

# Being Earnest with Collections — Known Unknowns: A Humanities Collection Gap-Analysis Project



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**Column Editor's Note:** *In this month's edition of **Being Earnest with Collections**, I have asked my new colleague **Alice Daugherty** to talk about an important project she participated in while still at **Louisiana State University**. We are pleased that **Alice** joined us at **The University of Alabama** on June 1, 2017. I was intrigued about the project to explore ways to address gaps in the humanities collection that developed because of fluctuations in the materials budget. Her article highlights the initial planning, challenges and best practices that developed during the project. Librarians planning to explore ways to close collection gaps will find her article enlightening and may find the information helpful in setting policies, priorities and procedures. — MA*

## Brief Explanation

The **Louisiana State University Libraries (LSU Libraries)** consists of the main library, Middleton, and special collections housed in Hill Memorial Library. Subject liaisons work in both locations with the responsibility of building monographic collections for curricular and research activities of the university community. Similar to many academic libraries, each budgetary cycle **LSU Libraries** allocates money to disciplines or program areas, and the corresponding liaison librarians use their expertise to select monographic purchases. In addition to liaison-selected monographs, there are a minimal number of monographs ingested into the collection through approval plans, which focus on children's awards books, faculty publications, and items focused on Louisiana. In summer 2014, a new dean onboarded and ushered in a new collections philosophy; **LSU Libraries** ceased its demand-driven acquisition plan and turned its monographic purchasing focus on large eBook packages. Accordingly, eBook packages must meet the following set criteria: (1) eBooks must be DRM-free, (2) eBooks must allow for an unlimited amount of simultaneous users, and (3) eBooks must provide perpetual access. Many of the initial large eBook packages purchased centered content around STEM disciplines. In the following paragraphs, the author hopes to provide a brief overview of a recently completed humanities' collection gap-analysis project at **LSU Libraries**. The reasons for initiating the project, the workflow, challenges, and best practices will be discussed.

Acquiring monographs through the liaison selection model, approval plans, and pur-

chasing large eBook packages are effective processes for building collections; however, **LSU Libraries'** administration wanted to do more to focus on print materials and ensure research recommended and curricular supporting titles necessary to the collections were actually in the collection. **LSU Libraries** has endured years of university- and state-imposed spending freezes (FY10, FY11, FY12, FY14, and FY15). Librarians know if they do not encumber their title allocations quickly, they may lose their monographic allocations at the beginning or midpoint of the fiscal year (or both). Even in fiscal year 2016, the **LSU Libraries** implemented a localized spending freeze for books and standing orders to stay within budget.

The budget situation is an ongoing challenge for **LSU Libraries'** administration and liaisons, and unfortunately important and critical titles slip through the cracks and go unpurchased. The **LSU Libraries'** administration was concerned that the annual recurring budgetary restrictions had created holes in collections. To address this problem, **LSU Libraries** launched a monographic gap-analysis of humanities' collections, which initiated from the library Dean's office.

## Project Overview

Librarians in the collection development department worked with **Gobi Library Solutions** (formerly **YBP**) to examine five years of monographic acquisitions from nine of **LSU's** thirteen flagship peer-institutions. Based on call-number ranges, **Gobi** provided extensive lists of titles **LSU** had not purchased, but which members within the select peer group had. **Gobi** required permissions from each peer-institution before sharing data, and **LSU** was unable to make contact with four of the institutions. In addition, **Gobi** anonymized all of the information, and **LSU** librarians did not know which institutions purchased which titles. The **Gobi** lists were helpful to most liaisons, but some selectors felt there was too much information and used the lists minimally, if at all.

There were six liaisons and nine disciplines involved in the project. The gap-analysis project had \$50,000 set aside for purchasing older, critical titles necessary to the collections. For comparative purposes, humanities firm order funds for the same areas were allocated \$81,000 in the same fiscal year. The head of collection development provided humanities' liaisons allocations for each discipline, which ranged from \$1,000 to \$9,000. For this project, liaisons did not

have permission to go over-budget and were advised to keep selection totals below allocation limits. Usually for annual purchases liaisons can extend a little over-budget and funds are moved to cover overages, but moving funds was not an option for this project. For logistical purposes, liaisons created project-specific, shared, discipline folders in **Gobi** to store title selections, and **Gobi** created a new fund code for the project so **LSU Libraries** could monitor expenditures and run title reports.

Staffing levels at **LSU Libraries** is at a minimum, and during the gap-analysis only one person had the authority to procure and pay for all print and electronic resources. Ordering extra materials identified from the gap-analysis added extra work to one person who was already overextended with multiple duties. When administration requested the gap-analysis project, they appointed a librarian from the collection development department as project lead to design and manage oversight of the project for the liaisons, but no one had thought through the consequences of adding extra work to the one staff member already handling all the procurement and access issues for the entire collections.

To ease the lone acquisitions staff member's duties, librarians were asked to place orders through **Gobi** when possible and to avoid selecting **Gobi** title records noted as "out of stock" or "out of print" or "not yet published." In addition, liaisons had to ensure **Gobi** title records were listed as "In Stock" with a last received date of July 2016 or later. If those criteria were met then those orders were placed through **Gobi**. A majority of the purchases went through **Gobi**, but if the liaisons wanted out-of-stock or out-of-print materials or foreign language items, the orders went through other vendors, such as **Amazon**, **Abe Books**, and **AMALIVRE**. Using other vendors creates more work for staff. In **Gobi** the title records are already selected and can be sent in large batch amounts for purchase. With other vendors, staff have to search for each title and ensure the result is the correct manifestation before purchase.

Staff checked each order title against the ILS staff client for duplications, because titles could have been duplicated within one of the large eBook packages, from a different vendor purchase, or from a gift collection. The title was only ordered if it was not already in the collections. For this reason, even though 828 titles were selected, only 810 were purchased. A few titles were already in the collection or

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were not available. A breakdown of allocations and number of titles selected follows.

LSU Libraries Gap Analysis FY2017		
Discipline	Allocation	Number of Titles Selected
African American Studies	\$5,000	111
Art & Design	\$9,000	134
English	\$1,000	31
Film Studies	\$4,000	116
French	\$5,000	52
Foreign Languages & Literature	\$5,000	51
History	\$8,000	125
Music	\$8,000	78
Religious Studies	\$5,000	130

The project began in April 2016. This allowed the project lead to use the summer months to work with **Gobi** and obtain the peer-purchase lists. A librarian in collection development used the summer and fall to analyze the humanities' circulation and report five-year trends to liaisons. Even though **Gobi** lists and circulation analyses were conducted for all of humanities, the initial focus of the project was only one discipline, art & design. After art & design proved to be successful, the other areas of humanities were folded into the project. Project allocations and instructions were sent to liaisons in the fall. During the fall and spring, liaisons evaluated all of their information and made selections. The deadline for the liaisons to put titles in the project's **Gobi** folders was March 1, 2017. Acquisitions completed all orders by mid-April with a shipping timeframe of May 2017. From concept to completion, the gap-analysis took thirteen months.

**Is it Essential to the Collection?**

Selecting titles for the humanities gap-analysis project shifted the mindset of selectors and provided a slightly different purpose in decision-making. Instead of usage data or evidence-based data, liaisons used their expertise and the expertise of other librarians at peer-institutions for purchasing decisions. At **LSU Libraries**, the liaisons curate and maintain collections with a focus

on supporting the overall research and curricular needs of the campus and strategizing to develop a long-lasting comprehensive collection reflecting the long-term value of university investments. The gap-analysis was an additional pathway to continue the

meaningful and systematic development of the humanities' collections.

Liaisons framed their choices with the following two questions: (1) If **LSU Libraries** doesn't have this title in the collection, is the collection sub-standard? and (2) What is the most effective way to improve the collection with a small pool of money? Liaisons appreciated the chance to address collection weaknesses and wanted to make the best use of their unexpected opportunity. Some liaisons focused on call number ranges or areas where little systematic title selection had occurred on a regular basis. Other liaisons made title selections based on their knowledge of their departments' curriculum and research needs, interdisciplinary interests, and book reviews or spotlight lists.

Resources for Liaisons	
Gobi Peer-Purchased Title Lists	Circulation Analysis Reports
Faculty Suggestions	ILL "Essential" Title Requests
Curriculum Maps	Faculty Profiles
Choice Reviews	Gobi Spotlight Lists
Knowledge of Publisher	Areas of Collection Specialization

Weeks before the launch of the gap-analysis, all liaisons completed curriculum maps, which guided decision making and allowed liaisons to identify departmental or programmatic priorities. The curriculum maps included valuable information for decisions such as degree programs offered and course summaries. When creating the curriculum maps, liaisons also profiled individual faculty members taking note of specific research interests, publications, and teaching loads.

In addition, liaisons were able to use in-house interlibrary loan title lists as decision-making tools. **LSU Libraries'** customized interlibrary loan request form includes a drop down menu for faculty to indicate whether the requested title should be purchased — is it essential to the collection? Monthly ILL reports of title requests marked by faculty as "essential to the collection" are provided to liaisons for purchasing decisions. Also, liaisons were encouraged to seek faculty input and to set up meetings within the colleges or with individual faculty. As with many academic libraries, faculty suggestions have a higher priority and they can offer justification for specialized or esoteric resources. Most of the liaisons did receive title requests and input from the faculty.

**Project Challenges**

Some may wonder why **LSU Libraries** used **Gobi** to produce such extensive spreadsheets of peer purchases that ultimately proved cumbersome to liaisons trying to grasp the large amounts of data provided to them. Collection development librarians did look into different title analysis tools such as **OCLC's** WorldShare Analytics Evaluation, **Green-Glass**, or **Bowker's** Book Analysis System, but at **LSU Libraries**, justification for operations typically boils down to cost — there was not enough money.

Most of the liaisons work in public services, and the gap-analysis started too late in the fall and coincided with periods of heavy student and faculty needs. Most of the liaisons did not receive their allocations or instructions until November or December. The six liaisons and the one staff member overseeing acquisitions considered the project highly time-consuming and labor-intensive because workflow was condensed into January and February with a March 1, 2017 deadline to submit title selections.

Some liaisons began reviewing their **Gobi** lists in November 2016, but lists contained between 5,000 and 6,000 titles; liaisons needed more time for review and selection. Liaisons were unable to work on the gap-analysis project every day and the difficulty of ordering gap-analysis titles was compounded because expenditure of annual firm order funds had to continue during the same period, giving some liaisons a sizable amount of money to spend between regular collections and the gap project. For example, for fiscal year 2017, the liaison for French and foreign languages had close to \$25,000 to spend which was an increase of \$11,000 over prior yearly amounts.

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Liaisons were concerned that there had not been any publicity from the **LSU Libraries** to the campus community about the efforts to enhance collections, but in reality, the Dean of Libraries had continually promoted the project and emphasized the **LSU Libraries'** mission to those stakeholders with specific interests in maintaining a robust print collection.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The gap-analysis for the humanities was the first time **LSU Libraries** had allocated special funds for liaisons to focus on previously published materials. **LSU Libraries** was able to add 810 print monographs to the collection for fiscal year 2017, encumbering \$40,246 before spending halted. **LSU Libraries'** administration considers this an important on-going effort to build collection strength, and the dean wants to continue this process. Plans are underway to set aside more funding next fiscal year, and focus on other disciplines in the humanities that were not a focus in the first year, and include social sciences.

This project was a learning experience for everyone involved. A collection development librarian debriefed all the liaisons at the close of the project to gather input for future adaptations. As the process evolves, the timeline should shift so liaisons receive their allocations earlier in the fiscal year and the deadline for selections should move from March to January. The **Gobi** lists were helpful, but needed better parameters to refine the quality and quantity of titles. One suggestion was to limit titles to the **Gobi** profile indicators of "research essential" and "research recommended." Another suggestion was to provide title information only if five or more of the peer-institutions had purchased the title. To ease acquisitions, liaisons should be responsible for checking title records against the catalog or the project manager should consider having student workers manage this task.

In addition to adjusting some of the project processes, liaisons would like to see a greater emphasis from **LSU Libraries'** administration for campus-wide marketing, as well as guidance towards effective communication strategies for promoting the newly owned materials. The gap-analysis project offers opportunities to strengthen ongoing relationships between liaisons and faculty by highlighting the **LSU Libraries'** continued commitment to deliver quality resources.

The overall purpose of the project allowed liaisons to focus on remediating past omissions to balance the collection instead of focusing on collecting recently published materials. So far, the results of the humanities gap-analysis project reflect a strategic strengthening of the collection. The **LSU Libraries** hopes to develop future iterations of the project, incorporating suggested efficiencies, and progressing forward to continued success. 🌱