

A (Very) Quick Look at Library Acquisitions

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Ever wondered how that invaluable book or journal you are using in your research found its way into the library collection? Under the umbrella of Libraries and Cultural Resources, Collections and Technical Services Department, the Acquisitions Unit is responsible for acquiring print material while the Electronic Resources Unit in Collections Services is responsible for acquiring e-resources. Here some quick facts on how the acquisitions processes work.

Essentially, there are two types of publications: serials and monographs. Both exist in print and in online versions. Very simply defined, a serial is a publication that is intended to be published indefinitely while a monograph is a one-time publication that refers to a single body of work. In an library like that of the University of Calgary, “serial” mostly refers to journals while “monograph” applies to books though there are many other publications which can fall into these categories.

On the recommendation of a liaison (subject) librarian (who consults with faculty and other users), a request for a new serial is sent to Collections Services for approval. If the serial is a print item, Collections initiates an order form, submits it to Acquisitions where staff check a vendor's database to confirm pricing, availability and shipping information. They then send the order to the appropriate serials vendor. If the serial is an online product (most newly-ordered serials are online), Collections negotiates pricing and a license for the item with the publisher or vendor and the Electronic Resources Unit does the ordering. Serials are ordered on a standing order basis and renewed annually until either the publication ceases or the Library cancels.

Monographs are ordered either as individual items, recommended by a liaison librarian, or, increasingly, subjects and publishers are identified where the Library wants all items published. These decisions are based upon purchasing history and the items come as part of automatic plans. This speeds up delivery and means that users can access material quicker. E-books are also mostly ordered in a similar manner, in large bundles by subject or publisher though, like electronic serials, license and price negotiation is a big part of the process.

In 2007, approximately 35,000 monographs, 8,800 print serials, and 30,000 electronic serials orders maintained in the Library acquisition modules. Large shipments of books and serials are received on a daily basis and are unpacked, checked, received and paid.