

Altering the collections landscape: an overview of patron-driven-acquisitions at Arizona State University Libraries

[Versió catalana]

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Abstract

In 2009, Arizona State University Libraries adopted a patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) plan for both electronic and print books. This article describes the decision making process that resulted in a permanent change in collection development at a major academic research library. It considers how the program works from the perspective of library subject specialists and provides some information on the user experience. Finally, the article discusses future directions for PDA and poses questions that must be considered in the context of a major paradigm shift in collection development practices.¹

1 Introduction

In 2009 [Arizona State University Libraries \(http://lib.asu.edu/\)](http://lib.asu.edu/) (ASU) adopted a patron-driven-acquisitions collection development plan. At that time, the process developed at ASU was the first of its kind in the United States in that it constituted a permanent shift from a traditional model of acquiring English-language North American print books through an automated approval plan combined with "slips" for bibliographer review, to a system without slips in which scholarly monographs are purchased in both electronic and print format as a result of direct patron requests. This article provides an overview of the plan at ASU, explaining why such a model was adopted and how it has been implemented. It also touches on the challenges faced and the potential for future opportunities in relation to patron-driven acquisitions.

2 Defining patron-driven acquisitions

For the purposes of this article, patron-driven acquisitions (PDA) is defined in a general way as systematic, direct patron participation in the collection development process. I use the term systematic because of the need to emphasize deliberate, designed programs at an institutional level and to distinguish such programs from the very basic (but also important) patron-driven actions of individual library users requesting that a specific book, journal, or other item be added to a collection. In the most basic sense, PDA marks a change in collection development concepts and practices away from a "just in case" model to a "just in time" approach for users (Swords, 2011). Terms synonymous with PDA, but not used in this article, include purchase on demand (POD) or user-initiated collection development. PDA programs in US universities exist in various formations. Inter-library loan (ILL) PDA programs have been around for over two decades. With ILL PDA, libraries purchase items requested via ILL, rather than borrowing such items from other libraries. E-book PDA is rapidly on the rise, and in most cases, involves streaming e-books in the online catalog and purchasing them when used by patrons. Several libraries (both academic and public) have initiated pilot programs, or trials of electronic book PDA programs, and some institutions have made these e-book PDA programs a permanent fixture in collection development (Hodges; Preston; Hamilton, 2010; Carrico; Leonard, 2011; Polanka, 2009). Finally, the most recent development in the PDA landscape includes the acquisition of print monographs. Arizona State University Libraries was the first major research library in the United States to adopt a comprehensive e-book *and* print monograph PDA program.

3 The Arizona State University context

[Arizona State University \(http://www.asu.edu/\)](http://www.asu.edu/) is located in Tempe, Arizona, in the Phoenix metropolitan area of the Southwestern United States. The university has four campuses under a single administration with a full-time student population of over 70,000 and growing. ASU Libraries is a member of the Association of Research Libraries and holds over 4.5 million print volumes. Five-year circulation data for print volumes in the social sciences, humanities, and science/technology at ASU Libraries revealed that fewer than fifty-percent of North American approval plan books had circulated over that time period. Twenty-five percent of the books had a single checkout, and twenty-four percent of the items had two or more checkouts. The data also revealed that the "average time from book receipt in the ASU Libraries to the first checkout was 326 days." Thus, it became difficult to justify a print-preferred approval plan, solely on the basis that print titles typically are available ninety days before their electronic counterparts (Richardson, 2013). The challenge of serving such a large student body over multiple locations, combined with decreasing circulation numbers of print books and the severe economic crisis in 2008 led ASU Libraries to explore alternatives to our traditional collection development processes.

4 Crafting a new plan

In fall of 2009, ASU Libraries joined with Ingram Content Group (formerly Coutts) to develop a new acquisitions plan for English-language North American books in both electronic and print formats. The end result was an e-preferred plan with patron-driven acquisitions at its core. The new plan contained the following components:

- E-book PDA.
- Print PDA where MARC records would be streamed and users could choose from available titles.
- Traditional approval plan for U.S. university presses.

At the time the plan was adopted in 2009, it was the largest print PDA program anywhere. While many libraries experimented with e-book PDA initiatives and streamlined ILL PDA programs, ASU Libraries underwent a dramatic shift in traditional collection practices. Our plan was not a pilot or a trial, but rather a permanent change.

5 How it works

Records of all available titles in our approval plan (print and electronic) are streamed in the online catalog or OPAC. The parameters (the approval plan) for streaming records have been set with substantial input from subject specialist librarians. Thus, the process is mediated to some degree. Currently, no decision has been made as to how long particular titles that are *not* purchased will remain in the OPAC. Records may leave the catalog if publishers, who own the copyright, decide to change models or pull distribution rights from Ingram. This would only affect materials that are streamed and not purchased. So far, since streaming e-books in 2009 and print books in 2010, no records have been deleted deliberately by ASU Libraries personnel.

Currently, the library has loaded 17,629 MARC records for e-books and 12,320 MARC records for print titles. Since the plan is e-book preferred, a 90-day hold on print titles is in effect. This means that Ingram waits 90 days before streaming newly-available print titles, so that if an electronic version of the title becomes available in those 90 days, the e-book, and not the print title will be streamed. If no e-book is available within 90 days, the print format is streamed. If a title streamed as print becomes available as an e-book, the electronic book record replaces the print record.

6 The user experience

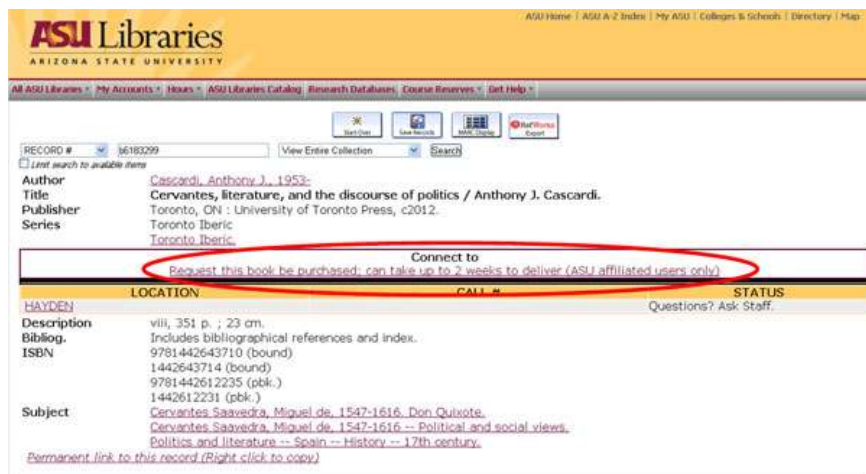


Figure 1. Sample OPAC (online catalog) record for print streamed book

Figure 1 shows the OPAC record for a print streamed title from the end user's point of view. Note that the availability of the title is listed as two weeks, but the books usually arrive within a week, and we are considering changing the language in the OPAC to reflect current delivery times.²

After the user clicks on the link to purchase the title, the screen image in Figure 2 appears:

Figure 2. Screenshot of patron-identifying information for PDA print title request

Note in Figure 2 that the system specifies that the user will *not* be charged for the item being purchased. Confusion as to who was actually paying to purchase the book was a problem for users early on.

Unlike the process for PDA of print materials, the selection of e-books is seamless for the user. Once he or she clicks on the title, the book is available for viewing. The system can handle various platforms with MyLibrary being the preferred e-book platform for Ingram.

7 User information

While we have not yet conducted systematic user-studies for our PDA program, we do have initial data, compiled in 2011,

regarding the user-base for *print* PDA.

Our early data on our users of the PDA print program are as follows:

- 45 % Faculty
- 40 % Graduate Students
- 15 % Undergraduate Students

These numbers suggest that undergraduate students do not want to wait or cannot wait for print titles. We do not have data on the breakdown of users for our electronic titles.

Subject distribution for purchases under the PDA program are not very surprising. For print titles, the social sciences and humanities dominate. For e-books, the humanities and fine arts fall behind social sciences and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) disciplines. The specific breakdown by subject for 2011 is as follows:

Print titles purchased by discipline:

- 54 % Social Sciences (including History)
- 24 % Humanities and Fine Arts
- 22 % STEM

E-books purchased

- 43 % Social Sciences (including History)
- 40 % STEM
- 17 % Humanities and Fine Arts

8 Expenditures

When the PDA program began, no prediction could be made regarding actual expenditures. As a precaution, a set sum was placed in reserve. We also have the added security of being able to "turn off" the purchasing by patrons at any point throughout the year to control for spending. So far, halting purchases has not been necessary. For fiscal year 2012 (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012) ASU Libraries spent \$152,000 USD on the e-book PDA program and approximately \$24,000 USD on PDA print purchases. We spent approximately \$100,000 USD on our university press approval plan. It is too early to tell if these figures represent a pattern, since FY 2013 figures are not yet available.

9 Challenges and solutions

Any new program that represents a break with longstanding practices will face challenges; the implementation of PDA at ASU Libraries was no exception. The technical services staff at ASU Libraries carried the burden of implementation of our new PDA program. The e-book portion of the plan was adopted with little difficulty. The print PDA program took longer and was not fully implemented until August of 2010, due to specific programming necessary by both ASU Libraries and Ingram. The challenges and resulting solutions from a technical services standpoint would be an excellent topic for a future article. Here I will emphasize the challenges from the viewpoint of subject specialist librarians at ASU.

9.1 Subject specialist librarians

Subject specialist librarians at ASU are responsible for collections, reference, and research skills instruction in their areas of expertise. Reaction to the PDA plan by the librarians was mixed, but perhaps "guarded" would be the best term to use. On the one hand, all of the librarians were very aware of the context in which this program was developed—increasing student enrollment on multiple campuses, decreasing materials/book budgets, declining circulation numbers for print materials—and as such, understood the need for a systematic shift in collection development practices. On the other hand, this new program constituted a major shift in the traditional collection development processes of our librarians. The process of receiving "slips" on a weekly basis and adding materials to the collection by reviewing those slips, in addition to a regular approval plan, ended. Some librarians worried about whether we would be building a collection that was comprehensive enough to be worthy of a major research university. Others wondered whether librarians should be mediating the process to a greater degree.

Many subject librarians' concerns were mitigated in two ways. First, subject librarians were heavily involved in the creation of the approval plan to determine which records to stream in the OPAC, much in the same way they set the parameters of the traditional approval plans of the past. Thus, subject librarians do maintain a mediation role of sorts, allaying fear by some that the new collection development method would result in an "anything goes" approach. Second, at the specific request of subject librarians, we initially maintained a traditional print approval plan for university presses that fit our broader approval profile. Even though we no longer worked with slips, we knew print publications from major US academic publishers would still arrive.

In addition to involving subject librarians in the process of creating the streaming approval plan, we continue with firm orders. Firm orders are purchases for library materials initiated by individual subject specialist librarians apart from approval plans. Most often, but not always, firm orders are initiated by specific requests from faculty members. Yet, the firm order system has changed as well, as a result of our new e-preferred, PDA system for collection development. In the past, individual subject librarians received an annual allocation for purchases within their subject areas (most often defined along Library of Congress call number ranges.) This system became less useful as interdisciplinary studies expanded at ASU, making the allocation of funds somewhat arbitrary. Along with the shift to print and electronic PDA for our English-language, North American approval plan, firm order funds ceased to be divided among librarians. We now have one large pool of firm order funds from which all subject librarians make purchases. For now, the central pool of funds for firm orders works well. Even though there always exists the chance that a handful of subject librarians will skew buying patterns by spending more funds than others, this has yet to become a problem.

So far, I have focused exclusively on English-language collections. As a major research university, ASU also requires that significant effort be made to acquire international materials in a myriad of languages. In general, foreign language materials at ASU Libraries are purchased and managed by a team of Area Studies specialists. These acquisitions continue to take place outside of the PDA plan with the collaboration of international vendors. Area specialists, unlike other subject specialist librarians, continue to maintain individual budgets and specific approval plans with vendors around the globe. As the Area Specialist for Latin American and Iberian Studies, I have been approached by at least one vendor interested in providing electronic books to our library with the potential to create a patron-driven plan. To date, such a plan is far from fruition. If PDA programs for foreign language materials do become a reality, I predict they will be confined to e-books for quite some time. To date, even e-book purchases (firm orders or approval plans) for non-English language materials are limited, but growing in the United States.

9.2 University faculty

So far, I have focused on the impact of the PDA program on ASU Libraries while providing general information about our user base. But what about the faculty members who rely on the library to provide access to scholarly materials? Early on, faculty were less concerned about the shift to a PDA program than they were to the adoption of an e-book preferred plan. The latter has been received with mixed feelings, especially by professors in the humanities. Faculty members understand the context in which these changes were made, and in general, are supportive. It is important to note that we did not advertise our program in advance; we (and our users) jumped in with both feet. Thus, our ability to look at the overall picture from a users' perspective has been limited, and assessment is something that will take place in the future.

10 Recent developments

10.1 Addition of university presses

As mentioned earlier, the original PDA plan called for maintaining a traditional approval plan for university press titles in print. About one year after the implementation of both the print and electronic streaming records, subject specialist librarians felt comfortable enough with the system and its parameters to stop the traditional approval plan and stream university press records in the online catalog, just as other print titles are streamed. As with any other resource, university press titles that do not stream in the catalog can be ordered by a subject specialist librarian as a firm order.

10.2 AULC - A PDA consortium

Based on the success of ASU's patron-driven-acquisitions initiative, the Libraries expanded the e-book (but not the print) portion of the plan to include our partners in the Arizona University Libraries Consortium (AULC). AULC institutions include ASU, the University of Arizona, and Northern Arizona University, all three public universities governed by the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR). The AULC collectively serves over 128,000 full-time equivalent students as of 2013. Early data show that the e-books available to the consortium are purchased at a much lower cost than if a single ABOR university were to purchase the title outside of the AULC agreement (Richardson, 2013). Consortia-based PDA programs will likely be the wave of the future for library systems, large and small.

11 Conclusion

ASU Libraries is one of many academic research libraries moving forward with patron-driven acquisitions. As the first U.S. university to implement a comprehensive e-book and print PDA initiative, we can offer a model for others and are happy to share our experiences with colleagues at other institutions. As we continue with this new way of building collections, some issues must still be addressed. Assessment is ongoing and must continue to be a focus, both from the perspective of internal library processes and the "external" experiences of our users. Important questions still need to be considered at length, chief among them, if the "just in case" model of collection development is indeed dead, what are the broader implications for academic research libraries in the future? What does this shift signify for the job duties of subject specialist librarians and bibliographers? To what extent do we need to change how these specialists are trained/educated? Initial data suggest that libraries ultimately save money by adopting PDA programs in place of traditional automated approval plans. Given this new reality, what happens to the savings? Will those dollars simply be absorbed by cash-strapped universities, or could they perhaps be diverted to other library programs such as special collections, where libraries have the ability to showcase truly unique holdings? These questions and others are important to consider as libraries everywhere contemplate the advantages and challenges of working within a patron-driven collection development program.

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Notes

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² Approximately 65 % of print titles are ordered from Amazon.com, not Ingram, because Ingram does not have them in stock. These Amazon orders usually arrive in two or three days. Ingram titles generally take four days and are ready to circulate in five or six days. A very small number of titles must be ordered from the publisher or are out of stock at Amazon and, thus, take longer to arrive.

Català

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