 16% rate of non-circulation, 96% of the material from the A's has seen zero total circulation. This number confirms a general sense at the UL that print reference materials were becoming increasingly less important. This suggests that the library may consider cutting back on purchases in the A call number range and de-emphasizing that subject area, focusing only on titles that are expected to be of the highest potential interest.

**Table 2: Percent of Total Items with Zero Circulation by Call Number**

<b>LC Call #</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>% of Items with Zero Circulation</b>
A	General Works	96
B	Philosophy, Psychology, Religion	13
C	Auxiliary Sciences of History	22
D	World History and History of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, etc.	23
E	History of the Americas	17
F	History of the Americas	13
G	Geography, Anthropology, Recreation	19
H	Social Sciences	14
J	Political Sciences	27
K	Law	20
L	Education	28
M	Music and Books on Music	8
N	Fine Arts	9
P	Language and Literature	16
Q	Science	11
R	Medicine	12
S	Agriculture	11
T	Technology	14
U	Military Science	22
V	Naval Science	15
Z	Bibliography, Library Science, Information Resources	25

Conversely, those areas with many titles that still maintain low percentages of non-circulation can be deemed as popular and high-use within the collection. These areas can be broken down to a greater degree of granularity to see which subjects within each area the users seem to find the most useful or desirable. The P class, for example, makes up the largest part of the UL's collection. A closer inspection of the number of titles for each P subclass (see Table 3) reveals areas where the P's are strongest, such as English Literature (PR) and American Literature (PS), and those areas where they are weakest, such as the Germanic/Scandinavian (PD, PF), Uralic/Basque (PH), and Hyperborean/Indian (PM) Languages.

**Table 3: Number of Items by P Subclass**

<b>P Subclass</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b># of Items</b>
PA	Greek/Latin Language and literature	1052
PB	Modern languages/Celtic languages	15
PC	Romanic languages	80
PD	Germanic/Scandinavian languages	4
PE	English language	219
PF	West Germanic languages	11
PG	Slavic/Baltic/Albanian language	789
PH	Uralic/Basque languages	13
PJ	Oriental languages and literatures	212
PK	Indo-Iranian languages and literatures	52
PL	Languages and literatures of Eastern Asia, Africa, Oceania	185
PM	Hyperborean, Indian, and artificial languages	13
PN	Literature (general)	3302
PQ	French/Italian/Spanish/Portuguese literature	2036
PR	English literature	5994
PS	American literature	8759
PT	German/Dutch/Flemish/Afrikaans/Scandinavian/Old Norse/Faroese/Danish/Norwegian/Swedish literature	676
PZ	Fiction and juvenile belles lettres	44



Before analyzing the collection, the Director had already suspected that adding an approval plan would be the best choice for the library's collecting procedures. This was mainly because of the time that could be saved by having an approval plan weed out certain publishers and types of materials that were not within the UL's scope. The results from the analysis above, showing that certain areas of the collection were getting very poor circulation, served to strengthen the Director's conviction to pursue an approval plan. With an approval plan, the library could continue to duplicate materials in high use areas, while using the zero-checkout items as a guide to areas that could be de-emphasized by having an approval plan profile that put greater scrutiny on areas with historically weak circulation.

With the analysis complete and a decision made to adopt a hybrid model that supplements the current firm order system with an approval plan, the UL is now ready to move forward in putting such a plan into place. The next section will outline the steps the library will take in the near future to put this plan into action.

## **FUTURE EFFORTS**

The librarians at the UL are taking a number of steps in order to begin the process of putting an approval plan into place. Over the coming months, the UL will have to: meet with the vendor to discuss how the process will work; communicate with subject librarians about their experience with the approval plan in place for the main collection; begin crafting a profile that will meet patron needs; and explore potential budgeting and workflow impact.

### Discussion With the Vendor

The first step to take will be to sit down with vendor representatives to discuss what will be involved in implementing an approval plan. Since the UL is already satisfied with its firm order arrangement with its current vendor, the Director will use their services for putting an approval plan in place. The library will need, however, to ask its vendor representative what they require, and to find out what level of assistance they can provide throughout the process. This will present an idea of exactly what the vendor's approval plan system offers for the library. For example, it will be useful to know precisely how specific the librarians can make the limitations of an approval plan profile

It will also be necessary to inquire about expense. The decision to adopt such a plan, although generally supported by the librarians and staff at the UL, will still be subject to approval from library administration. Additionally, the acquisitions team will need to be prepared to negotiate terms with the vendor. Having a sense of the cost

associated will aid all library departments in assessing the feasibility and inconvenience such a move will involve.

#### Budgeting and Workflow

Beyond learning from the vendor what the library can expect to incur in costs and expenses for the approval plan, the UL will need to take into consideration the other ways in which the plan will impact its budget. Money may have to be shifted between funds in order to pay for the approval plan. If the plan functions as intended, the UL will be collecting more efficiently, and spending less on titles that do not circulate well. The Director will have to determine the best use for reinvesting this savings into other areas of the collection that are popular.

The workflow for collecting at the UL will also necessarily have to undergo some revision. New selectors will have to be trained differently in order to account for the change in practices. It should be expected that selectors will spend less time sifting out unwanted items from their firm order slips. Some of that time will be used on reviewing titles that the approval plan flags for review, but there should still be a net gain in time and energy for selectors. This will also hold true for the staff at the UL responsible for processing and receiving orders and shipments, respectively. There should be fewer orders to key in manually, and the frequency with which shipments arrive will shift slightly, based on when approval order items are mailed out.

#### Communication with Subject Librarians

One of the central goals of putting an approval plan in place is to save selectors at the UL the time and energy they were putting into deleting superfluous slips from the firm order. This goal will be missed and all efforts negated, however, if moving to an

approval plan manages only to create further complications for the UL librarians involved in collection development activities.

The main AAL collection has operated on a hybrid model for many years and librarians there are already familiar with the workings of an approval plan. The Science Library moved to incorporate an approval plan in 2008, and can therefore provide insight into the process of beginning to supplement a firm order system with an approval plan. It is hoped that by communicating with those subject librarians who select for both the main and the science collection, the UL can avoid encountering such obstacles as the subject selectors may have faced themselves.

The expectation is that the subject librarians can provide guidance on a range of questions, such as:

- How long did it take to get the profile operating at peak efficiency, and what steps can be taken to shorten this timeline?
- Is it enough to have one librarian in charge of the approval plan? If not, how many should be involved? Should a committee be formed?
- What were some of the major early challenges faced and mistakes made, and how can these be avoided?

With the knowledge and experience the subject librarians can offer, it should be realistic to expect to encounter as few difficulties as possible, and to be prepared to eliminate any trouble that might occur during the early stages of implementing an approval plan. Once the subject librarians have been consulted, the UL should be in a good position to begin creating a profile for the plan.

### Crafting the Profile

The process of crafting the profile will certainly be the most arduous and complicated, but also the most vital step the UL will have to take in order to get an approval plan in place. There will be a number of factors to consider in deciding which subjects should be prioritized by the approval plan, and which areas can be de-emphasized.

For example, based on the findings presented above in Table 2, there are a limited number of items from the A call number range (General Works), and what is held does not circulate often. Due to the shift to electronic resources, it is to be expected that reference materials would circulate less frequently than other books. With this in mind, it might make sense hypothetically to tailor the approval plan profile to reject most items from the A's. However, many undergrads at UNC do study the history of North Carolina, and the UL may decide to have the approval plan notify selectors when reference materials specifically about North Carolina—such as an almanac—become available. At this time, selectors could decide whether or not to acquire the item. This is just an example of something that could be done, but it illustrates the ways in which the UL hopes to make use of an approval plan, and the degree to which the profile can be personalized so as to purchase or notify selectors only of the most relevant items.

Creating a profile that is so specific in many different subject areas will require a high level of attention to detail, and even then it is extremely unlikely that the profile will immediately meet the UL's collection needs perfectly. In the early stages of implementing the approval plan, it will be necessary for the librarians to monitor and adjust the profile so as to ensure that it is performing efficiently—purchasing only items

that the UL wishes to hold in its collection and rejecting all others that are outside the library's scope.

## CONCLUSION

The idea of having a library dedicated to undergraduate studies is not new. Despite having been around for more than half a century, though, the core mission of such libraries has not changed—to provide the services and resources that create an environment conducive to putting undergraduates at ease with the research process.

What has changed since the first undergraduate library opened its doors is the means by which this mission has been carried out. From collaborative group study spaces to cutting edge technology and design software, today's undergraduates have a diverse set of needs, not least of which is a collection that adequately reflects their coursework and research requirements.

In the current climate, selectors are dealing with stagnant or shrinking budgets and an increasing reliance on electronic resources that are purchased at the campus-wide level. The library's physical collection needs to accurately cater to the needs of its users with little room for excess while still providing the highest possible level of research. The task for collections librarians is a difficult one, and any tool that could potentially help them to better and more efficiently do their job is not to be ignored. The literature has demonstrated that approval plans can be an excellent means for selectors to save time while maintaining a high level of control over their collections.

This paper has shown that while the UL's collection is made up of a high number of items that are duplicates of titles held elsewhere in the UNL campus libraries, the

majority of these materials circulate well. Duplication can cripple a budget if it is not managed properly. In the case of the UL, however, the statistics clearly indicate that the extent of duplication is justified, since the library's patrons get use out many of these materials. However, it is clear that there are areas of the collection that could use a higher level of scrutiny in order to avoid acquiring material that will never be checked out.

These factors point to the implementation of an approval plan as a supplement to the current firm order system being the best approach to more efficiently conduct collection development. An approval plan will allow the UL to continue to collect and duplicate other libraries on campus in the subject areas that perform the best and most accurately meet the needs of the users. It will also automatically remove from the review of selectors items that do not fit the scope of the collection or will not circulate well. This should hopefully result in more time and energy for selectors to devote to other aspects of their job, and a leaner collection that is better suited to the research interests of the library's user population. The UL is excited about these potential benefits and is determined to put an approval plan into place.

The process going forward from this point will be complex and will involve many steps and decision points. This case study has attempted to address a number of the issues the UL may face and has suggested some approaches that may be considered in order to meet such challenges. It is important to note that the examples offered in the "Future Efforts" section were all hypothetical. They are presented merely as being indicative of the mindset that will be required when putting the approval plan into place.

The librarians at the UL understand that creating an approval plan profile will be a constant work in process. As the mission of the University, the scope and budget of the



library system on campus, and the tastes and demographics of users change, the profile will naturally have to change accordingly. The approval plan will be monitored and the profile tweaked often in the early stages of adoption, but it will also be important to have a plan for formal assessment in place for 3-4 years from the start of implementation. The assessment may take a variety of different forms, but the main goals will be to ensure that adopting an approval plan has freed up time for selectors, has led to a better use of funds for items that see positive circulation, and has altered the UL's collection to be a more accurate reflection of the needs of UNC's undergraduate population.

This case study has shown the process of investigating the appropriateness of pursuing an approval plan at the UL. The study has highlighted the thought processes of library administration, the approach that was taken to analyze the collection and determine areas of strength and weakness, and the steps the UL plans to take now that the decision has been made to adopt an approval plan. It is hoped that this case study will serve as a guide for other undergraduate libraries grappling with similar concerns about their collection and considering the implementation of an approval plan as a solution.

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