

Evaluation of an Approval Plan

On the basis of a study evaluating an approval plan employed by a health sciences library, it was found that receipt of preselected materials from a vendor can assist considerably in collection development. However, such a plan cannot totally replace the use of book reviews and publishers' fliers and other selection procedures

AS ONE OF THE DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES in the University of Iowa library system, the Health Sciences Library serves the Colleges of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Nursing and the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology. The libraries began use of a book approval plan in October 1975. This was not the libraries' first encounter with approval plans, but because the coverage of an earlier plan appeared unsatisfactory, the medical library (the precursor of the present Health Sciences Library) dropped out of it. The experience left us with a certain skepticism. Could or would this new plan be better? Could we trust it enough to reduce our other selection efforts in the Health Sciences Library?

Since the inception of approval plans, books and journal articles have appeared on the subject in large numbers. Axford conducted a cost study and Evans and Agyres a use study.^{1,2} Theoretical discussions abound.³⁻⁷ However, few papers examine whether or not the libraries are receiving on approval the material for which they would otherwise have had to place firm orders. DeVilbiss comes closest to that kind of study.⁸ However, the subject of her study was narrow, the comparison of the performance of two vendors. The basis for satisfaction was the comparison of the number of titles received on approval with the number of those listed in the *Cumulative Book*

Index (CBI). This ignores the fact that, even if given the opportunity, the library would not have ordered all the titles listed in *CBI*.

Our hope was that a study in our library would indicate which publishers were adequately covered by the approval plan so that some in-house operations for selection could be streamlined or eliminated. The intent of this paper is to offer a technique for evaluating approval plans and to list valuable reviewing journals in the health sciences.

Heretofore, the librarians had been examining book reviews in thirty-two journals (listed in table 1). The list of journals to monitor was based on the work by Chen and Wright.^{9,10} The journals selected for the study were divided into groups, with each librarian assigned to monitor one group of journals for a three-month period. In addition, a librarian examined publishers' fliers and the *American Book Publishing Record*. Each year from such sources as these thousands of requests are generated, searched, and typed; and a large (and possibly disproportionate) amount of time is required for the selection of materials.

The acquisitions department of the main university library, which is responsible for the actual purchase of all book materials, established the approval plan profile. As stated, the plan for the Health Sciences Library is to make available "new U.S. and Canadian books at junior-senior level or above in all subject areas except . . . veterinary medicine, animal husbandry, and mortuary science." Monographic serials were to be represented by the first volume only. Several foreign-based but English-language publishers were to be represented,

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TABLE 1
 REQUESTS FROM BOOK REVIEWS BY SOURCE

Journal	Total Number of Books	Books Received On Approval	Books Rec'd or Ordered Previously, or on Standing Order	Number of Books Had to Order	Percentage of Books Had to Order
American Book Publishing Record	23	9	12	2	9%
American Family Physician	6	—	6	—	0
American Heart Journal	5	2	3	—	0
#American Journal of Diseases of Children	8	2	4	2	25%
American Journal of Hospital Pharmacy	8	1	7	—	0
American Journal of Ophthalmology	2	—	2	—	0
#American Journal of Pharmacy*	3	—	2	1	33%
#American Journal of Psychiatry	18	2	12	4	22%
American Journal of Public Health	2	—	2	—	0
American Journal of Roentgenology	2	—	2	—	0
Anesthesiology*	6	—	6	—	0
Annals of Internal Medicine	44	4	38	2	5%
Applied Spectroscopy	1	—	1	—	0
Archives of Disease in Childhood	2	—	2	—	0
Archives of Internal Medicine*	15	2	13	—	0
Archives of Neurology	10	2	8	—	0
Archives of Pathology	2	—	2	—	0
#ASHA	4	—	1	3	75%
Books in Print*	2	—	2	—	0%
#British Medical Journal	61	16	35	10	16%
Chronicle of Higher Education*	1	—	1	—	0
Clinical Chemistry	15	—	15	—	0
#Current Contents (2 editions)	108	29	57	22	20%
Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology	5	—	5	—	0
Gastroenterology	14	2	11	1	7%
Hospital Progress*	1	1	—	—	0
Hospitals	15	2	13	—	0
JAMA	188	37	144	7	4%
#Journal of the American Dental Association	33	8	20	5	15%
#Journal of the American Dietetic Association	4	—	2	2	50%
Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (A)	9	2	6	1	11%
Journal of Medical Education	1	—	1	—	0
Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences	6	1	5	—	0
#Lancet	93	23	50	20	22%
#Library Journal*	9	3	4	2	22%
Login*	96	21	53	22	23%
#New England Journal of Medicine	64	11	46	7	11%
#Nature	20	2	11	7	35%
New Physician*	1	—	1	—	0
#New Zealand Medical Journal	20	3	8	9	45%
Publishers Weekly*	1	—	1	—	0
Psychiatry*	1	—	1	—	0
Psychosomatic Medicine	2	—	2	—	0
#Radiology	13	2	5	6	46%
RQ	2	—	2	—	0
#Science	59	11	36	12	20%
Unknown Sources	6	1	3	2	33%
Total	1,011	199	663	149	15%

*Not regularly monitored journals.

#Journals retained for monitoring due to study.

among them American Elsevier and *Excerpta Medica*. For any books costing over \$75 and certain other items (e.g., compilations of previously published papers), the vendor was to send forms instead of the books for examination. Using the information on the forms, we decided whether to order the books. For this study books received in each way were treated as "approval books."

THE STUDY

The basic plan for the study was to continue to use all book selection techniques as in the past but to keep additional records. Thus we would be able to tell later the source of each book request, if we had received other requests for the same book, and how we finally obtained the book. In this way we were able to determine the amount of overlap between our standard book selection techniques and the approval plan.

To minimize the number of firm orders that required typing, we held back all requests generated from book reviews and publishers' fliers for a period of three months to see if the book would be supplied on the approval plan. Books requested by patrons or needed quickly for our reserve collection were ordered immediately. The study covered books with a copyright date 1975 or 1976 only, and data were collected from March 1 to November 1, 1976.

Prior to the major portion of the study, a preliminary count by publisher was made of books received on approval. Books from four publishers (Academic Press, Halsted, Mosby, and University Park Press) were being received in quantities large enough so that we could assume adequate coverage. We excluded these publishers from the request-originating portion of the study (in order to reduce the number of requests that had to be prepared and searched). The librarians were instructed to ignore fliers and reviews for these publishers' books unless a particular work was considered essential.

The precise procedures for the collection and tabulation of the data are available from the authors to anyone wishing to replicate the study. Information accumulated during the study was sorted into four files:

File I: Records for all books received with

1975 or 1976 copyright dates (excluding theses, government documents, non-book materials, etc.).

File II: Requests generated from fliers if the requested book had been received in some other way (book review, already in the library, standing order, approval plan) at any time before the end of the study.

File III: Records for books which after three months had to be ordered, as long as they were not later received on approval.

File IV: Requests generated from book reviews if the books had been received in some other way at any time before the end of the study.

RESULTS

Data from the preceding files were used in tabulating the study results. To determine the efficiency of each segment of our selection process, we counted the number of unique requests resulting from that selection method and compared that total to the number of requests duplicated by other selection sources.

Table 2 gives the status of the 993 requests generated due to book reviews, indicating how many of the requested books were received through other methods (857) and the number of unique requests which ultimately resulted in a new order's being placed (136). For brevity, the publishers are grouped by type although data were kept on each publisher.

Any publisher with a corporate address outside the U.S. or Canada was considered a "foreign" publisher. (Elsevier was categorized as "general" because it was covered in the approval plan.) The "health sciences" group included Lea & Febiger, Mosby, Saunders, Williams & Wilkins, and Year Book. All other publishers were categorized as "general."

Table 2 also provides in the last column the percentages of requests that resulted in orders. As might be expected, books from "foreign" publishers had to be ordered in the greatest quantity, 31 percent as compared to 13 percent for "general" and 7 percent for "health sciences" publishers. Although our approval plan was not supposed to cover "foreign" publishers, 14 percent of the requested titles were received on approval, reflecting the international distribu-

TABLE 2
REQUESTS FROM REVIEWS BY TYPE OF PUBLISHER

Type of Publisher	Total Requests No.	Requested Books Received through Some Other Method						Requested Books to Order				
		Total No.	Books Received on Approval		Patron Requests No.	Standing Order No.	Already Own No.	Already Ordered Due to		Number	Percent	
			Number	Percent				* No.	BR No.			Filer No.
General	761	660	150	20%	40	26	337	60	38	9	101	13%
Health	154	143	39	25%	4	1	85	9	4	1	11	7%
Sciences	78	54	11	14%	1	—	24	11	6	1	24	31%
Foreign	993	857	200	20%	45	27	446	80	48	11	136	14%
Total												

*On order but without information on request source.

tion network used by some publishers. There were more received on approval from "general" publishers (20 percent) and even more from "health sciences" publishers (25 percent).

Individual data for each publisher indicated that requests generated from book reviews were unique requests less than 10 percent of the time for a number of them. Therefore, books from these twenty-seven publishers, many of them major firms, are now ignored when we monitor book reviews. This has allowed a substantial reduction in the work required for the librarians reading book reviews. Books from at least thirty-two publishers, including societies and university presses, are still part of the book review selection process.

Besides listing journals consulted for reviews, table 1 also shows the disposition of each requested book, by reviewing source, and gives (1) the number of books received ultimately on approval; (2) the number already received, on order, or on standing order; (3) the number to be ordered; and (4) the percent to be ordered.

Following the study, we were able to remove seventeen reviewing sources from the original list of thirty-two journals after comparing the number of books requested due to book reviews in particular reviewing journals to the number that had to be ordered as shown in table 1. (The sources indicated with an asterisk in table 1 were non-mandatory reviewing sources but were included in the study for completeness.)

Journals were removed as reviewing sources if requests resulted in less than 10 percent of the cases (indicating 90-percent coverage through other methods).

Two journals with an order percentage above 10 percent were also removed: *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (A)* (11 percent) because all the reviews monitored resulted in only one book order, and *Login New Title Abstracts* (23 percent) because information on individual titles was no longer sufficient to allow an evaluation of the book. It is hoped that materials previously ordered from these two sources will be picked up through other methods in the future.

Two journals formerly thought to be primary reviewing sources, *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)* and *An-*

nals of Internal Medicine, were removed from the list of journals monitored. However, because their contents are very useful for keeping up with current activities in medical science, we shall continue to set these two journals aside for browsing by the librarians.

Some journals, such as ASHA (*American-Speech and Hearing Association*), despite the few books reviewed, remained on the list to give librarians an opportunity to keep in touch with material in subject fields which our library covers. We have also added *Nursing* as a browsing journal to round out coverage of the basic colleges served.

The fact that we were able to remove more than half of the journals previously examined indicates that (1) our other selection methods, including the approval plan, give adequate coverage to the basic and usually reviewed materials; and (2) many journals are so late in publication or reviewing that more than half of the items reviewed are either already in the library or on order by some other method.

Table 3 shows the disposition of the 506 requests that originated from publishers' fliers with a total of 100 (20 percent) of these requests resulting in an order. Several comparisons may be offered with table 2. The total number of requests generated from publishers' fliers was about half that from book reviews, 506 versus 993, but the number of unique requests from each type of source was roughly comparable, indicating the greater numerical effectiveness of publishers' fliers for book selection.

Of the books requested due to fliers, 38 percent were acquired through the approval plan during the study, compared with only 20 percent of "book review" books. On the other hand, 446 (45 percent) of the "book review" books were already in the collection versus only 109 (22 percent) of the "flier" books. Two main reasons can be advanced: Publishers' fliers tend to be much more current than book reviews, and this seems especially true of the "health sciences" publishers where the percentage of unique orders was almost five times as high for fliers as for book reviews, 33 percent versus 7 percent. In addition, there is more duplication of titles in book reviews than in pub-

TABLE 3
REQUESTS FROM FLIERS BY TYPE OF PUBLISHER
Requested Books Received through Some Other Method

Type of Publisher	Total Requests No.	Books Received on Approval		Total No.	Patron Requests No.	Standing Order No.	Already Own No.	Already Ordered Due to:			Requested Books to Order	
		Number	Percent					* No.	BR No.	Flier No.	Number	Percent
General	449	172	38%	368	33	9	102	31	16	5	81	18%
Health Sciences	57	22	39%	38	2	2	7	5	—	—	19	33%
Foreign	506	194	38%	406	35	11	109	36	16	5	100	20%

*On order but without information on request source.

lishers' fliers if the fliers are monitored systematically.

Obviously, we were not receiving fliers from foreign publishers, as there were no requests or orders. Of the 20 percent that had to be ordered, 18 percent were from "general" publishers and 33 percent from "health sciences" publishers. There was a great deal of variation among individual publishers in the percentage of unique requests resulting from fliers, ranging up to 91 percent. We have stopped monitoring fliers that yielded less than 10 percent unique requests, thus excluding fifteen publishers—thirteen "general" and two "health sciences." Books from at least twenty-five other publishers will continue to be ordered from fliers.

Data resulting from this study, broken down by individual publisher, were used as the basis of discussions with the university library's acquisitions department. We were concerned because the percentage of books received on the approval plan from several major publishers was substantially lower than the average. That concern has been relayed to the approval vendor in hopes that the firm will increase its efforts to cover these publishers better. Since many books had been received during the three-month hold period, we decided to continue this hold period even after the study was completed, except for publishers whose books had not been supplied in quantity by the vendor.

Table 4 shows that we rely on the approval plan for over half of our material and on patron requests for only 10 percent. It should be noted that the totals of table 4 do not correspond directly to those of the earlier tables, because table 4 lists all the books received during the six-month study, whereas tables 2 and 3 indicate the number of books searched and ordered during that period.

Table 5 shows the number of books offered by the approval vendor and the number selected for our collection. Of those books received from the approval vendor, 79 percent came from "general" publishers, illustrating the importance of this type of publisher to a health sciences library.

Our interest profile listed with the vendor was probably well prepared, since only 11 percent of the books offered were rejected. It is felt that most of the rejects were from form selection rather than from the books sent (although the data are not so divided in table 5). This would indicate that the approval vendor was successful in eliminating the less important titles and informing us of them through forms. Many of the rejected books were recommended for other departmental libraries.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, we have been able to reduce appreciably the work required for book selection. There are fewer journals to monitor for book reviews

TABLE 4
SOURCES OF ALL BOOKS RECEIVED

Source	Number	Percent
Approval Plan	730	57
Book Review or Flier	330	25
Patron Request	131	10
Standing Order	97	8
Total	1,288	100%

TABLE 5
BOOKS RECEIVED ON APPROVAL

Type of Publisher	Total Books Received		Books Accepted		Books Rejected	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
General	650	79	560	86	90	14
Health Sciences	167	20	163	98	4	2
Foreign	7	1	7	100	—	0
Total	824	100%	730	89%	94	11%

and fewer publishers with whom we must be concerned. This has permitted the librarians more time for browsing through the contents of the major health sciences journals rather than concentrating on their book reviews. We have assured ourselves that the approval plan offered by our vendor works well for our library, and we were able to speak with the firm in specific terms regarding underrepresented publishers in the hope of improving its service.

While our objectives have been met, data were collected for only a limited time, and we cannot assume that the approval plan will continue to function as well in the future. It may be worthwhile to repeat the study in a year to determine the effect of the alterations and to make sure that the operation of the plan has not deteriorated. However, the memory of the work involved

in the current study will temper our enthusiasm for embarking on another one.

At first glance the percentage of books selected by other methods but ultimately supplied by the approval plan (20 percent of titles from book reviews and 38 percent from fliers) may appear dishearteningly low. The main reason that these percentages are so low is that we often had the book already or it was on order at the time. The number of books received through the approval plan was more than twice the number received due to book reviews and publishers' fliers, and the total staff effort was less for the former activity than for the latter. Thus we have acquired through the approval plan the majority of the books we need. The approval plan complements our other methods of book selection, but it will not replace them.

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