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## E-Books in Academic Libraries

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## Transitioning to E-Books at a Medium-Sized Academic Library: Challenges and Opportunities— A Feasibility Study of a Psychology Collection

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### **ABSTRACT**

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania Library, a medium-sized academic library, is transforming its building space to support creative learning and collaborations. One of the projects related to this goal involved mass weeding of the library's print collections to free space for new types of user services. In embracing the new library service model and space utilization plan, one of the major collection development questions was "Can e-books serve as an effective alternative for the future library monographic collections?" This paper explores the feasibility of transitioning a print psychology collection to electronic format, using the library resources requirement for a new undergraduate psychology course as an example. This case study evaluates the library's current print and electronic books relevant to the course topics, and then investigates whether and to what degree e-books can fulfill the course requirements. Based on the findings, it recommends a gradual transition from print to e-books; for the immediate future both print and electronic books will be needed to support this course.

### **BACKGROUND**

Like many academic libraries, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania Library, the library in this case study, has been implementing a new service model to support teaching, learning, and career development. One of the strategic goals was to redesign the Library space, that is, change the current collection-centered building space to a multifunction, multipurpose facility.

This goal included a significant reduction of the library's print collections, thus clearing space for study and collaboration, and in particular, creating space for new types of services, such as a technology learning center, a writing center, and a mathematics laboratory. Under this plan, the library has undertaken a series of collection rearrangement projects since 2011. The librarians have weeded about 25% of the print collections, which included books, bound journals, and government documents.

In embracing the new library service model and space utilization, one of the psychology librarian's major questions was "Can e-books serve as an effective alternative for the library's print monographic collections in the future?" This case study explores the feasibility of transitioning the library's psychology collection from print to electronic format.

## **LIBRARY'S PSYCHOLOGY COLLECTION**

The library's psychology collections encompass both print and electronic formats. The psychology monographs are mostly classified under Library of Congress (LC) Classification in these areas: BF (psychology), RA790-790.95 (mental health), RC49-53 (psychosomatic medicine), RC321-571 (biological psychiatry and neuropsychiatry), and RJ499-507 (mental disorder and child psychology). Books with psychology-interdisciplinary content may be found in other LC classes. For example, books dealing with both psychology and sociology are often classified under H (social science), and books on psychology and physiology can be found under QP (physiology).

### **Print Books**

Before the massive weeding project described in the introduction, the library held about 10,000 volumes of print books in psychology. According to the circulation statistics, patrons rarely or never checked out over 50% of the library's print books. Taking the psychology books in BF and RC classes as examples, 47% and 48% of them, respectively, had never circulated during the last 15 years. The collection's age was one of several factors contributing to the low use. Over 65% of the books in the print collection had been published between 1960 and 1990. Table 1 shows the steady decline in circulation statistics over a five-year period for psychology books correlated to publication date.

**Table 1.** Use of psychology print books by publication decade during a five-year circulation period (2009–2014).

Decade of publications	Total number of titles under RC	Number of circulated titles	Percentage of titles circulated
Pre-60s	244	9	3.6%
60s	690	39	5.6%
70s	906	72	7.9%
80s	676	111	16.4%
90s	409	120	29.3%
00s	291	152	52.2%

Aside from the weeding mandated by the library’s space remodeling project, this investigation identified the even more urgent need to update the collection from a content standpoint. For example, if the psychology librarian removed all books published before 1990, the psychology print collection in certain subject areas would be starkly depleted. The accelerating age of the collection was not only a direct result of the generally shrinking library materials budget, but also due to inadequate collection weeding in the past. So although the primary goal of the current weeding project was to free space, the weeding also made the subject librarians aware of the critical need to renew the collection with more recent publications. The challenge is that under the new library service model, future space will be allocated more to study and research activities and less to the physical collections. One solution would be to replace print books with e-books when possible.

### E-Books

The library currently provides access to 250,000 e-books, mostly acquired through packaged subscriptions, although there are a small number of single-title purchases. With steady growth in the library electronic collections over the last decade and their availability in the online catalog, patrons have had opportunities to use e-books. The use statistics and user feedback suggest

that e-books have gained increasing popularity among students and faculty. According to the latest use report from ebrary (one of the library's major e-books vendors), library users viewed 2,286 unique e-books between January 2013 and January 2014; this was 2.6% of the entire ebrary collection accessible via the library catalog. Under the category of psychology, users viewed 137 unique e-books, or 4% of the total psychology e-books available from ebrary. (This statistic includes only titles from which at least five pages were viewed.) Compared with print, the use of psychology e-books was considerably higher: only 2.7% of the print books in BF class circulated during the same time period. To the psychology librarian, both print and e-books use statistics support the future transition of the library's psychology collection to electronic format.

This significant percentage of use of psychology e-books led to two important questions. First, to what extent could psychology print books be replenished with more current e-books? And, second, will it be feasible to acquire new psychology publications exclusively in electronic format?

## **AVAILABILITY OF PSYCHOLOGY E-BOOKS**

Studies indicate that only a small portion of scholarly titles are available in electronic format. According to Anderson and Pham (2013), who checked a sample of their library's current print collection against electronic sources, the overlap between print and e-books was no more than 33%. The percentage of e-editions falls when it comes to useful academic books, such as titles on specific subjects that match a library's collection profile or titles that have been heavily used by students in the past. Pomerantz (2010) compared the print monographs that her library acquired in nursing and business to equivalent electronic editions available from aggregators and found that only 31% of the library-profiled books in these subjects had electronic counterparts. Link, Tosaka, and Weng (2012) concluded that fewer than 25% of locally checked out or interlibrary loan-requested print books were also available in e-format.

This paper approached the assessment of the print vs. electronic collection differently. The author used a new psychology course proposal to investigate the availability of psychology e-books, not by matching print books with their equivalent electronic editions, but by finding relevant e-books on specific topics covered by the course.

## **Library Resources for New Course Proposal**

This study investigated book resources to support one course, Lifespan Development, in which students learn about infant, child, adolescent, and adult development and aging in the social, emotional, cognitive, and biological realms of human development.

The library resources relevant to the major subjects of this course fell into various LC classes: BF710 to BF724.85 (developmental psychology), HQ and QP (physiological and sociological aspects of development), and RJ (child development). The author matched the material that the library already held on topics related to this course by LC subject headings and LC classification numbers or number ranges. (See Table 2 for print books by LC subject and classification for the Lifespan Development course.) All existing monographs, print and electronic, were identified through the Voyager (the library's integrated library system) Access Reports through subject heading and call number matches, then sorted by classification number and publication date. The report identified 1,573 print books as relevant resources for the course.

However, a significant portion of these books were dated. For example, after filtering out the pre-1990 publications, the total number of print books relevant to the course dropped to 335—that is, reduced by 79%. The reduction of the titles in certain other subjects is even more alarming. For example, the number of potentially useful titles in child psychology (BF721-723) fell 90%, from 583 to 60 titles. These dramatic figures helped the psychology librarian realize the need to update the collection by purchasing more recently published books. By contrast, Table 3 shows that the psychology e-books to which the library already had access were much more current; of the 473 titles identified for the course, 384 (81%) had been published between 2000 and 2014.

## **Lifespan Development E-Books Available at YBP**

The author's ultimate goals were, first, to update the library's print psychology collection and fill the gaps with e-books and, second, to transition the print collection to electronic in the future. Although the library will retain ebrary's Academic Complete, this collection alone does not satisfy the needs of the psychology program, since only a very small percentage of the titles are psychology books, and many of those titles do not fit the local curriculum

**Table 2.** The library's print books identified for the lifespan development course, by LC subject and classification.\*

LC subject heading	LC classification	Total print books	Post-1989 publications
Maturation (psychology)	BF710	5	1
Developmental psychology	BF712-713	66	10
Child development	HQ767.8-777	163	49
	RJ131-137	98	36
Psychology of play	BF717	16	3
Infant psychology	BF719-720	14	6
Child psychology	BF721-723	583	60
Adolescent psychology	BF724-724.3	60	11
	HQ796	80	15
Adulthood	BF724.5-724.85	68	20
	HQ799.95	8	3
Middle age	HQ1059.4- HQ1059.5 (BF724.6- BF724.65)	10 (2)	5
	Older people	HQ1060-1064 (BF724.8)	276 (14)
Gerontology	HQ1060-1064	(276)	(83)
Life cycle, human	(HQ799.95)	(8)	(3)
	(BF713)	(58)	
Human growth	QP84	34	4
Longevity	QP85	12	4
Aging	QP86	80	
	(QH1061)	(110)	25
	(BF724.55.A35)	(11)	
Total		1573	335

\*For statistical purpose, the numbers of books already counted once are in parentheses.

**Table 3.** The library’s e-books identified for the lifespan development course, by LC subject and classification.\*

LC subject heading	LC classification	Total e-books	Post-1999 publications
Maturation (psychology)	BF710	1	1
Developmental psychology	BF712-713	10	8
Child development	HQ767.8-777	80	68
	RJ131-137	12	10
Psychology of play	BF717	9	7
Infant psychology	BF719-720	14	11
Child psychology	BF721-723	126	99
Adolescent psychology	BF724-724.3	23	17
	HQ796	32	28
Adulthood	BF724.5-724.85	23	21
	HQ799.95	5	3
Middle age	HQ1059.4-	4 (2)	3
	HQ1059.5		
	(BF724.6- BF724.65)		
Older people	HQ1060-1064	112	91
	(BF724.8)	(11)	
Gerontology	HQ1060-1064	(112)	(91)
Life cycle, human	(HQ799.95)	(5)	(3)
	(BF713)	(10)	
Human growth	QP84	5	4
Longevity	QP85	5	4
Aging	QP86	12	9
	(QH1061)	(44)	(35)
Total		473	384

\*For statistical purpose, the numbers of books already counted once are in parentheses.



needs. The library collection needed titles on very specific subjects to fill the gaps left by weeding outdated print books. The author chose YBP Library Services, the library's main book vendor, for the future e-books acquisition investigation, because YBP supplies e-books from most major aggregators as well as from individual publishers. First, the author searched e-book titles in GOBI3, YBP's online bibliographic database, between August and October 2014, using the following parameters and varying the query only by LC classification range:

- Query: [A specific LC classification range, e.g. "BF712-BF713"]
- Content Level: General Academic
- Date: > = 2000
- Binding: eBook only

Then, to compare the availability of e-books with the print counterparts, the author conducted separate searches with the same parameters, altering only the binding preference. The author organized the results into five categories for each LC classification range:

- total number of books found
- number of books available in electronic format
- number of books available in print
- number of books exclusively in electronic format
- number of books exclusively in print

The searches yielded a total of 730 books under the selected classification ranges regardless of format and binding; 229 (31%) were available in electronic format. Of these 229 e-books, 41 were available only as e-books. All major aggregators, such as EBL, ebrary, EBSCO, and JSTOR, could supply the majority of the e-books. Nevertheless, a fairly significant number of titles were only available from particular aggregators or individual publishers. About 8% of the electronic titles were not available from the library's contracted aggregators. (Currently the library's contracted e-book aggregators are ebrary and EBSCOhost.) By comparison, the author identified 501 books in print (paper and/or cloth binding). Of these 501 books, 273 (55%) were only available in print. Table 4 summarizes the results of the searches in YBP's database to identify recently published psychology books.

**Table 4.** Availability of subject e-books at YBP as identified for the lifespan development course, 2000–2014: GOBI results A (as of October 2014).

LC classification	Total books	E-books	Print books	E-books only	Print only	% available as print only
BF710	2	1	1	0	0	0.0%
BF712-713	80	14	66	0	46	57.5%
BF717	6	3	3	1	1	16.7%
BF719-720	10	3	7	1	5	50.0%
BF721-723	113	33	80	4	43	38.1%
BF724-724.3	13	5	8	2	4	30.8%
BF724.5-724.85	29	12	17	3	8	27.6%
HQ767.8-777	202	63	139	13	74	36.6%
HQ796	82	27	55	2	26	31.7%
HQ799.95	5	1	4	0	2	40.0%
HQ1059.4-1059.5	13	6	7	3	4	30.7%
HQ1060-1064	123	44	79	7	38	30.9%
QP84	5	3	2	3	0	0.0%
QP85	8	4	4	2	2	25.0%
QP86	10	4	6	0	2	20.0%
RJ131-137	29	6	23	0	18	62.1%
Total	730	229	501	41	273	37.4%

To identify potential future acquisitions, the author searched GOBI for more recent publications by altering the date from “> = 2000” to “> = 2010.” The percentage of e-books of the total retrieval fell from 31.4% to 30% (see Table 5). One explanation for the lower percentage of electronic editions among newer academic titles is the delay of electronic release of academic books in general. According to Walters (2013), the delay of the electronic release, which varies between three to 18 months, maximizes the publishers’ print profits (p. 191).

Based on the GOBI search results, if the library only acquires electronic copies at YBP, more than 40% of the publications relevant to the course subjects would be excluded from the selection process because e-versions are not available. In certain subject areas, in which the print collection will be

**Table 5.** Availability of subject e-books at YBP as identified for the lifespan development course, 2010–2014: GOBI results B (as of October 2014).

LC classification	Total books	E-books	Print books	E-books only	Print only	% available as print only
BF710	0	-	-	-	-	-
BF712-713	33	4	29	0	23	69.7
BF717	2	1	1	0	0	0
BF719-720	0	-	-	-	-	-
BF721-723	38	10	27	0	15	39.5
BF724-724.3	4	2	2	2	2	50.0
BF724.5-724.85	19	9	10	3	5	26.3
HQ767.8-777	69	15	54	1	35	50.7
HQ796	32	12	20	0	10	31.2
HQ799.95	6	3	3	3	0	0
HQ1059.4-1059.5	2	0	2	0	2	100.0
HQ1060-1064	42	18	24	2	8	19.0
QP84	2	1	1	0	0	0
QP85	2	1	1	0	0	0
QP86	0	-	-	-	-	-
RJ131-137	16	4	12	0	9	56.3
Total	267	80	186	11	109	40.8

more heavily affected by the continuing weeding (e.g., child development, child psychology, adolescent psychology, and developmental psychology in general), acquiring e-books will be more challenging due to the even lower percentage of available e-books.

To investigate further whether the YBP print-only titles are available in electronic format outside the GOBI database, the author checked a sample of the YBP print-only titles against the Amazon and OCLC databases. About 14% of the titles were available in a Kindle edition at Amazon. About 40% of the titles had bibliographic records for e-editions in OCLC database, but only 20% of these led to the actual e-book sites.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the current findings on the availability of e-books on lifespan development, it is not realistic to replace the psychology print collection completely with e-books in the near future. A combination of print and e-books will be needed. Even if the library's acquisitions budget allowed the maximum purchase of e-books, the transition from print to electronic will be gradual, since it is anticipated that over time publishers slowly will make a larger percentage of scholarly books available in e-book format closer to the print edition release dates. For current collection development, one approach to take advantage of as many books in e-format as possible is to set the YBP profile to prefer electronic format. In other words, if a desired title is available both in print and electronic at YBP, librarians should order the e-edition. The psychology librarian will need to continue buying print books for those titles where a print copy is the only choice—because even if an electronic version may be available elsewhere, the licensing and platform restrictions often prohibit the library from purchasing e-books outside YBP (Polanka, 2011).

## FUTURE RESEARCH

In light of emerging e-book acquisition models, librarians should diversify acquisition methods and select the best options for developing subject e-book collections. To investigate and refine collection development of e-books further, a cost/value study of various acquisitions models will inform the acquisition strategies. For example, while title-by-title selections might match the library's profile more closely, purchasing backlist packages often results in a lower per-title price (Walters, 2013). Special subject packages can leverage the increasing cost of individual purchases. Besides the major vendors, librarians also can identify publishers or aggregators that specialize in certain subjects and therefore offer e-books relevant to specific academic disciplines, either as single titles or as packages. For an example in the field of psychology, *APA PsycBOOKS* (<http://www.apa.org/pubs/data/bases/psybooks/index.aspx>) is a full-text database of nearly 4,000 books and 50,000 individual chapters (as of October 2014) and is updated monthly.

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