

A Guide to Library Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College

Introduction

Dickinson College is firmly committed to providing each student with an education that is distinctive and useful, emphasizing global awareness, engaged service to the community, and interdisciplinary academic study. The Waidner-Spahr Library of Dickinson College exists to enhance the educational experience of students, and to facilitate the research activities of faculty members. Materials purchased for the library collection must be supportive of our rigorous liberal arts curriculum, and should encourage student learning beyond the minimum requirements of the classroom.

In keeping with the Dickinson College Strategic Plan, the Waidner-Spahr Library shall abide by the principles of efficiency in the acquisition of materials and accountability with library expenditures. In addition, we will contribute to the College's sustainability efforts by providing the College community with maximum possible access to our purchased materials, and by ensuring that much of our collection is usable across sub-sections of the curriculum. To that end, the Library staff will continually re-assess the usefulness of the Library's collection and make improvements based upon curricular enhancements, usage trends, and budgetary considerations.

This policy will guide the Library's purchasing habits; help the Library plan for the future of the collection; make judicious use of the budget; communicate purchasing considerations to faculty, administration, and students; and help assure consistent and balanced growth of the collection.

Specific goals for collection development by subject area shall be outlined in individual statements by academic department. Liaison librarians also are responsible for drafting individual collection guidelines specific to each academic department in consultation with the faculty members.

Types of Materials

The Waidner-Spahr Library collects monographs, journals, films, and sound recordings, as well as the databases and indexes required to locate sources of potential scholarly value. Other types of material as deemed necessary for the curriculum also may be purchased.

Format of Materials Collected

The collection of materials for the Waidner-Spahr Library shall not be limited by format. Although many necessary sources still appear exclusively in print, the Library buys materials in the format which is the most cost-effective, and most easily accessed simultaneously by the greatest number of researchers. With the landscape of information retrieval and delivery constantly changing, the library does not rule out alternative formats as long as the material is evaluated for quality of content, accessibility, and viability.

In regard to hardcover vs. paperback books, the Library prefers to purchase paperback copies, when the option is available, in order to realize cost savings. When it is anticipated that a book will be used heavily, it may be purchased in hardcover.

Collections Responsibility

Any new materials can be purchased at the request of faculty; however the liaison librarians make final purchasing decisions in consultation with faculty members. Major decisions for products costing more than \$500, or products requiring a start-up fee and multi-year commitments, are made by consensus of librarians, with approval from the Associate Director for Library Collections.

Liaison librarians should, for their assigned departments, continually monitor approval plan offerings, assess collection strengths and weaknesses, remove materials deemed no longer useful to the curriculum, evaluate gifts, provide advocacy for individual departments, monitor collection use, and endeavor to understand community needs to the greatest extent possible.

Budgetary Considerations

All academic libraries must contend with constantly increasing prices for research materials, particularly journals. On average, during stable economic cycles, the Library's budget increases at a rate about 1% per year, while prices for scholarly journals alone rise between 9 - 11% per year. In order to maintain a healthy collection and a solvent budget, our purchasing habits require constant vigilance, and annual subscriptions in particular must be scrutinized regularly to ensure that they continue to meet the College's curricular needs. In order to help develop new curricular initiatives at the College, faculty members are requested to keep the need for new library materials in mind when applying for grants.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the College curriculum, the Library does not subdivide the acquisitions budget by individual department, and there is no provision to split the budget by departmental allocation. All library materials are paid from one acquisitions budget, maintained and monitored by the Associate Director for Library Collections.

One-Time Purchases

One-time purchases such as books, films, and audio recordings may, at any time, be requested by faculty members and purchased at the discretion of the liaison librarians. Although there is no price ceiling for one-time purchases, librarians should investigate the curricular value of any unusually priced requests. In order to ensure that the portion of the budget allocated for one-time purchases is sufficient to last throughout the fiscal year, liaison librarians review the balance sheet once per month and may curb purchasing near the end of the academic year, or to carry over requests to the next fiscal year.

Subscription Purchases

Subscription materials such as journals and databases usually require start-up funds in addition to multi-year commitments. Such purchases are therefore subject to thorough analysis and/or a trial period before a subscription may be started.

- Journals - Any journal subscriptions considered for the library should be discoverable by way of a paper index or a database to which the Library already has access. New journal subscriptions requested by faculty members or suggested by library liaisons will be reviewed on a semi-annual basis, and will be purchased if there is a budget surplus or if the requesting department is willing to make adjustments to existing subscriptions. The Library conducts journal reviews on a semi-annual basis in order to determine which subscriptions are still necessary and relevant, which are financially sustainable, which may be switched from paper to online format, and/or which may be cancelled or replaced.

- Databases - Databases are the vehicles through which students and faculty members discover relevant and useful material for research projects. All databases should be thoroughly vetted during a free trial period. At the conclusion of the trial, purchasing decisions will be made based upon feedback received from relevant faculty members and their liaison librarian(s). Databases are purchased by consensus of librarians, within the constraints of the budget. Electronic databases are preferred over paper indexes to maximize searching flexibility and currency, and to provide access to many simultaneous researchers.

Other Considerations

Publication Dates

Most of the secondary materials purchased for the Waidner-Spahr Library are contemporary publications. However, with the creation of new academic programs, the revival of subjects temporarily abandoned, and the discovery of gaps in core areas of study, retrospective collecting also is appropriate. Primary sources from all eras and geographic areas also may be added to the collection as appropriate and financially feasible.

Geography

Because the College is committed to global education, the Library seeks to expand our traditional western focus by enhancing the collection in areas such as Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia.

Languages

Materials for the Waidner-Spahr Library primarily are collected in the English language. However, to supplement language education, global studies, and advanced studies in other cultures, the Library also collects important works in their original languages.

Gifts to the Waidner-Spahr Library

The Library's holdings may be greatly enhanced by donations from interested benefactors; however items retained in our collection should fit Dickinson's curriculum and mission. The Library's gift policy is available on our website.

Extracurricular Purchases

The Library will spend no more than 2% of the acquisitions budget for extracurricular and popular books, music, and films that have not been purchased specifically for classroom support.

Items Usually Not Purchased

Items that usually are not purchased for the library include: textbooks, mass-market paperbacks, workbooks, handbooks, teacher manuals, individual copies of journals or magazines, scholarly journals that are not indexed in a Dickinson-accessible database, and materials in foreign languages that are beyond the comprehension of students.

Collection Assessment

The Library staff continually assesses the Waidner-Spahr's collection through planned and measured annual examinations of cross-sections of our holdings. Assessments include but are not limited to cost-benefit analyses, usage analyses, curricular benefit analyses, and examinations of the condition of physical materials. Methods of assessment include:

- Annual journal reviews based on usage statistics,
- Annual database reviews based on usage statistics,
- Interlibrary loan statistics,
- Review of seminal works and important newly published items, and
- Comparisons to colleges with curricula similar to Dickinson's.

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