
No room at the inn: Media collections and university libraries

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How are non-print materials managed in your library?

University libraries and non-print media collections. Often they're separate. Separate facilities, separate staffs, separate budgets, separate missions. Though an academic library collection almost always includes microforms, and may even extend to spoken or music material on record or audiocassette, other forms of audio and visual media are relatively rare. A 1985 survey of twenty-four libraries in the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems and nineteen institutions designated as CSU "comparison" schools found that non-print media were not collected by 28–70%, depending upon medium; visual media were particularly underrepresented. As shown in the accompanying table, most of these libraries have no 16mm films, and substantial numbers also reported not including videocassettes or discs, records, or audiocassettes in their collections.

These findings are surprising, particularly when one considers that non-print materials have long been included in other kinds of libraries. In elementary and secondary schools, and in community colleges, the media center often is not just another part of the library; it is the library. Why are conditions so different at four-year and research level institutions? Why do so many of these libraries indicate that other campus agencies—usually an audiovisual center or academic departments such as Theatre Arts, Music, Art, English, or Telecommunications—have the responsibility for

collecting and circulating these materials? Isn't this turf which librarians ought to have claimed, and if so, why haven't they? If pressed, it seems likely that these libraries would explain their collection development stance toward media in one or more of the following ways:

1) **The Library does not wish to encroach upon or duplicate collections and services already established elsewhere.**

Jurisdictional responsibilities established or claimed in the dim past may have relegated non-print collections to other agencies. In that earlier era the library probably was viewed as, and indeed saw itself as, a repository for print resources exclusively. An academic department may have taken the initiative to begin a collection of video or slide materials to serve its particular needs. An audiovisual department may have been established to deal with the new technology on a broader scale and to provide for classroom instructional needs. These collections have continued and grown, and their budgets for staffing and materials are long established. This arrangement is meeting the needs of the university. The library has decided not to become involved in competing with, duplicating, or assuming responsibility for these existing collections and services; perhaps it never even has considered doing so.

2) **Librarians are uneasy over dealing with a variety of non-print materials and confronting the issues associated with doing so.**

Academic libraries now are home to a wide variety of formats for the storage of informational materials. Librarians have embraced microformat, CD-ROM, laser disk, and floppy disk and have come to exploit them effectively in the performance of professional functions such as reference, collection development, or cataloging.

Despite their new and technologically altered formats, however, these are basically print resources. When images and/or sounds, rather than print, are stored on film, disk, or cassette a librarian may regard the item with less confidence. What criteria are to be used to evaluate these kinds of materials? Are book funds appropriate for their purchase? Is the particular format one for which the library has appropriate equipment available? If the library acquires something should it not be equipped to allow its users to view or listen to it? Is a review sufficient to justify a purchase which can amount to hundreds, perhaps thousands of dollars? These are valid concerns, issues that libraries and librarians face when they make a decision to collect non-print media. The prospect of coming to terms with these issues probably has induced many librarians to continue the status quo.

3) Teaching faculty and librarians have doubts about the scholarly value of non-print materials.

The role of non-print media in higher education should no longer be open to challenge; series and individual programs of very high quality have been used to present ideas, provoke discussion, and foster understanding, often in ways that would never be possible otherwise. Some instructional faculty have drawn heavily upon these resources for use in the classroom. Even though they may use films or videocassettes to illustrate or amplify information they impart during class, instructors may differ on the appropriateness of these materials for the library, a situation in which they would become a stand-alone learning tool, directly accessible to students. Other instructors dismiss media categorically as "shallow" or "remedial," having little to contribute to the pursuit of scholarship. They see no role for these materials, either in their own curriculum or in the library collections that support it. They and their librarian counterparts tend to believe that non-print materials are inherently unworthy of the lofty status which a place in the library would confer. In some cases this attitude may mask a reluctance to update and enliven one's

course or to deal with new and unfamiliar technology; in others, instructors truly may have grounds for criticizing available materials, or they may be unaware of the better films, slides, or tapes which have been produced in their field.

Why rock the boat?

Many might suggest that these are compelling reasons for a college or university library to continue policies which restrict or exclude non-print collections. Why rock the boat? Why put new claims on resources that are dwindling or unreliable? Why challenge or provoke another campus jurisdiction? Why invite criticisms that the library is "empire building" or that it is letting its collection standards slip? Why? Because the library has too much at stake, has too much to offer to hold back any longer from becoming involved in collecting non-print materials, even if it has never considered doing so before.

What can the library offer to the campus community when it assumes responsibility over non-print media collections? For one thing, no one else is equipped to provide the degree of bibliographic control, the thorough, consistent cataloging that the library can. Libraries are in the business of information organization. Accurate physical descriptions, consistent subject headings, multiple entries to facilitate patron access are established practices, easily adaptable to information presented in non-print formats. Furthermore this accuracy, consistency, and thoroughness are likely to come at a lower cost than is possible when the collection must be cataloged by an agency having no access to a bibliographic utility.

In a library information about non-print resources in the collection can be available to students and faculty in a card catalog, in an online catalog, and/or through a printed or fiche catalog generated from the library database. Again, it is unlikely that anyone else at the university will be prepared to offer so many options for locating needed materials.

Another aspect of providing access to collections of non-print media in which the library is likely to be superior is service hours. Few university audiovisual centers, and fewer academic departments, are staffed to enable students and faculty to borrow or use their film, video, slide, or other materials on

Non-Print Media Collected by 43 College and University Libraries December, 1985

	Collect	Do Not Collect
Phonorecords	28 (72%)	11 (28%)
16mm Films	12 (30%)	28 (70%)
Audiocassettes	23 (66%)	12 (34%)
Video (Cassette/Disc)	25 (61%)	16 (39%)
Filmstrips	24 (57%)	18 (43%)

Not all libraries responded to all questions; numbers and percentages reflect those who did respond.

evenings or weekends. The campus community looks to the library to have the informational materials it needs and to make them available when they are needed; no one else can perform this role as competently.

Teaching faculty who confer with their librarian colleagues to make collection development decisions may find the library's decision to defer collection of films, videos, slides, or other media to other campus agencies an arbitrary one. They may not appreciate the seemingly artificial division of responsibility according to format, and librarians may not find it easy to explain to their satisfaction why they must go elsewhere to recommend acquisition of new media items.

When an academic department is involved in a performance review or is visited by an accrediting team, self-study questionnaires routinely seek information about non-print collections and expenditures. When the library is responsible it often will be equipped to prepare comprehensive, detailed information about holdings, circulation, and expenditures just as it can, and probably already has, for books and serials. These are data that are appreciated, and the ability to provide them when needed can reflect well on the library.

Staking out a claim

Non-print collections are costly, especially film and video collections. How can a library respond to fears that introducing new collections will erode budgets that ought to go to print materials? Each university has its own budgeting process and its own traditions of support for the library and for audiovisual purchases. It may be the case, however, that an audiovisual center's budget for new or replacement materials has declined to inadequacy, that the agency has had a struggle to maintain the collection, much less develop it. The library, with its much larger budget, has more flexibility. Even a modest portion of the library materials budget, even 5%, might well exceed the campus's previous annual allocations for the purchase of non-print materials. A cooperative venture in which the library works with other departments to assure that the materials it selects do not duplicate other purchases could help to deflect friction and political disputes.

But often the library need not start completely from scratch. The library has a lot to offer the campus community; it can promise the best organization of non-print materials, the widest access, and perhaps the best budgetary support. If the library can present this case effectively, and with sensitivity toward the political dimensions of the issue, academic departments may see advantages in forfeiting their local media libraries to an agency which has pledged to maintain and develop them better, to provide the same or improved levels of access to the department's faculty and students. If collections and services can continue and even improve,

and if the department can devote the funds it used for media to other priorities, it may discover that its interests are best served by a transfer of its collections and the responsibility for them to a central facility within and operated by the library.

Local collections and collections available only to faculty or students in a particular discipline really do not serve the interests of the broader campus community either. It may be useful, therefore, for the library to exercise leadership in proposing and defining university policy for acquisition of audiovisual media. A policy statement which stipulates that, when university funds are used to acquire film, video, and other non-print materials, these items shall be accessible to all on campus who may have need of them, can help. Such a measure can discourage provincialism and set the stage for the library to become the central repository for media.

What about the Audiovisual Center? What if it houses the university's film and video resources? Would not having the library collect these items render them less accessible for teachers to use in the classroom? Again, even though they may be separate jurisdictions, the library can propose steps which can serve the needs and interests of all. The AV Center provides equipment, materials, and possibly set-up, delivery, and retrieval to instructors. It schedules the use of films and other materials to assure availability when they are required. A library media center could become the home for these items, providing additional access and viewing facilities for students. There is no reason, however, why they cannot continue to be scheduled by and issued to AV staff when needed in instruction, and made available for loan to others when not needed for a class. These are costly materials; it makes sense that they be used by and available to as many segments of the university as possible, and that students who may have missed or who want to review a film shown in class can have the opportunity to do so. Coordinating the work of the AV Center and the Library, even when they are separate jurisdictional entities, can mean more cost-effective operations and better service for the constituencies of both.

Conclusion

University libraries have for too long allowed others to encroach upon territory that should rightly have been theirs. Information presented both in print and non-print formats is the jurisdiction of the library. The library has a responsibility to perform and many benefits to provide. To keep abreast of technology, to maintain a leadership position in the delivery of information to its constituencies, libraries should develop strategies now for the development and growth of non-print collections to complement and enhance their existing collections and services. ■■