Filling in the gaps: Historical DDA e-book project at University of Ottawa[1]

The current case study originated in 2005, when the University of Ottawa library was just beginning an off-site storage project. Readers who have been involved in such projects know that they often provoke intense debate with faculty and students about library collections - their meaning, usefulness, composition, quality, format, and location. In the current case study, two departments stood out in terms of how vocal they were regarding collections: History and Religious Studies. The DDA e-books project was, in a certain sense, a by-product of listening to community needs and supporting departments in achieving their library-related goals, which did not only start in 2005, but was certainly magnified since then. These goals were to have faculty well-supported with local collections and provide students with the materials required to be successful in their studies.

The main issues identified by the departments were:

1. Lack of historical monographs (mainly due to low funding in the 1980's and 1990's);

2. French language collection deficiencies (University of Ottawa is a French-English bilingual university);

3. Little consultation with faculty in terms of what was being collected;

4. Unbalanced collections (collections did not reflect either the strengths or the emphases of the departments' research or teaching).

Initially, these concerns were addressed through active collection development activities including manual selection of titles (especially in non-English languages) and through approval plans, which were established at the University of Ottawa in 2005-2006. After several years of expanding approval plans, faculty and student opinion slowly turned with respect to current collections; feedback in a 2011 Council

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of Ontario Universities survey[2] indicated a good level of satisfaction that nearly all relevant and current publications were being collected.

But unfortunately, gaps in historical collections persisted. Previous to the DDA e-books project these gaps would often be addressed by creating bibliographical lists (often based on the holdings of libraries that had notable collections) from which faculty members and the librarian would decide what to order. Creating such bibliographies is labor-intensive however, and had not necessarily resulted in greatly improved historical collections. Generally, the Acquisitions staff would be able to acquire about 25%-30% of these orders, but the rest would not be available. So the question remained: How would the library satisfy what was perceived by faculty and graduate students to be a significant need?

The idea for a DDA e-book plan developed over time. Electronic slips, which are often part of approval plans, indicated that many newly published e-books were in fact historical titles re-released in e-book format. Could a DDA e-book plan fill the gaps in the historical monographs collection? Were the historical e-book releases robust enough? While there was a small risk in attempting to customize a DDA E-book plan to these unusual needs, the possibility of achieving this longstanding goal was tempting. Furthermore, additional questions could be pursued, such as whether or not the current collection development policies matched what the University of Ottawa community would select and whether or not e-books were an acceptable format for research and teaching in these two subject areas. A final element of the project would be to address the concern of faculty members who had felt left behind when approval slips went from paper to electronic and professors were no longer included in the

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[2] The internal survey was not published but was related to the graduate program accreditation exercise for Master and PhD programs in Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, 2011.
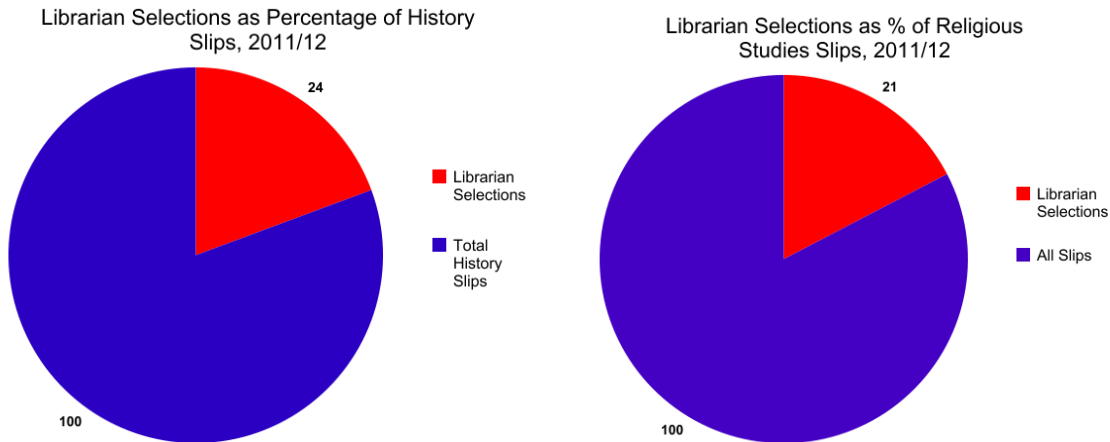
selection process as they had been when paper slips were circulated among faculty members prior to selection.

Once the subject librarian for History and Religious Studies and the Associate University Librarian (Collections) determined that a DDA e-books plan would be feasible, Cataloguing and Acquisitions staff loaded discovery records (provided by YBP which mediated the relationship between the University of Ottawa and the e-book vendor, ebrary) into the library catalogue. ebrary emailed weekly spreadsheets to those involved in the project containing information regarding e-book selections such as ISBN, title, trigger date, trigger event (view, print, copy or chapter download), purchase date, order number, type of access, price, publisher, year published, LC number, and so on for every title selected through the plan. These reports were valuable in terms of providing consistent, standardized feedback throughout the plan period. Staff knew how much of the budget was being spent ($10,000.00 was originally deposited into the plan account), what subject areas were being selected, and how many historical titles were being purchased week by week.

Over 15 months, the University of Ottawa community triggered 615 titles for purchase through the DDA e-book plan out of a total possible 5,982 titles loaded into the catalogue in the two subject areas. As the University of Ottawa is a large university with approximately 42,000 students, this number seemed rather small, so the author compared the number of purchases to other similar sized institutions that had experimented with DDA e-book plans (reviewed by William H. Walters in a 2012 study) to find that there was indeed a slightly lower than average number of titles purchased: approximately 41 titles per month were selected during the University of Ottawa trial while the comparable institutions in Walters' article purchased an average of 43 titles per month (Walters, 2012). In the University of Ottawa's case however, only two subject areas were included. It begs the question of how much might have been

selected if the DDA e-book plan had included all subject areas as the comparator groups from Walters' article presumably had, since they did not indicate otherwise. Imagining that historians tend to be monograph-oriented in their publishing and research habits (Cronon, 2012; Niessen & Roberts, 2000; Stone, 1982) it would be difficult to predict whether having a broader subject coverage would have increased the percentage of titles selected or not, given that scholars in non-humanities disciplines might not be as reliant on monographs as scholars in History and possibly, Religious Studies are. In a previous study by Hodges, Preston and Hamilton, selections in History represented only 4.2% of titles purchased in a DDA plan and Religious Studies wasn't reported at all (Hodges, Preston, & Hamilton, 2010). That study indicated that the highest number of purchases was in Health Sciences and Economics but it unfortunately cannot be generalized since the researchers did not report the full range of subjects that were made available to library users. In other words, it is impossible for students to trigger a purchase for a Religious Studies title if there are no Religious Studies titles to select from.

So out of a possible 5,982 records, the University of Ottawa community selected 615 titles, which represents a title acquisition figure of just over 10.3 %. How does that compare to what is normally selected by the librarian? Based on data provided by YBP for 2011/12 in both History and Religious Studies, the subject librarian selected at least 10% more titles than what patrons selected during the DDA e-book plan period, although it must be said that patrons only saw titles that were available in e-book format, whereas subject librarians receive slips for both electronic and print formats. However, the spread between what a subject librarian selects and what library patrons select is where many DDA plans aim to improve efficiency (reduce costs) and effectiveness (purchase items that the university community will definitely use).

Librarian Selections as Percentage of History
Slips, 2011/12

24

■ Librarian
Selections

■ Total
History
Slips

100

Librarian Selections as % of Religious
Studies Slips, 2011/12

21

■ Librarian
Selections

■ All Slips

100

Relevance of DDA selections

In addition to examining the overall selection habits of library users during the DDA e-book plan,

individual titles were assessed for various elements, the first being relevance of titles to the subject

areas. Much to the surprise of the subject librarian, only 497 out of 615 titles were actually classified as

history or Religious Studies, with nearly 20% of the purchases falling in outlying subject areas such as

political science, law, medicine, military strategy and international relations. Why is this? In reviewing

the approval plans, it became clear that both plans included related but very peripheral subjects in

addition to the main subject categories. In the traditional course of selection, this is appropriate because

a librarian will consciously make decisions regarding whether or not to purchase in these adjacent

subjects. But traditional approval plans do not anticipate selection by non-specialists and therefore do

not include safeguards against what can seem to be irrelevant material. A DDA-specific approval plan

might be a wise option when attempting to achieve narrow goals as this case study intended to. If a

widespread DDA plan across multiple subject areas is being designed however, this would not be as

much of a concern.

Titles by Subject

The number of titles selected for Religious Studies accounted for 40.4% of the 497 titles related to History and Religious Studies. This percentage is high compared to the many more faculty members, graduate and undergraduate students in History. The Religious Studies approval plan is also very small, representing only about 25% of the total number of slips received for History. Nonetheless, Religious Studies titles represented a significant portion of what was selected by the community.

Number of Titles Selected in Religious Studies by Broad Subject

Subject	Number of Titles Selected
Christianity (including theology, biblical Studies)	75
Judaism	36
Ancient / late antique (Judeo-Christian)	17
Islam	14
Buddhism	11
Sociology of religion	9
Medieval	8
Psychology of religion	6
Hinduism	3
Indigenous religions	2
Other (New Religious Movements, Interfaith dialogue, General religion)	20

These results, somewhat reassuringly, conform very closely to the current collection development policy. What they cannot do however, is provide an evaluation of subject coverage of ebrary's e-book offerings. Questions remain such as how many titles are actually available from ebrary in the lesser selected areas of Hinduism or Indigenous religions? In other words, would there have been more

selections made in these subjects had ebrary offered a greater number of e-books in them? This was an early indicator that an e-book DDA plan cannot be uniquely relied on for collection development.

Titles by Major Publisher

Publisher	Number of Titles Selected
ABC-Clio (almost 100% History)	70
Brill (~75% Religious Studies)	58
Palgrave-MacMillan	40
Continuum (almost 100% Religious Studies)	32
Greenwood (almost 100% History)	23
Routledge	22
Various University Presses	49

Titles by Smaller Publishers

Publisher	Number / Subject of Titles Selected
Pluto Press	10 (generally in History)
I.B. Tauris	8 (4 Religious Studies, 4 History)
Mohr Siebeck	8 (Religious Studies)
Zed	4 (History)
Jewish Publication Society	4 (2 Religious Studies, 2 History)

Unfortunately the representation of smaller or niche publishers in the e-book marketplace is not well-developed, therefore at the present time, e-book plans based on a major book vendor's stock would not be suitable for collection development in a large research university, especially in collection areas with PhD programs. An earlier study by Peter Just estimated that only 11% of academic titles were actually

available in e-book format in 2007 (Just, 2007). Even if this number has doubled, tripled or quadrupled since 2007, it still does not represent the full spectrum of academic publishing which is further indication that the e-book DDA plan as implemented at the University of Ottawa was not a good fit for the advanced needs of these two departments and could not really accomplish the goals of the project.

Purchase Triggers

In terms of the user behaviors that triggered purchases, 30 were triggered by printing, 64 by copying, 103 were triggered by chapter downloads, and 306 titles were triggered by viewing for an e-book for at least ten minutes. This compares and equates with a study released earlier in 2013 by Emily Chan and Susan Kendall which compared the triggers for purchase in a DDA e-book plan at San Jose State University. The period of the San Jose study was roughly the same as the project at the University of Ottawa. Chan and Kendall reported that in the call numbers B, C, D, E, and F (covering Religious Studies and History) that there were consistently more titles triggered by online reading than by downloading. (Chan & Kendall, 2013) This indicated that not only were the triggers appropriate (based on the overall number of titles purchased) but they were consistent with at least one other study from the same time period.

Did the plan accomplish its goals?

On the question of historical gaps and whether this project was successful at filling in missing monographs from previous decades, the data indicate that out of 497 titles (in Religious Studies and History, excluding outside subjects):

- 203 were published before 2005 (the oldest one in 1951), meaning that 40.8% of DDA titles were
  historical in the sense of having been published before 2005.

- Of these older titles, at least half were in the field of Religious Studies which is somewhat surprising because based on verbal and survey feedback, this had not been a major concern for Religious Studies in the same way that it had been for History. These numbers indicate that while Religious Studies affiliated researchers may not complain about lack of historical titles, there is a need to fill in historical gaps in the collections.

- Of the 203 titles published before 2005, 52 were published prior to 2000. Therefore, of the historical titles, roughly 25% were published prior to the year 2000.

- Of the 497 e-books selected in History and Religious Studies, 204 or 41% were published in the year 2005 or later.

Relationship to Interlibrary loan

Unfortunately the University of Ottawa library, which accesses interlibrary loan data from a consortium called OCUL (Ontario Consortium of University Libraries) does not have access to statistics from before 2012. It is therefore impossible to say whether the overall number of requests decreased during the DDA e-book plan compared with previous years, as might have been expected. There are figures available for the time period under study however, and these are reported below. Out of the titles that were requested by interlibrary loan:

- 34 out of 75 requests (45.3%) from the Department of Religious Studies (professors and graduate students only) were for non-English language material and could not have been covered by the titles available in the DDA e-book plan, since the DDA e-book pool was an English language record set. Religious Studies professors requested only eight books (10.6%) published before 1950, which also would not have affected the DDA plan since there were no DDA e-books available that predated 1950.

- 36 out of a total of 108 requests (33%) for interlibrary loans from the History department were for

    non-English titles. In terms of the dates of publication, the History department requested 35 pre-1950

    books. (32.4%).

Some DDA projects have been based on interlibrary loan requests so that any title requested by is automatically a trigger for purchase (see for example (Silva & Weible, 2010) and (Tyler, Melvin, Xu, Epp, & Kreps, 2011). In retrospect of this project, an ILL-based DDA plan might have been more appropriate to collect historical and non-English monographs, which made up a significant portion of interlibrary loan requests and which cannot at this time be replaced by a DDA e-book plan, though to be fair, that was not one of the plan's original goals. However, if one is seeking to improve accessibility to titles that faculty and students need, interlibrary loan statistics and requested titles should be factored into the plan.

DDA E-book Survey

When the DDA e-books plan was announced, response from faculty members was very positive. They liked the idea of playing a part in collection development and that students would be able to trigger purchases of e-books that they needed to complete assignments. In order to obtain some sense of faculty and graduate satisfaction with the project, a survey was administered which included 12 questions (see appendix for questions). Unfortunately due to delays in the ethics review and translation of the survey, it was not available until the middle of May 2013, which resulted in a very small sample. In total, 18 faculty and graduate students shared their points of view regarding the availability of historical e-books in the catalogue, the plan, and e-books. Out of the responses, 16 were in English and two were in French. 28% (5) were faculty members and 72% (13) were graduate students. Nine of the respondents were from Religious Studies and nine were from History.

In terms of whether patrons had noticed an increase in historical e-book titles in the library catalogue over the life of the project, 61% (11) said they had noticed more historical e-books while four indicated they had not, and three were not sure. With respect to whether or not historical gaps in the collection continue to be a problem, 55% (10) said that they still thought this problem persisted. Eight respondents said that there was no problem with historical titles. Of the text comments received on this question, some indicated that while historical titles were still missing, they had found that the situation had improved. One respondent mentioned that in her area of research, older print monographs just were not available and that e-books are the only way to have access to the older literature. A few respondents mentioned that they are heavy users of interlibrary loan and that their reliance on interlibrary loan had not changed during the life of this plan, so the local collection was no more helpful to them than it had been in the past.

In terms of acceptability and usefulness of e-books, 66% (12) reported that they thought e-books were useful but when the textual comments were analyzed, this was not resoundingly positive. The attitude was one of "If I can't have what I need in print, then I suppose an e-book will do." Several respondents mentioned that they were not comfortable reading a whole e-book, but that not having to physically go to the library, being able to access e-books at any time of day and the ability to search electronic texts were appreciated. A couple mentioned limitations with respect to copying, printing and downloading e-books as a barrier. A few mentioned that e-books were "better than nothing."

With respect to the balance between print and e-books in the current collection, 72% (13) respondents felt that there was an appropriate balance between the two formats. In terms of linguistic balance, only 8 respondents thought that it would be helpful to have a similar plan for French language e-book titles.

On the question of whether the respondents felt reassured that the titles were available in the library catalogue ready to be purchased upon the appropriate trigger, only 44% (8) respondents said that this was reassuring. 28% (5) specifically said it was not reassuring and another 28% (5) expressed no opinion. This question spoke to the issue of building confidence in the library - in helping library constituents to feel that the library is doing its utmost to meet their needs, so this result was disappointing.

Final Thoughts

While the DDA e-book plan did not manage to meet all of its goals, it was a worthwhile experiment for the following reasons:

- Through the survey, it was confirmed that faculty and graduate students are fairly satisfied with e-books now; there has been a lot of new content made available in this format and the community is beginning to appreciate the positive features of e-books.
- This experiment attempted to look at a DDA e-books plan with a critical eye: it did not focus on the typical and narrow goals of increasing circulation and decreasing investment in collections but rather had a goal to satisfy a need for historical collections, which is unusual for a DDA e-book plan. Going forward, an interlibrary loan-based DDA plan for both print and e-books would probably be more suitable for filling in historical, non-English language and specialized academic content, which would be more helpful to the research-intense community at the University of Ottawa.
- The Subject Librarian demonstrated a willingness to be open and accepting of the community in allowing them to help build library collections, even in this small way.
- Many mainstream academic titles which were not purchased at the time of publication were collected.
- In the Religious Studies area, the current collection policy and practice is very much in line with what the community selected. A future study of the History collective development policy is planned.

- There is, even within a DDA e-book plan, a significant need for academic librarians to play a strong role in the management of the plan. Deciding on how to design it, monitoring it, and adjusting it as necessary are key roles.

- DDA e-book plans are probably best suited to collect mainstream academic monographs as a supplement to an approval plan but cannot be relied on to satisfy the needs of advanced researchers, at least in the fields of Religious Studies and History.

- A final comment made by a colleague at the University of Ottawa was that now, other subject librarians are interested in and intent to design and execute their own DDA plans.

Appendix: Survey (English version)

1. Are you a Faculty Member or Graduate Student?

2. Are you affiliated with the department Religious Studies of History?

3. In your searches of the library catalogue over the last 12 months, have you noticed an increase in historical titles available in e-book format?

4. Faculty and graduate students have complained about historical gaps in the library collection. Thinking about your experiences using the library in the last 12 months, do you feel that these gaps continue to be a problem?

5. Follow up question: If you answered yes to the previous question, can you provide a brief explanation as to why you feel this way.

6. In your opinion, are e-books an acceptable format for books in your area of study or research?

7. Follow up question: Can you provide a brief explanation as to why you responded "yes" or "no" in the previous question.

8. In what circumstances are e-books especially useful or not useful?

9. Do you feel that the current balance between the library's print and e-book titles is acceptable?

10. Even if you did not notice that the library had many more historical and current e-book titles available, and even if the library does not yet own these titles, do you feel reassured that they are there and ready to be purchased as the need arises?

11. Would you like to see a similar project be available for French language e-book titles?

12. If you have any final comments about library e-books, please use this box.

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