

COLLECTION EVALUATION IN AUSTRALIAN THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES PART II

Gary E Gorman

School of Information Studies
Charles Sturt University - Riverina

User-Centred Measures

This kind of evaluation must measure actual use by users and assumes that heavy use of a collection necessarily means it is a 'good' collection. An implicit assumption in this approach is that a measure of the use of a book is a measure of its value to the library. This assumption is the basis of the Sloc method of collection weeding, which argues that in weeding one is aiming to reduce the stock to a core collection that will satisfy 95-99 per cent of present use as measured by loan statistics.[16] While it is not difficult to collate figures that indicate classes of books that have not been used in the past, and thus are likely not to be used in the future (for example, fiction collections in a theological library), it may not be possible to do the same for individual items in the collection (works by Flannery O'Connor). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the best method of establishing likely future use of any individual work is its 'shelf-time period', that is, the time the work has remained on the shelf since it last issued, or (in the case of very recent acquisitions) since its accession. Most writers have now accepted that past use is the most reliable indicator of likely future use in *large research libraries*. Despite this general acceptance one must be aware that there are great variations in different subject areas and that the method needs to be applied with caution. There is minimal precedent in the form of studies of theological collections, and one must wonder whether many Australian theological libraries can be classed as 'large' research collections?

There are at least seven problems inherent in the use and user studies approach. First, it is necessary that some statistics have already been gathered for a reasonable period. Should these statistics not be available, then some sampling must be employed. This could be sampling of the total collection, or a form of sampling of current use such as current loans. Second, statistics gathered on the use of certain parts of any collection do not necessarily reflect the use of other parts, or of different uses of the same parts. For instance, measuring the use of a theological collection by B.Th. students does not indicate the research value and use of that collection. Third, there are problems in measuring 'in-house' use, as most of the

methods rely on user cooperation or on staff who are involved in other work at the time, or are used in uncontrolled areas of the library; given the limited number of staff and long opening hours of most theological libraries, these last two problems are particularly telling. Fourth, the method measures demands rather than needs, and thereby raises the important question of whether measures of what has actually been required in the past should be taken as reliable indicators of what ought to be needed in the future. It is necessary at all times to consider the question of whether theological libraries should be expanding the outlook of their students rather than necessarily limiting collections to cater only for the current outlook. Fifth, any surveys of actual users must of necessity ignore potential users, unless it is to be assumed that the potential users will have the same needs and make the same demands as do existing users. Extrapolation and the forecasting of future use can be effective only if the likely requirements of potential users can be estimated; the more closely the forecast is based on current use, the more likely it is to reinforce the current patterns of use. Sixth, what is the real meaning of 'use' as it is understood by the users being surveyed? There may be considerable variation in what users understand by the words 'use' and 'read', and the term 'use' is often viewed as akin to 'usefulness', rather than as the simple act of 'making some use of'. Seventh, familiarity with the bookstock will influence the advice and recommendations given by staff to patrons. It is almost inevitable that where professional advice is offered, there will be a tendency to recommend material that is familiar or has recently come to notice, thus influencing the results of any 'use' study, no matter how internally valid that study may be; surveys must be designed to take this phenomenon into account and to minimize it.

Use-Centred Measure 1: Circulation Studies. These studies are used to identify the less used parts of a collection for weeding, to identify a core collection, perhaps for duplication or special treatment, or to identify use patterns of selected subject areas for adjustment of funding and collection development practices, and also to identify user populations. The methods used certainly reflect current circulation patterns, but the basic problem remains that although circulation may be a measure of what was done in the past, it is not necessarily a measure of what ought to have been done, or of what is likely to be done in the future. The statistics kept must show loans by different classes of borrowers and of different classes of materials and must also measure different loan periods. Some method of comparison of the figures with those of acquisitions in the relevant subject areas should also be included.

Advantages of circulation studies include the following: with computerization of circulation procedures the data are easily collected and easily arranged for analysis; the duration of a study is flexible; sample sizes can easily be adjusted to suit changing circumstances; the units are easily counted; and the information is objective. Among the disadvantages one may mention that they exclude in-house consultation and thus are

almost certain to underrepresent actual use. They may indeed misrepresent it, for although some research shows a high correlation between volumes used in the library and volumes taken out on loan, other work throws some doubt on this.[17] Circulation studies reflect only successes, and do not record user failures; they may be biased through the inaccessibility of heavily used material; they could fail to identify low use through obsolescence or low quality material.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Circulation Studies

Advantages

- 1 data are easily categorized for analysis
- 2 duration of study and size of sample are highly flexible
- 3 units of information are easily counted
- 4 information is objective
- 5 automated circulation systems can generate data as part of normal routines
- 6 types of users can be correlated with types of material

Disadvantages

- 1 actual use is under-represented because in-house use is excluded
- 2 user or collection failures are not counted, only successes
- 3 bias may exist because heavily used materials are inaccessible

Use-Centred Measure 2: In-House Use Studies. This approach can be used to record the use of material consulted in the library. In-house user studies give more complete pictures of in-house use than do other methods, and they can be used in conjunction with circulation studies for more accurate information on specific parts of the collection. On the other hand, they rely on user cooperation, so they are difficult to use in 'uncontrolled' areas; certain aspects of timing and of the non-recording of materials in circulation may bias results; and they also reflect only successes and do not report failures. It is necessary to define precisely what is meant by 'in-house' and for that purpose some kind of marking of material is used so that it can be seen if it has been disturbed, and use may be more narrowly defined by taking into account only material taken from the shelves and left on tables for re-shelving. Because there is also a considerable amount of variation in use of different parts of a collection, it would be unwise to

make any decision on the basis of 'in-house' studies that could not be verified and supported by other kinds of measures.

Advantages and Disadvantages of In-House Use Studies

Advantages

- 1 they can correlate type of user with type of material, giving a more complete idea of use
- 2 they can be used in conjunction with a circulation study of the same part of the collection to give a more complete picture
- 3 they are appropriate for non-circulating collections

Disadvantages

- 1 they are difficult to apply in open stacks without full user cooperation, so may need supplementation with another method (observation, etc)
- 2 the timing of studies may bias results (e.g., during peaks and troughs)
- 3 materials in circulation are not available for in-house use
- 4 they do not indicate user failure to find information

Use-Centred Measure 3: Inter-library Loan Requests. Inter-library loan (ILL) requests represent use of the collection because they show what is not in the collection but is still required by the user. In general ILL requests should be viewed as indicators of unmet research demand on the part of users. Accordingly, analysis of inter-library loan statistics can identify areas where the collection is not meeting user needs. ILL requests can also help identify journals to be considered for subscription and serve as a means of monitoring resource-sharing agreements. To be successful an evaluation tool ILL requests must be recorded by subject and date, not just by specific item. According to the annual ANZTLA statistics, ILL requests are minimal for many member libraries; if this is a genuine reflection of such activity, then inter-library loans are unlikely to contribute much to collection evaluation in this instance. Nevertheless, the larger, more active libraries may want to consider ILL requests as an additional source of information.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Inter-library Loan Requests

Advantages

- 1 statistical data tend to be readily available
- 2 analysis is based on items of known demand
- 3 requests may serve to identify changing demands or collection deficiencies

Disadvantages

- 1 statistics may be difficult to interpret
- 2 ILL requests miss users who go elsewhere for materials

Use-Centred Measure 4: Document Delivery Tests. These are used to assess the capability of the library to provide its users with the items at the time they need them. They must measure (1) the extent to which the collection is adequate to provide the material needed in specific subject areas, (2) the speed with which the material is provided, (3) the effort the user is required to expend in order to get results, and (4) the level of precision of the system expressed by its ability to provide what is needed and to filter out what is not needed. While it is certainly important to design the study so that it does not interfere with normal work routines, this introduces the problem that a time and a method that best suit staff requirements and best fit into work patterns may not be the best in terms of objective measurement. One might almost assume the reverse to be true: for instance, a time that suits work patterns could well be a 'slack period' and would measure a 'non-typical' delivery pattern. An effective approach would be to design an instrument that lists a number of documents (or references to them) thought to be those most likely to be needed by the users, and then to determine how many of the items are owned by the library, how many are available at the time, and how long it takes to make them available. Although the technique is said to simulate the processes employed by a user who walks into the library and searches for a document, it may be difficult not to introduce unconscious variations. The best way, of course, would be to make use of 'real-time' situations, but this would almost certainly result in some unnecessary complications; it could not only lower the quality of the service being offered at the time but also introduce an unmeasurable bias. Among the advantages of document delivery tests are these: they provide objective information on the ability of the system to satisfy specified user needs; the data can be comparable and therefore compared among different libraries; they are not difficult to design, to understand, or to install. However, these advantages are counterbalanced by several disadvantages: it is difficult to compile a list of representative citations for use in checking the actual delivery procedures; they require repeated comparable tests; since the staff who perform the tests will be familiar with the library's routines, the results can underestimate

the problems faced by users, who are not so well versed in the techniques of using libraries.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Document Delivery Tests

Advantages

- 1 tests provide objective measurement of a collection's ability to satisfy user needs
- 2 data can be compared across libraries if identical lists are used

Disadvantages

- 1 a list of representative citations is not easily compiled
- 2 user error in locating materials is under-represented because staff perform the searches
- 3 results require comparison with studies in other libraries in order to be meaningful

Use-Centred Measure 5: Shelf Availability Tests. These form a subset of document delivery tests and are used to determine whether items presumed to be in the collection are actually available to users. The importance of shelf availability per se is open to question, however. Danton reported on work done on the collections of some German research libraries that had been badly damaged in the Second World War and showed that in some libraries up to 40 per cent of the collection was considered not worth replacing.[18] This would indicate that a considerable part of the collections of those libraries was 'redundant'. If that were so of these carefully selected research collections, it is reasonable to assume that it might be even more so in some of the rather haphazardly collected public and academic libraries elsewhere, and that simple measures of what is, or is not, available when asked for may have little to do with any measures of value. These figures correspond quite well with those of Trueswell, who calculated that 99 per cent of the circulation requirements could have been met by 25 and 40 per cent respectively of the two collections.[19]

A shelf availability test has several advantages: it reports failures of real users, and is thus more likely to reflect what is actually happening, rather than what is thought to be happening; it can be used to identify reasons for user failure outside the scope of collection development policies, and thus can be useful for other purposes (such as improving reshelving procedures); it can be repeated readily. Among its disadvantages is the fact that it depends on the cooperation of users; the design and operation of each study is difficult and time consuming; it do not identify the needs of non-users.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Shelf Availability Tests

Advantages

- 1 tests report user failure to find materials
- 2 they can be readily repeated at regular intervals to measure changes in library performance

Disadvantages

- 1 tests depend on the cooperation of users to an unacceptable degree in some situations
- 2 they can be difficult and time consuming to design and implement
- 3 they do not identify the needs of non-users
- 4 users may not recall all items they failed to find

Use-Centred Measure 6: User Surveys. The purpose of user (opinion) surveys is to determine how well a library's collections meet user information needs. They do this by gathering responses, both written and verbal, to specific questions about user perceptions and use of the collections. Information from a properly structured and carefully administered user survey can be extremely useful in evaluating collection effectiveness in meeting user needs. Surveys can also help to define a user community more accurately and identify groups that could be better served. This is perhaps their most valuable contribution to collection development. For example, a survey of Adelaide theological college library users found that a comparatively small number of academic staff possessed research degrees, that a large number were working on higher degrees, and that they found little of research value in their college libraries - all of which information, when quantified, can contribute to more effective collection development. However, there are so many pitfalls in the development, administration and analysis of surveys that they should be tackled only by the very brave, the very foolish or the very fortunate (that is, a librarian with experience in survey work, or with access to those with such experience).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Surveys

Advantages

- 1 surveys are not limited to existing data but create new data
- 2 they permit direct input from users

- 3 surveys can be either simple or complex, depending on a library's requirements

Disadvantages

- 1 survey design is difficult
- 2 analyzing and interpreting survey data can be difficult
- 3 users tend to be passive about collections so need to be surveyed individually, at some cost both financially and temporally
- 4 users may not cooperate, which skews the results
- 5 many users do not know what a library can be expected to do for them and therefore cannot judge what is adequate
- 6 surveys may record perceptions which do not reflect actual experiences

Conclusion

In any evaluation of a library collection a combination of procedures must be employed. This is because each technique, whether collection- or use-centred, measures a specific aspect of the quality of a collection. No technique is complete in itself, and each has been developed to obtain specific kinds of data. The selection of evaluation techniques must be based on the precise questions to which a librarian is seeking answers. In terms of collection development these questions relate to density and intensity:

What is our collection density?

What is its size?

How does it compare with standard lists?

How adequate is it to meet user demands?

What is our collection intensity?

Is it appropriate to the curriculum?

Does it reflect changing staff profiles?

Are sufficient materials available in heavily used subjects?

The selection of methods must be based on the questions appropriate to the specific situation. When selecting a technique, make sure it is valid for producing the kind of information required. And always employ both collection-centred and user-centred techniques in tandem so that a more complete understanding of the collection will be achieved.

- 16 Stanley J. Slote, *Weeding Library Collections: Library Weeding Methods*. 3rd ed. (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1989).
- 17 William E. McGrath, 'Correlating the Subjects of Books Taken out of and Books Used within an Open-Stack Library.' *College and Research Libraries* 32, 4 (1971): 280-285; Geoffrey Ford, 'Stock Relegation in Some British University Libraries.' *Journal of Librarianship* 12, 1 (1980): 42-55.

- 3 For examples of practical applications of the methods to be discussed in the balance of this chapter see Anthony J. Arthur, *Collection Development: A Report to the Swinburne Librarian*. 2 vols. (Hawthorn: Swinburne Ltd, 1985); Bruce C. Bennion, 'The Use of Standard Selection Sources in Undergraduate Library Collection Development.' *Collection Management* 2, 2 (1978): 141-152; Gary D. Byrd, D.A. Thomas and Katherine E. Hughes, 'Collection Development Using Inter-Library Loan Borrowing and Acquisitions Statistics.' *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 70, 1 (1982): 1-9; Pauline A. Scales, 'Citation Analyses as Indicators of the Use of Serials: A Comparison of Ranked Title Lists Produced by Citation, Counting and from Use Data.' *Journal of Documentation* 32, 1 (1976): 17-25; Eric J. Wainwright and John E. Dean, *Measures of Adequacy for Library Collections in Australian Colleges of Advanced Education*. 2 vols. (Perth: Western Australian Institute of Technology, 1976).
- 18 J. Periam Danton, 'The Subject Specialist in National and University Libraries with Special Reference to Book Selection.' *Libri* 17, 1 (1967): 42-58.

- 19 Richard A. Trueswell, 'A Quantitative Measure of User Circulation Requirements and Its Possible Effect on Stack Thinning and Multiple-copy Determination.' *American Documentation* 16 (1965): 20-25.

ONE (OR TWO) FRENCH PRIESTS AND THE "CATHOLICS OF NEW SOUTH WALES" IN 1788

Frank R.L. Carleton

When published at the end of 1988 J.H. Donohoe's *The Catholics of New South Wales 1788-1820 and their families* (Sydney: Archives Authority of New South Wales, 1988. viii, 432 p. ISBN 0 7240 7974 2)¹ was advertised in the *Catholic Weekly*² and available at \$19.95 through the Government Information Service in Hunter Street, Sydney. According to the preface, which bears the names of the Principal Archivist and the Chairperson of the Archives Authority of New South Wales:

The Archives Authority believes that the present work - involving 10,000 names - is an important contribution to the documentation of the individuals who made history. It should be of value to family historians, Catholic historians and scholarly researchers alike. (p.iii).

¹ "Compiled and edited by James Hugh Donohoe in association with the NSW State Archives and Government Records Repository ("Kingswood"), O'Connell St., St Marys, 2760, and the Archives of St. Mary's Cathedral (sic), St. Mary's Cathedral Road, Sydney 2000" (titlepage verso)

² *Catholic Weekly* 7 Dec. 1988 p.21. Curiously, and despite its imprint, this publication did not appear in the June, 1989 list of its publications issued by the Archives Authority, but was advertised again in a letter by the Coordinator of the New South Wales Bicentennial Archives Program which was published in the November, 1989 issue of *Footprints*, the quarterly journal of the Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission (*Footprints* 6 (12) Nov. 1989 p.36).