Where's the Core? A New Approach to Assessing Journal Collections

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Abstract
What journals should the library have? Which journals do faculty want? How do librarians determine which are the "right" journals to have? Academic librarians are often called upon to serve disciplines in which they themselves have little expertise. That can sometimes lead librarians to doubt themselves in dealings with disciplinary faculty, particularly in matters of collection development. Though there are core lists created by disciplinary experts, construction of those lists is often time intensive and gradually lose relevance over time. Journal metrics are often looked to for guidance, but typically are narrowly focused with methodology that is opaque. Attendees will explore a new, tested methodology, that itself relies upon time tested tools of librarianship, to develop a core list journal titles for a discipline of their choosing. Further, they will develop the skills that will enable them to update their core list whenever circumstances demand.

Summary
The demand for authoritative lists of "important" journals is one that cuts across disciplines and shows no signs of abetting. Whether a member of the teaching faculty, and/or a member of an RTP committee, and/or a librarian there is a nearly insatiable desire for information-based, objective, lists of core journal titles. The biggest challenge is in the methodologies employed to construct such lists. Whether surveying disciplinary experts or examining bibliometric data, the process is often arduous, requiring far more time and attention than most people have to give to such an effort. Further, because of the time intensive nature of the work, once a list is constructed it is rarely updated. The presenters of this preconference have identified a methodology for constructing core lists, utilizing the existing tools of librarianship, that is both rigorous and scalable.

One of the flaws in many core lists is that the list of titles considered for inclusion is too narrow. Therefore, one of the goals of this new method is to identify the universe of titles to be considered. With that in mind there are multiple tools that are utilized. The first of these tools are the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH). Despite some inherent flaws (e.g. bias, slowness to adapt), the use of this widely adapted controlled vocabulary enables individual

librarians to search for journal titles identified as being *about* a particular topic or discipline. Similarly, this scalable method also utilizes the indexing and abstracting databases to identify journals that are important to a discipline, often multiple databases. Finally, because of its wide acceptance, core lists created as part of *Journal Citation Reports* are also incorporated into the early phase of the process

Results of this method can be seen in the Educational Psychology workbook. In this case, the results obtained using various tools are represented on different workbook pages. The final result, a tiered (as opposed to ranked) list, is one that captures the overlap (see "Core List" tab), with those titles indexed/listed by all the tools used constituting the essential titles, while those listed by all but one of the tools are still considered core titles to the discipline. Beyond that, the necessity of including any particular title in a collection is an individual decision for each librarian, depending upon the programs they serve.

Because the methodology articulated in the preconference is relatively new, it is recommended that, where possible, the results of this method be compared with a list built through disciplinary expertise, whatever methodology might have been used.

Because librarians are often called upon to serve departments and disciplines with which they are unfamiliar, they are often hesitant to utilize their judgment when considering which resources their library should have and which ones are less valuable. Hence, the strong desire for an "expert" list upon which they can rely. However, the tools of librarianship can contribute to such an assessment, and the expertise of librarians, can be used in creating reliable, objective lists of core materials. The methodology outlined during this session, while still in need of further testing, is a step in that direction.

Activities
During the session attendees were introduced to the methodology and engaged in hands-on activities that included:

Donut Ranking Exercise: In an effort to convey the elements of the process of creating a list of core journals using this methodology a card sorting exercise, developed by co-presenter Michelle DeMars, was employed to demonstrate the process in a simplified and visual way. For this activity, three separate batches of cards were created with each card containing an image of a variety of baked goods (see Appendix A). Each batch represented a different part of the process. The first batch signified the input of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (*LCSH*). For this group of cards, attendees were asked to use pretend subject headings to place the cards in order and remove those that did not fall within the 'donut' range. The next batch represented the expert input the process also considers. For this batch, the attendees were asked to rank the baked goods based on their expert knowledge as donut aficionados. The third and final batch represented the *Journal Citation report*'s Impact Factor part of the core journal process. Attendees were asked to rank the cards based on "taste factor" scores displayed on the cards. Once all three groups had ranked their cards, all of the attendees worked together to discover the frequency of the overlapping cards. A donut card that appeared in all three groups would be a tier one donut, a card that appeared in two groups would be a tier two donut and the cards that only appeared once were tier three. The activity served to provide

the attendees with some active learning and a visual representation that summarized the core journal process.
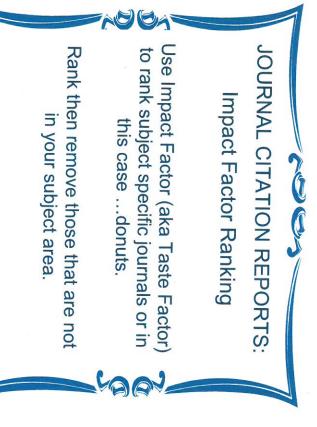
Subject searching of the Library of Congress public catalog (https://catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/searchAdvanced): Attendees performed guided searching to determine *LCSH* and titles assigned those headings cataloged by the Library of Congress.

Subject heading search of relevant database(s): Attendees performed guided searching of databases in an effort to identify journals publishing articles that had been assigned relevant subject terms.

Downloading and management of title records: The process of saving and managing the numerous records generated by the searching processes was described, and attendees had the opportunity to experience that on a small scale.

Appendix A: Donut Ranking
Exercise Instructions & Samples

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
SUBJECT HEADINGS

Use LCSH to determine subject
specific journals......Or donuts!

Remove those that don't belong

BG   Baked Goods

Breakfast Pastries

Donuts
Red
Orange
Yellow
Green
Blue
Purple

JOURNAL CITATION REPORTS:
Impact Factor Ranking

Use Impact Factor (aka Taste Factor)
to rank subject specific journals or in
this case …donuts.

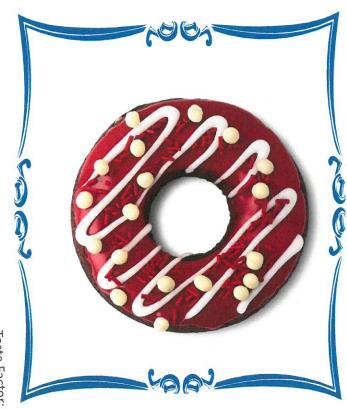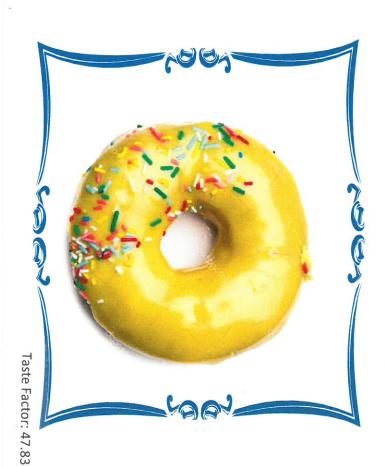Rank then remove those that are not
in your subject area.

EXPERT LIST:
You are the expert in your field.

Rank the baked goods using your
expert knowledge as a donut
aficionado.

Rank then remove those that are not
in your subject area.

Taste Factor: 72.40

Taste Factor: 47.83