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Coates Library Collections Philosophy

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COATES LIBRARY COLLECTIONS PHILOSOPHY

“The discovery of new knowledge and the reinterpretation of previously discovered knowledge develop an understanding of the world beyond the borders of campus.”¹

Coates Library helps students in their quest to discover and reinterpret knowledge by acquiring relevant portions of the intellectual record and providing access to much of the rest. Indeed, the library is but one node in a global network of collections. Through established relationships, agreements, and systems, we extend our students’ reach beyond the borders of campus and into the world by drawing on other libraries’ and producers’ resources.

To fulfill this part of its mission, Coates Library offers carefully selected and managed resources to support teaching and learning grounded in the liberal arts and preprofessional curriculum at Trinity University. The following collections philosophy explains how the librarians select and manage these resources.

Selection of resources

Collecting priority. Priority is given to materials that support teaching and learning throughout the curriculum and that have excellent potential for use by students or faculty members today, not in the future and not in the abstract. Beyond support for teaching, we may also support the research of current faculty and students through the purchase of materials. While librarians are responsible for all purchasing decisions, they appreciate and encourage requests from faculty members and students.

Open Access. Whenever quality and content are comparable, the librarians favor open access publications over those behind pay walls. (See also “Coates Library Support for Open Access Scholarly Publishing.”)

Level of collection intensity. The library maintains its collection at the *instructional support level* for both undergraduate and graduate degree disciplines. The instructional support level is described as supporting “undergraduate and most graduate instruction, or sustained independent study; that is, adequate to maintain knowledge of a subject required for limited or generalized purposes, of less than research intensity. It includes a wide range of basic monographs, complete collections of works of more important writers, selections from the works of secondary writers, a selection of representative journals, and reference tools and fundamental bibliographical apparatus pertaining to the subject.”²

¹ From Trinity University’s statement of mission and values (<https://new.trinity.edu/mission-values>).

² The levels of collecting intensity are based on those developed in the 1980s by the Research Libraries Group (RLG) as part of the *RLG Conspectus*. Academic libraries around the world have adopted this approach to describing and assessing their collecting activities. The Library of Congress posts the definitions of the various levels at: <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/cpc.html>.

Format. Reader preference, publication type, space concerns, and financial considerations influence the format of the materials we collect. To the extent that we can determine reader preference and accommodate it physically and financially, we will buy the format most of our readers prefer and will use. Generally speaking, this results in the purchase of the digital format for journal literature and reference works and of the physical format for monographs. (The collection development policies for the various disciplines reflect differences in preference for digital versus print formats.) Digital monographs that are to receive extensive consultation for course assignments are licensed for unlimited simultaneous use in order to provide 24/7 access to all students. For video and audio, we invest in some aggregated streaming options but continue to buy CDs and DVDs, while being aware that these physical formats will become obsolete in the near future.

Language. The library buys materials in English except for 1) the modern and ancient language disciplines, for which we also collect materials in those particular languages (Chinese, French, German, Greek, Latin, Spanish) and 2) Languages across the Curriculum courses in the language of instruction.

Textbooks for reserve status. We acquire these selectively, targeting courses that assign very expensive textbooks. This service not only alleviates some of the pressure that financially disadvantaged students experience at the beginning of each semester; it may also increase the number of students who consult textbooks, enhancing learning in these courses.

Institution-specific materials. The library preserves Trinity's institutional memory by gathering and maintaining many institutional records. These include, in Special Collections and Archives, faculty-authored or -edited monographs, papers of Trinity-affiliated people, and official university files, publications, photographs, video and audio recordings, webpages, etc.; and in the Digital Commons, student theses and faculty publications, research, working papers.

Government documents. As a library with selective federal depository status, the government documents collection serves the information needs of the general public and 21st congressional district as well as Trinity students and faculty. New documents are collected in electronic format whenever possible, especially for materials that benefit from improved accessibility and discovery in searchable online platforms. Physical materials with local or state-level focus are maintained, as are primary source material unavailable in other formats or areas of the library collection e.g., statistics, data, reports, letters, legal documents, etc. Secondary or analytical historical materials are maintained on a case-by-case basis as they pertain to curricular or research needs of the Trinity community.

Management of resources

General. To the extent that we can do so responsibly, the library subscribes to the "just in time" philosophy rather than the "just in case" approach. We exploit rush ordering and fast delivery options to acquire materials when readers alert us to their needs. We purchase journal articles for readers as needed when that approach is more economical than subscribing to a journal.

We also add records to the library catalog for e-books on a wide range of subjects. When a given ebook is consulted enough to cross a defined-use threshold (based on length of online sessions and number of times accessed), the library pays for the book at that point but pays nothing until then. In addition, in response to expressed needs, we provide quick delivery of articles and books via interlibrary loan. These approaches allow us to spend our materials budget on resources with real rather than potential use.

Management of monographic materials. In accordance with the guiding principles of 1) giving students materials they will use in support of their coursework, 2) presenting these materials in an approachable and appealing way (to increase the chance that they will, in fact, use them), and 3) respecting the space limits imposed by the building, librarians regularly review and revise the collection by removing materials that no longer appear to support these principles. Librarians base these withdrawals on various categories of information, including relevance to the current curriculum offerings, recorded uses, year of publication, subject, currency of the information, physical condition, and number of copies owned by other Texas and U.S. libraries. These criteria vary from discipline to discipline in order to take into account the reading and research practices and publication types that characterize different subject areas. Librarians solicit the opinions of faculty members, asking that requests for retention of titles be grounded in convincing, evidence-based arguments for their use in coursework or research.

Management of ongoing access to information resources. The breadth of coverage of many resources such as journals, databases, datasets, streaming audio or video, etc. means that these are frequently consulted by many people. Therefore, renewal and cancellation decisions for these resources call for collaboration between the academic department and its liaison librarian, or in the case of multidisciplinary journals and databases, between several departments and their liaison librarians. Use data and cost-per-use figures are important factors in renewal and cancellation decisions. In some disciplines, accreditation requirements may trump use and financial considerations.

Approved by library faculty members December 12, 2016.