

The Basis for an Acquisitions Policy: Two Surveys  
of Holdings in HSIU Libraries

by

Colin Darch

During the period 1971-2, two attempts were made to survey the periodical and book holdings of the Haile Sellassie I University Libraries in terms of both quality and quantity. This paper describes the method of survey in the hope that other libraries in Ethiopia may find the HSIU experiment useful, and perhaps even worthy of adaptation.

The survey of periodical holdings was undertaken by the Acquisitions Librarian and a graduate assistant. The first step was to add up the total sum spent in the fiscal year 1970-71 (1963-4 E.C.) on subscriptions to journals, magazines and newspapers, as well as membership fees to organisations from whom we receive journals. It emerged that the University has spent £12,611.16, or Eth.\$75,666.96. Since the budget for periodicals was Eth.\$100,000.00, two conclusions could be drawn—firstly, that we were in a position to spend more money on periodical literature, and secondly, that in order to do this with maximum effectiveness it was necessary to analyse the needs of the various University Departments.

Cards recording subscriptions to individual periodicals were already in existence. These were divided firstly into broad and then into narrower subject categories, corresponding roughly to the faculties and departments of the University - Arts, Education, Business, Science, Engineering, Law, Social Work, and Theology. A ninth category included miscellaneous newspapers, Time, Newsweek, and so on. From the cards in each of these divisions the percentage of the total actual expenditure

was calculated, and correlated with the percentage of the total student body. Thus it emerged, for example, that although only 10.76% of the 2,444 students committed to majors were actually studying science, 33.53% of the periodical titles were in this area, and 59.65% of the actual expenditure, or Eth. \$45,135.34, was being spent on them.

At this point other factors had to be considered. Scientific periodicals are notoriously expensive, and in fact on a base of 100 in 1959 had increased in price by over 550% by 1970. It is probably fair, then, that science periodical expenditure should be heavy. However, a figure of 33.53% represents 333 titles out of 993, which would certainly need investigation; in fact a committee of librarians and faculty members is surveying the question now, as a result of these findings.

An attempt is also being made to spend all the budget of ~~Eth~~ \$100,000.00, as usefully as possible by relating the number of periodicals in a given subject area to the size of the department. A much more detailed breakdown of the figures for broad subject areas was obtained by a simple extension of the technique described above, and has enabled us to obtain a picture of what we are spending our money on, and whether we are allocating it fairly within the laid-down policies of the Library and the University.

Late in 1971, a second survey was undertaken, this time to try to ascertain the subject breakdown, and the volume:title ratio, of holdings in the HSIU Library System. The technique used was again very simple. The cards in the shelf-list were measured, using a standard of 100 cards to the inch, 1,000 cards in a drawer, and assuming one card per title. Since the shelf list, by definition, is organised in a classified sequence, it is possible to deduce that, say, 25 inches of cards in the 'Z' sequence represent 2,500 titles on the shelves.

The total measurement (87,695 titles) and the known total volume count (184,791 excluding the Technology Southern Campus, College of Public Health, and College of Agriculture Libraries) yielded a volume:titles ratio of 2.1:1-- a high figure which reflects this system's function of providing large numbers of student textbooks in multiple copies.

The figures obtained were again converted into percentages, and a comparison was made with the standards set in the U. S. A. by the Lamont Library at Harvard University and the University of Michigan Undergraduate Library -- two of the best collections of their kind in the world. It emerged that HSIU has placed less emphasis on language and literature and more on the natural and social sciences. The figures, in part, are:

	<u>HSIU</u>	<u>Harvard</u>	<u>Michigan</u>
Social Sciences:	23.4%	17.3%	18%
Natural Sciences:	23.8%	11.3%	8%
Literature and Languages	<u>20.2%</u>	<u>37.5%</u>	<u>31%</u>
	<u>67.4%</u>	<u>66.1%</u>	<u>57%</u>

These figures show that the policies that have been followed have been effective in building the collection in the directions required without creating serious imbalance. One direct result of this experiment may be the setting up of an internal system of departmental allocations of the budget of Eth. \$100,000.

Without a sound knowledge of the state of the collection was impossible to assess the effectiveness of the present policies, or to predict their relevance to future needs. The statistics assembled in these two surveys have given us some of the information we required. The next step will be a long-term investigation of reader use of the libraries, from which we will hopefully be able to predict with even more assurance exactly what we will have to do to achieve and maintain a reasonable standard of effectiveness.