



Research Article

Thank You for Your Suggestion! Analyzing Patron Purchase Requests at the University of Alberta Library

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Abstract

Objectives – To understand how many of the user recommendations for new library acquisitions come from high-volume requesters, whether requests are submitted for a person’s own use or on behalf of someone else, and to develop understanding of the reasons given for acquisition requests. Additionally, this work sought to understand approaches to “suggest a purchase” forms at comparator institutions. This understanding would support a review of the University of Alberta Library’s approach to soliciting patron purchase requests, including a review of the form used by patrons to submit these requests.

Methods – User recommendations for new library acquisitions at the University of Alberta are received through a “suggest a purchase” form. These form submissions populate a centralized

request database, and this database was used to create a dataset of requests for review. A total of 4,681 requests received between April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2024, for non-subscription materials were reviewed in detail.

Results – This analysis found that 17% of the requests were submitted by 8 individuals who submitted over 50 requests each, with a further 11% submitted by 15 individuals who submitted between 26-50 requests. While half of all requests were submitted by those who indicated that the item was for their own use, high-volume requesters were more likely than low-volume requesters to submit a request on behalf of someone else. The reason provided in about one third of the requests was categorized as “collection development”, meaning that the user suggested that the material would be beneficial to the collection but did not indicate that they themselves would use it. In reviewing “suggest a purchase” forms from comparator institutions, there was a lack of consensus around requested information or intended audience for this service.

Conclusion – As 28% of the requests received at the University of Alberta during this three-year timeframe came from 23 individuals, this work demonstrates that the library’s “suggest a purchase” program does not have broad engagement relative to the size of the library’s community. The wide variety of academic library approaches to submission forms suggests that there is not a clear purpose or approach to receiving these requests. Providing this service requires a significant investment in staff time, yet without a clear purpose and limited user engagement it is unlikely that this service is fulfilling its potential and may instead be detracting from institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. However, considering the large proportion of collection development requests, and the fact that high-volume requesters submit forms on behalf of others, this service could be explored as a means of community engagement and collection diversification. At the University of Alberta Library, this analysis supported the implementation of a program called “Broaden Our Bookshelf” as well as changes to the suggestion form to create a more welcoming user experience that would also enhance departmental understanding of user needs and future assessment of the service.

Introduction

Many academic libraries accept purchase suggestions from library users, typically by submitting a suggestion through a form located on the library’s website. While the visibility and promotion of these “suggest a purchase” forms vary considerably, enabling users to request materials acknowledges that there may be gaps in collection holdings, or in the discovery of collection holdings, that can be addressed by encouraging library users to ask for needed materials. The intended audience for this service, and the information requested, varies across institutions. Some academic libraries limit requests to current faculty and graduate students, while others accept suggestions from anyone affiliated with the university including undergraduate students or staff. There is also variability in what recommendations are accepted as some institutions only permit suggestions for items that would enhance research activities, while others enable patrons to ask for materials that would support their learning such as supplemental course materials for undergraduate students.

This service is intended to ensure that limited acquisitions budgets are spent wisely on needed materials (Ramsey, 2023), and also provides a way for users to participate in collection development. In theory, participatory collection development could provide users the opportunity to suggest diverse and

underrepresented materials; however, the literature that explores this service and its link to diversity initiatives and user engagement, while limited, suggests that this opportunity is unlikely to be realized (Blume, 2019; Morales et al., 2014). As the University of Alberta Library works towards diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts - particularly within the Collection Strategies Unit - an assessment of engagement with this service and an analysis of the information received through the form was completed.

Literature Review

User involvement in academic library collection development has increased, most notably through the introduction of demand-driven acquisition (DDA) methods (sometimes referred to as patron-driven acquisition). In this method of acquisition, agreements have been made with vendors to include records in the library's catalogue for materials – typically electronic books (ebooks), but sometimes print (Tench, 2019) - that the library does not yet own, but can be purchased and made available to users when access is requested. Generally, DDA occurs seamlessly and without the user being aware that the library does not own the material. Some libraries have also implemented interlibrary loan (ILL) DDA plans, choosing to purchase some materials requested through ILL instead of borrowing (Anderson et al., 2002; Zopfi-Jordan, 2008).

Contrastingly, the acquisition process for the requests submitted through suggest a purchase forms are more visible to users and reflect an intentional purchase request. Users must seek out a suggestion form, choose to fill it out, and then submit the request to the library (rather than simply click a catalogue link). These submissions also reflect a wider breadth of requests as the form enables users to ask for materials without being limited to certain formats or publishing sources - in other words, without being limited by the material's inclusion in the pool of requestable materials.

Regardless of the implementation, the motivation behind any DDA plan or purchases based on user requests is one of “just in time” rather than “just in case” acquisition (Blume, 2019) by engaging with users as part of the acquisitions process. Assessment of traditional librarian-selected materials acquisition - the “just in case” acquisition - suggests that a large portion of purchased items never circulate and that a small part of the collection represents a large portion of the circulation (Ramsey, 2023). While circulation does not adequately capture in-house use of library materials, as library budgets are finite there is both the concern and the motivation to purchase materials that patrons want and to provide these resources as needed and “just in time”. Both DDA and patron suggestion forms mitigate concerns over collection use by inviting user participation in collection development activities, with the intention of increasing the portion of the collection used. Additionally, users report a high level of satisfaction with suggest a purchase services, and providing this service can create a favourable impression of the library (Reynolds et al., 2010).

Assessment of acquisitions purchased as a result of patron input through its impact on circulation and citation generation has shown it to be an effective and positive method of acquisition (Tyler & Boudreau, 2024; Tyler et al., 2019), but DDA is not without criticism. Concerns have been raised whether “super users” - meaning those who submit significantly more requests than those of the average user - absorb large portions of the budget allocated to DDA (Blume, 2019), or whether such users could manipulate these programs to build personal collections through the library's budget (Tyler et al., 2014). There is also the concern whether this type of program could contribute to collection imbalance (Price & McDonald, 2009) as the impact of “super users” in specific subject areas may result in acquisitions imbalance, meaning that the acquisitions budget is then used for high request subject areas, which may be different from areas of high use.

Given the potential for “super users” and the resulting imbalance in acquisitions purchased as a result of patron input, as well as its related impact on the balance of staff time across subject areas and user groups within the Library community, there is a need to consider whether soliciting suggestions supports or hinders diversity efforts in academic libraries (Blume, 2019; Costello, 2017). As Morales et al. write, acquisition decisions “have profound impacts on who and what is represented in the scholarly and cultural record” (p. 445, 2014). While it is the responsibility of collections librarians to ensure diverse and inclusive collections (Blume, 2019), it has also been suggested that these forms enable users to recommend resources from diverse or less-prominent publishers and creators. However, these forms require users to both locate the form and identify a specific item or material that they feel is lacking from the library collection; in other words, users are expected to independently find and assess what they need before submitting a suggestion, and to feel comfortable asking the library to make purchases on their behalf. As concerns about a lack of diversity in the publishing industry and in librarianship itself have already been acknowledged (Ramsey, 2023), the expectation that library users will be able to find and assess diverse materials, and therefore use this service to work towards broadening and diversifying academic library collections, is hopeful at best.

Assessment of requests submitted at the University of Colorado Boulder Library through their suggest a purchase program indicated that few users make use of this service, yet the information is valuable to collection development activities and could be more helpful if usage increased (Ibacache, 2020). Also, the abundance of suggest a purchase services at academic libraries implies that collections librarians desire to engage with the university community in collection development activities to provide materials that their users both want and need. However, as this service is often implemented as a passive service rather than a proactive way of engaging the library community, its ability to provide insight into the needs of the user community is limited. This passive way of soliciting user engagement also means that this service best supports users who are either already engaged with the library, who have an awareness of this program, who are willing and able to seek out these forms and submit requests, and those who feel comfortable asking the library to purchase materials (particularly, materials which meet their own individual information needs).

This analysis is enhanced as the user requests submitted through this service are format-agnostic; they are not limited by the library’s ability to purchase or the user’s catalogue discovery skills. This is an important distinction from the current literature, which has focused on ebook DDA plans that create limited availability due to vendor and library agreements. This distinction allows us the opportunity to examine the characteristics of both the requests received by an academic library and the requesters submitting them, to further explore whether this program could be used to support ongoing collection diversification efforts, and to develop broader understanding of what users both want and need. By examining these characteristics and the reasons for the requests, a deeper understanding of the impact of the program and the level of user engagement (or lack thereof) can be identified. As all suggestions are welcome, challenges in the publishing industry which limit the diversity of ebook DDA plans could, theoretically, be mitigated through this program.

Institutional Context

The University of Alberta is a large, research-intensive university located in Edmonton, Alberta with over 40,000 graduate and undergraduate students across a wide spectrum and depth of subject areas including engineering, medical and education programs, and a diverse Faculty of Arts. The University has six libraries for which new materials are purchased (four at the main North Campus, one at Campus Saint-Jean, and one at Augustana Campus in Camrose, Alberta), and one location which serves as a storage

facility for older or low circulation materials as well as some donations. The four North Campus libraries generally hold subject-specific materials (Cameron, Science and Engineering Library; Geoffrey and Robin Sperber, Health Sciences Library; Rutherford, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education Library; and Weir, Law Library). The Augustana Campus Library and Bibliothèque Saint-Jean have material from all subject areas yet reflect the unique needs of their campus, such as a focus on French-language materials at Bibliothèque Saint-Jean. The University employs over 11,000 people (University of Alberta, 2025), and the library's employees typically include approximately 10 individuals in the Collection Strategies Unit as well as 25 faculty engagement librarians.

At the University of Alberta, all acquisitions requests are sent to a centralized Collection Strategies Unit (CSU). This centralized unit has been in place since 2016, and all requests that align with the collection mandate - which are the majority of the requests - are filled if it is possible to do so. However, relative to the total collections budget of \$20.6 million CAD (2023-2024 budget year), the amount spent on acquisitions purchased through the library's suggest a purchase program is small. All requests are added to a database that includes purchase requests received directly from staff, students, alumni, and faculty, building a comprehensive data source for all patron purchase requests received at the institution. This contrasts with many academic libraries, where requests for library acquisitions can also be directed to subject-specific liaison librarians who manage small collections budgets that they can use to fulfill these requests.

Receiving Suggestions

The purchase requests examined in this analysis were submitted through one of two forms: one for the general University population and one specific to library staff. These forms have largely remained consistent since their inception and include fields for information about the item, e.g. author, title, publication year, and publisher, as well as the reason for the request. The public-facing form for the general University population also asks for the requester's college or faculty, which is used to determine the home location for the requested item, while the staff form specifically asks for the desired location for the requested item. All requests, regardless of which form was used for submission, are tracked within a central database, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of these requests.

The public-facing form requires users to login before requesting an item as requests are limited to active staff, students, alumni, and faculty. While this form is linked on the library's website under Library Services, the link is not provided on the homepage, which may have reduced its visibility. Many users become aware of this form via interactions with the library's staff, though our perception is that University-wide awareness of this service is low.

After this analysis was completed, the form specific to library staff was removed as part of a general streamlining of acquisitions procedures. Previously, the staff form was available on the library's staff intranet, and all library staff were made aware of this form when they were hired as part of their orientation. Staff could submit requests for materials for their own use or for any perceived gaps they noticed as part of their regular work. Staff could also submit requests on behalf of library patrons, which often results from patron interactions or via other internal library processes. Since CSU's creation in 2016, the staff suggestion form was the main way that subject librarians - known at the institution as faculty engagement librarians - submit acquisition requests. While this staff-specific form has been removed, staff are still encouraged to submit purchase suggestions to CSU through the remaining form.

Aims

Concerns about “super users” and the resulting potential for imbalance (Ibacache, 2020; Blume, 2019) prompted a review of the suggest a purchase service at the University of Alberta. As in Ibacache (2020), the phenomenon of high-volume requesters has been noted, but not quantified. Also, the low number of requesters compared to the size of the university community, and the resulting likelihood of an uneven distribution of requests across subject areas, prompted a desire to further assess the impact of this service in light of the library’s move towards developing diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and the Collection Strategies Unit’s development of departmental goals in support of library-wide strategic initiatives. Anticipating changes to the University of Alberta’s suggestion submission form that would come out of this analysis, the implementation of this service at other academic libraries was also explored.

Specifically, this work sought to address the following questions:

1. What portion of the requests are submitted by high-volume requesters?
2. Do users submit requests for their own use, or on behalf of someone else?
3. Why do users submit purchase requests?
4. What can we learn from the implementation of similar services at other academic libraries?

Environmental Scan

One of the stated aims of this project was to learn from the implementation of similar services at other institutions, particularly as the existing literature does not discuss how best to implement this service or what information to request when soliciting user purchase suggestions. While differences in implementation are expected due to differences in collection development policies as well as the specific contexts and constraints of each institution, exploring implementation at comparator institutions could provide ideas for modifications to the form at the University of Alberta as well as develop a more nuanced understanding about the purpose of this service.

This environmental scan focused on all graduate degree granting institutions that were full members of COPPUL (Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries), as determined by their inclusion on the COPPUL website in July 2024. This cohort of 18 university libraries was chosen as a comparative peer group as they reflect similar contexts as at the University of Alberta. For this review, the University of Alberta Library is included as one of the 18 libraries examined.

Of the 18 institutions, five did not have a purchase request form available, and only two of these five indicated that requests should or could be submitted through subject liaison librarians. Of the remaining 13, four provided access to the suggestion form on the library’s homepage, two were not linked on the homepage but were easy to find, and seven were found by searching the library’s website or frequently asked questions. Two forms required a requester to sign in before accessing the form, and of the 12 forms that were available for review, only five directly asked questions that related to the purpose or rationale behind the request. While some others mentioned an evaluation of the request by subject liaison librarians or included form fields such as “notes” or “comments,” they did not expressly ask why the material was being requested. All but one of the 13 forms were open to suggestions from faculty, while the one remaining form stated that faculty requests were to go directly to liaison librarians. Eleven forms were open to students, ten to staff, and six listed additional categories such as alumni, postdoctoral fellows, or other.

Methods

User Requests

This analysis focused on the characteristics of patron purchase requests received at the University of Alberta Library for non-subscription collection items such as books, DVDs, sheet music, and perpetual license ebooks. Specifically, this analysis sought to understand requester characteristics and behaviour including the number of unique requesters, the purpose for requests, whether requests were submitted by the intended recipient or for someone else, as well as the distribution of requests.

As requests are received by the Collection Strategies Unit, a request-tracking database is auto-populated with the information contained in the form. This comprehensive dataset includes requests that would not be considered true patron purchase requests such as replacements for lost or damaged items or for subscription-based resources such as journal or database subscriptions; these requests were removed from the dataset prior to analysis. Additionally, as the library's Textbook Initiative program seeks to make available course materials through analysis of the Bookstore's adopted title list - rather than through requests received directly from instructors - any records relating to the Textbook Initiative program were also removed from the dataset. Further review of the dataset revealed some requests that had resulted from internal CSU department workflows that were not true user requests, and these requests were also removed from the dataset.

Data was available from 2015 onwards. However, COVID-19 had a significant impact on library and university-wide operations including periods where access to print library resources, and the library's ability to acquire and process print library resources, was significantly reduced. Acknowledging that this, along with moves between in-person and online course delivery, may have significantly impacted the volume of requests received, we first analyzed the timestamps of requests. As this analysis was intended to inform changes to our current process, we sought to determine whether the pre-pandemic distribution and volume of requests received was similar to more recent experience as this would impact our decision to include or exclude these requests from our dataset. This analysis showed that requests received pre-2020 had considerable variability in seasonality, with noticeable peaks in September, November, and January, coinciding with busy academic periods in the fall and winter terms. While pre-2020 years were somewhat similar, the 2020-2021 academic year - which was the only year held fully online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and which had limited in-person library services - revealed significantly different behaviour while still maintaining an initial peak at the start of each of the fall and winter terms. The graph below in Figure 1 visualizes the year-over-year monthly counts of requests received.

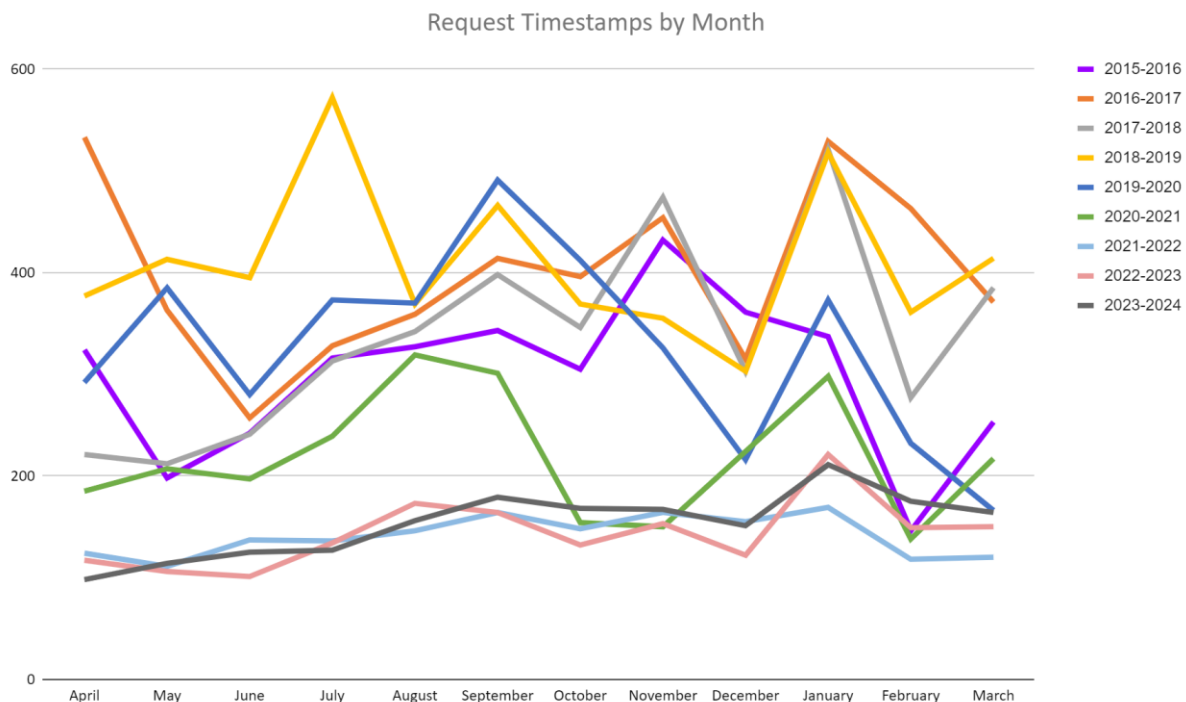


Figure 1
Count of request timestamps by month and year.

There was a greater consistency in request distribution during the three academic years following 2020-2021. As such, we further limited the dataset to these three years, spanning 2021-2024. While the start of each of the fall and winter terms was correlated with an increase in the number of requests received, the month-to-month variance was significantly reduced, as was the overall number of requests received. This timeframe reflects three fiscal years, which runs from April to March, as well as ensures that the busiest part of the academic year for requests - fall and winter terms - can be analyzed together.

After removing out-of-scope records from the dataset as described above, there remained 4,681 requests. For each of these requests, the information received was reviewed in full, including whether the requester had asked to be notified about the outcome of the request, the rationale for purchase, any associated course information, as well as additional notes and documentation provided by CSU staff as part of their review of the request. Each individual requester was assigned a unique identifier, and based on the reviewed information, each request was coded as either submitting a request for themselves or on behalf of someone else and a generalized rationale as described below.

Reasons for Purchase Suggestions

After reviewing the information provided by requesters for broad themes, all requests were coded with one of the following reasons behind the request. As some requests could fit into multiple categories (such as an instructor who indicated that the material would be both for course materials and for their own research), requests were coded following the hierarchy below:

- Course Materials: used when the rationale, course reserve, or course name fields indicated that the material would be used as required or supplemental course materials for a specific course.
- For own work: used when the reason given indicated that the material requested would be used for an individual's own work including research, teaching support (such as course development, potential course materials, etc.), candidacy exam materials, performance pieces, materials that had been requested to support paper or thesis composition, requests that were submitted by ILL and did not indicate course materials, and so on. This coding was used regardless of whether the request was submitted "for own use" or "on behalf of someone else".
- Collection Development - non-Collection Strategies Unit (CSU): used when the rationale did not indicate personal or course use but did indicate that the requester felt the material would be beneficial to the Library or to the University of Alberta community. This category included materials requested because they were written by University-affiliated authors, as well as materials that patrons suggested would fill perceived gaps in the collection.
- Not specified: used when the request did not meet any of the above criteria. This included rationale fields which contained only a book description or book review, or otherwise did not provide enough information to determine the reason for the user's suggestion.

Results

Requester Information

All requests were coded as either "for own use", "on behalf of someone else", or "other." "For own use" was used when the requester intended to use it for their own work or as part of course materials for a course they taught, while "on behalf of someone else" was used if it was clear that the request was submitted for someone else's work. This information was sometimes noted in the rationale or was implied by comparing the notify versus submitter email addresses. "Other" was used if it was unclear who the request was for, or if it was clearly indicated as a collection development request (meaning that the user felt the library collection should include it) rather than for immediate personal or course materials use.

Of the 4,681 requests analyzed, shown in Figure 2, 48% (n=2,234) were submitted by the requester for materials intended for their own use. A further 23% (n=1,064) were clearly indicated as requests submitted on behalf of someone else, while 29% (n=1,383) had no clear indication of the relationship between the requester and the intended user.

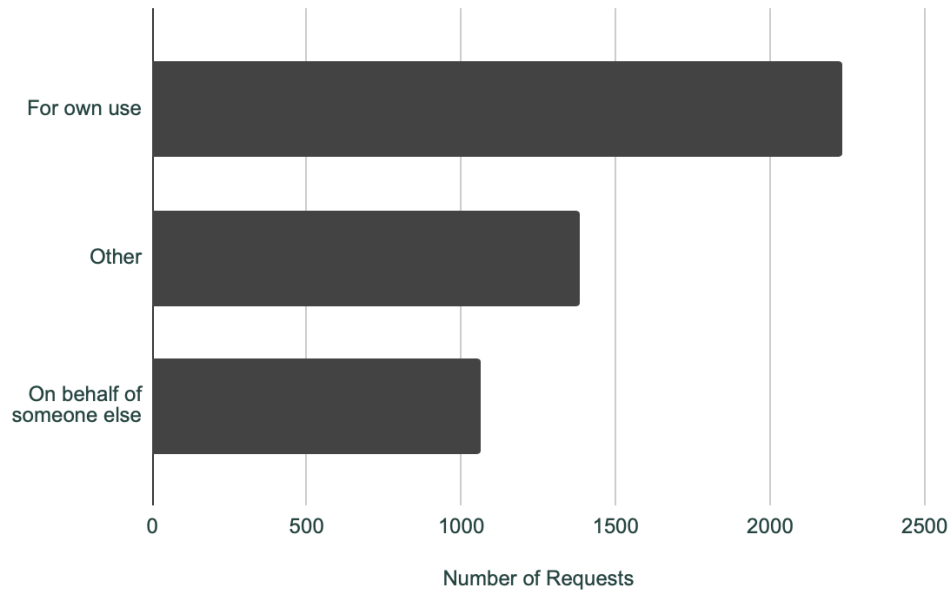


Figure 2
Requester information.

Requester Distribution

Over the three-year period analyzed, requests were received from 1,054 unique requesters including students, faculty, individual staff requests (including librarians), and requests from library staff as part of departmental workflows outside of the collections department. Of these unique requesters, 911 submitted five or less requests, with 583 requesters submitting only one request over the entire three-year period.

The 911 requesters who submitted five or less requests represented 32% (n=1,497) of the 4,681 requests (Figure 3). Workflows from four non-CSU library departments which generated patron purchase suggestions represented another 14% (n=646). These internal library workflows include, for example, InterLibrary Loan requests that resulted in a purchase by CSU, rather than the ILL requests being completed. Additionally, 115 requesters who submitted 65-25 requests represented 26% (n=1,197), and 15 requesters who submitted 26-50 requests represented another 11% (n=525). The remaining 17% (n=816) of requests were submitted by 8 individual requesters.

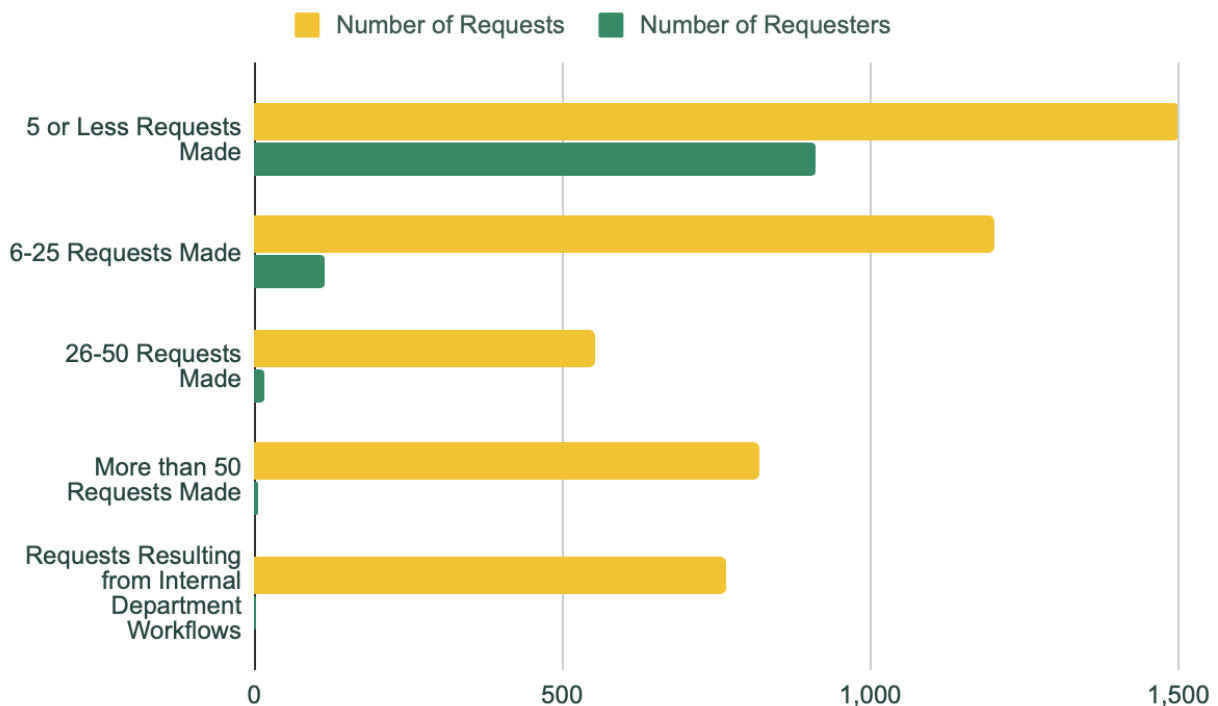


Figure 3
Frequency of requests.

In analyzing the relationship between the frequency of requests and the submitter, 24% (n=316) of the 1,341 requests submitted by high-volume requesting individuals - meaning those who submitted 26 or more requests during this timeframe - were submitted on behalf of someone else, while only 2% (n=37) of the 1,497 individuals who submitted less than 5 requests were submitted on behalf of someone else. While not all high-volume requesters are librarians, these submissions on behalf of someone else do include many coming from librarians resulting from their approach to user consultations and faculty engagement.

Rationale for Purchase

Of the 4,681 requests analyzed, 35% (n=1,654) were for course materials, 34% (n=1,607) were requested for an individual's own work, 24% (n=1,105) were suggested for collection development, and the remaining 7% (n=315) did not have a clear rationale for purchase, despite the form indicating that this information was required as part of the request submission (Figure 4). Overall, of the requests submitted for own work or for course materials, 68% (n=2,217) were submitted by the individuals themselves, not on behalf of someone else.

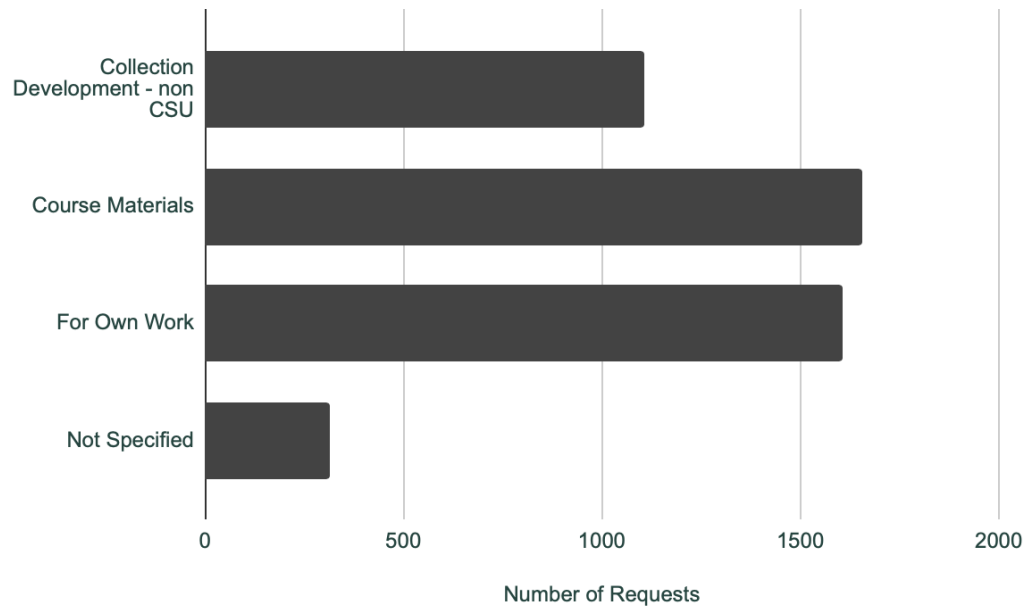


Figure 4
Number of requests received by rationale.

Further analysis of the rationale in relation to the requester's frequency of submissions revealed that, of the 1,341 requests made by the 23 individuals who submitted 26 or more requests, 39% (n=522) were for their own work, 29% (n=386) were non-CSU collection development, 27% (n=368) were for course materials, and for the remaining 5% (n=65), the rationale was not specified. Similarly, of the 1,497 requests submitted by those who placed 5 or less requests over the three-year period, 32% (n=480) were for their own work, 31% (n=469) were for course materials, and 28% (n=423) were collection development suggestions. Additionally, low-volume requesters were much more likely to submit a request for their own use, with 96% (n=912) of the 949 requests for course materials and materials for own work submitted by the requester themselves.

Discussion

This analysis demonstrates that concerns over the rate of user participation and the disproportionate impact of super users (Ibacache, 2020; Blume, 2019) for suggest a purchase services is justified. While the 28% of suggestions submitted by 23 individuals over the three-year period includes requests submitted by proxy, this low number of requesters demonstrates that this program does not have a breadth or diversity of participation across the university community. While it should be acknowledged that collection needs vary significantly between subject areas (particularly for undergraduates) and that some subject areas may be less likely to submit requests due to higher levels of satisfaction with the existing collection, this low number of individuals means that this uneven participation exists even after accounting for uneven user needs.

Interestingly, requests from low-volume requesters were nearly always requests for materials for their own use, while a quarter of high-volume requesters submitted suggestions on behalf of someone else. While not all high-volume requesters are library staff, this is reflective of the practice of some librarians who submit requests on behalf of others as part of their consultations or engagement work with faculty or

students. Given the low number of super requesters compared to the number of faculty engagement librarians and recognizing that not all super requesters are library staff, this finding also implies that the phenomenon of super users exists among both librarians and library users and that not all librarians engage with users by submitting requests on their behalf.

This analysis also demonstrates that the distribution of the reasons for the requests are similar for both low and high-volume requests, as in either case nearly two-thirds of requests were received for own work or course materials, and nearly one third for collection development. This finding demonstrates that, while underused, this is a program which currently provides a way for collection development staff to support engaged library users within the community and that some super requesters are actively engaged with library users in collection development activities, as evidenced by the high rate of requests submitted by super requesters on behalf of others. As well, both high and low volume requesters similarly submit collection development requests, suggesting that both high and low volume requesters are motivated to participate in collection development. And as Ibacache (2020) suggested, the information collected through this service could be a useful indicator of collection needs if participation increased.

While the acquisitions expenditures for this program is low at the University of Alberta relative to the total collections budget, providing this service requires the approximate equivalent of one full-time staff role within the unit as well as additional staff hours across other units for cataloging, processing holds, and shelving these acquisitions. And as many libraries across academia - the University of Alberta included - are also under increased budgetary pressures due to both finite or reduced collections budgets and rapidly rising ebook costs (Buck & Hills, 2017), as well as a need to demonstrate and quantify their positive impact on their respective institutions, assessment of these services must also be established to understand the impact that these services have on their user communities. As the presence of super users indicates, this service may be contributing to imbalances in the use of staff time, and as a result a significant amount of staff time may be spent supporting a very small number of users rather than supporting the community more broadly. This finding is particularly concerning as academic libraries become increasingly aware of the need to diversify collections and to support diverse users (Morales et al., 2014), all within this context of limited resources under increasing pressure. If this staff resource-intensive program supports a small number of super users rather than diversity and inclusion strategies, underrepresented voices, or the community more broadly, it should be re-examined to determine how to best align the program with the library - and the institution's - strategic goals and priorities.

Investigation into suggest a purchase forms at Canadian academic libraries indicates that there is a wide variety in use, with the only clear consensus being that requests from faculty are largely encouraged. While this may be an indicator of differences between collection development approaches and policies even among a narrowed group of graduate degree-granting Canadian institutions, it also indicates that there is a lack of accepted best practice around soliciting acquisition suggestions from the university community. Additionally, while such programs have been broadly implemented as demonstrated by the high portion of the reviewed libraries that have suggestion forms available, the differences in intended users and accessibility of the forms - as well as the differences in information sought as part of the request - show that there is no clear consensus as to the intended purpose of these programs beyond providing a service to the library community. In particular, the lack of forms that ask why users are requesting these materials shows that many libraries have not implemented this service in ways that enable them to develop deeper understanding of user needs beyond a subject-level analysis of received requests.

The difficulty of finding and accessing the associated forms at many of the comparator institutions also implies that such services are not currently viewed as a way to actively engage users in collection

development. This is in contrast with active engagement with the library community in other areas of library services such as reference services, library instruction, and so on, all of which recognize the community's need to access, explore, and understand the library collection. With only a third of the reviewed websites having forms either linked on the homepage or easily findable, there cannot be an expectation that users are engaged in collection development activities in significant ways through these services. Yet if users are not actively engaged in collection development activities, then the insights provided to collections librarians by such programs - what users want and need, as well as deepening understanding of what areas, publishers, and creators are missing from the collection - is lost. Furthermore, limiting requesters according to their status at the institution rather than broadly accepting requests and evaluating according to the collection policy may have the unintended consequence of suggesting which users the library considers the "most" important. This approach could also undermine the success of the program as a method of soliciting diverse suggestions; if the form implies some users or requests are more welcome than others, it may further hinder a user's motivation to provide recommendations for materials that they do not already see reflected through large academic publishers or through the existing collection.

Moving towards active rather than passive engagement with users through the suggest a purchase service could not only increase the insights gained by collections staff through this program, but also enhance the service's ability to support underrepresented or hesitant users. By actively seeking input from a diverse user group - rather than relying on highly engaged super requesters - this service could become an effective tool to gauge shifts in library user collection needs as well as support the goal of using this service to identify materials and publishers from non-traditional or diverse sources. To apply the understanding developed through this work and inspired by efforts elsewhere such as at the University of Virginia (Flanigan, 2018), the University of Alberta is developing an event called "Broaden Our Bookshelf" to solicit diverse acquisitions suggestions and has promoted this idea through modifications to the existing suggestion form. Programs such as these serve the dual purpose of fostering awareness of the service while also reframing suggestion forms from a passive service to active user engagement and can include the deliberate co-creation of lists of potential suggestions for diverse acquisitions. This approach not only creates an avenue for outreach to the user community through library collections with the goal of diversifying acquisitions, but also seeks to mitigate the barriers experienced by users who must traditionally assess and find materials on their own before submitting a suggestion. While the "Broaden Our Bookshelf" event is still in the planning stages, it will involve inviting students to a session in which they will be asked to fill out the form to suggest titles or authors that promote diverse and underrepresented voices. During this event, students will be guided through the process of both checking the catalogue and submitting the form, allowing for real-time user engagement and feedback regarding the suggestion form and process. This idea has been promoted through the form by the addition of a "Broaden Our Bookshelf" option to the reason for purchase drop-down menu, and a corresponding website and promotion campaign is in development.

Additional recent amendments to the form resulting from this analysis include adding the option for users to provide their preferred name rather than use the name associated with their university status, adjusting the form to be more inclusive of non-faculty requesters such as central university staff, and modifying how information about the reason for the request is collected. These modifications include a drop-down menu for the main reason for the request (for example, "needed for my research") as well as an open text field for users to be able to provide more context around their request. Previously, some requesters used the previous open-text "rationale" field analyzed in this work to either attempt to justify their request or to provide unnecessary, and at times unhelpful or even harmful, commentary. Therefore, this change is intended to not only be more invitational and welcoming to users, but also to support

future assessment of user needs and collections staff as these requests are reviewed and processed. The Appendix includes a chart that details the changes that were made to the form such as what fields were kept from either the public or staff forms and what fields were added to the form.

Limitations

This analysis was completed using data from a single institutional context and reflects the local situation and characteristics of this institution. As more work and assessment in this area is completed, greater understanding of generalized patron purchase request behaviours could be created.

Additionally, this analysis focused on super requesters as identified through their act of submitting a form. There may also be “super recipients” who place requests through one or more individuals other than themselves, or in addition to their own form submissions, which could not be determined from the information available to us. Similarly, some of the requests coded as “collection development” or “other” are likely the result of inadequate information provided rather than a lack of rationale and may have been intended for an individual’s own work or as part of course materials.

Conclusion

Analysis of this comprehensive dataset of acquisition requests submitted by users and staff at the University of Alberta Library confirmed that the number of participants is low relative to the size of the university community, with a significant proportion of the submissions coming from a very small number of individuals. Furthermore, this analysis supports concerns raised within the literature that such programs do not support a broad spectrum of library users, and as found elsewhere (Ibacache, 2020), may instead be used primarily by a small group of super users.

While this program represents a small portion of the materials acquisitions budget at the library, significant staff time is expended to support this small number of library users. While further work is needed and ongoing to better understand how these super users have impacted the balance of subject-level acquisitions through this service, the low number of participants demonstrates that this service does not currently provide broad or diverse community engagement with users in collection development and cannot, therefore, adequately support an understanding of user needs. Additionally, the difficulty in finding the appropriate suggestion form at many institutions, their limiting of who can access this service, and their lack of asking why users are submitting requests means that these services are not currently set up to develop understanding of community-wide user needs.

However, the large volume of collection development requests demonstrates the library community’s desire to contribute to collection development, presenting an opportunity to meaningfully engage with the library community to work towards collection diversification and inclusion goals. Moving towards more active solicitation of suggestions could, however, be a way to support the broadening and diversification of library collections as suggestion forms can be format and publisher-agnostic - unlike traditional DDA ebook acquisition plans. Just as academic libraries actively engage with their users through other collection-related services such as reference and instructional services, the suggest a purchase service may also provide a way to meaningfully engage and connect with library users so that collections staff can develop a deeper understanding of user wants and needs.

Author Contributions

Melissa Ramsey: Conceptualization (equal), Data curation (lead), Formal analysis (lead), Methodology (equal), Project administration (equal), Visualization (lead), Writing – original draft (lead), Writing – review & editing (lead) **Sarah Chomyc:** Conceptualization (equal), Data curation (supporting), Formal analysis (supporting), Methodology (equal), Project administration (equal), Visualization (supporting), Writing – original draft (supporting), Writing – review & editing (supporting)

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Appendix

Changes to the Suggest a Purchase Form Used at University of Alberta Library

Field Name	Modifications (if any)
*Your Name	This field is auto-populated based on the submitter's campus ID.
Preferred Name	This open-text field was added to make the process more inclusive by encouraging patrons to tell us how they would like to be addressed.
Email Address	No change
Author	No change
Title	No change
Volume/Edition	No change
Year Published	No change
Publisher	This field was removed to reduce the amount of information patrons need to provide.
ISBN/ISSN	No change
Is this item for	No change

Field Name	Modifications (if any)
Course Materials? Yes/No	
Course Name	No change
Course Number	No change
Number of students in class	This field was removed since the number provided was often inaccurate.
Rationale for purchase	This field was renamed to “Main Reason for Request” to sound more inviting. While this field was previously open text, it is now a drop-down menu so patrons can select the reason that fits best for them and to support future analysis.
College or Faculty	This was changed to a drop-down menu and a “Not Applicable” field was added for patrons who do not belong to any of the listed colleges
Your Campus Affiliation	This field was added to help CSU staff better understand who is requesting the item, which will be helpful for future analysis. This field is presented as a list from which requesters can choose a single option (e.g. student, library staff, etc.)
Notification	While the purpose is the same, this field was modified slightly to reflect streamlining the process from two forms to one.
*Location Code & Speed Code	These fields were removed as they were no longer used.
*Link to more information (if applicable)	No change
*Is the item an added copy?	This field was removed as this information is determined by CSU staff.
*Is the item RUSH?	This field was removed because patrons can note if a request is RUSH in the “Anything Else” field.
Anything Else?	This field was added for patrons to note any additional details about the request.

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates a field which previously existed in only one of the two forms. Text in bold indicates a required field in the updated form. Please note that some fields had slightly different names on each of the previous two forms, but as their intention was the same they have been listed in a single row in this table with a representative name.