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# Making the Most of Your Video Collection: Trends in Patron Access and Resource Sharing

BARBARA J. BERGMAN

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## ABSTRACT

Video collections have undergone many changes over the recent decades, but have library circulation policies and practices kept up? The historical model for audiovisual collections at colleges and universities has been that of a reserve collection where films were purchased at faculty request as classroom support, held in closed stacks for availability to faculty while student access was limited, and rarely was resource sharing through interlibrary loan allowed. Research showed that while this model still exists, it is no longer the only model. The purpose of this article is to discuss trends seen in policies and practices of how academic libraries are providing increased collection access. Libraries are encouraged to review their policies and procedures regarding their video collections. Examples of the potential benefits of increasing user access to media materials in spite of the potential problems are described.

## INTRODUCTION

Video collections have undergone many changes over the recent decades, but have library circulation policies and practices kept up? Are we living in the past, still using policies that were appropriate for 16mm films, even though we're now in a DVD world that is on the brink of online life?

As the formats held in audiovisual collections continue to evolve, policies and practices should be reviewed in light of current needs. The purpose of this article is to discuss trends seen in how academic libraries are providing collection access to different categories of users. This article builds upon research published in 2004 in "Academic Media Center Col-

lection Development and Circulation Policies: A Comparative Analysis" (Laskowski & Bergman).

Forty years after the original set of the ACRL *Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries* was created in 1968 (American Library Association [ALA], 2006, revised), and a decade since the presentation of the *Guidelines for the Interlibrary Loan of Audio Visual Formats* (ALA, 1998), many media collections still remain under virtual lock and key. In addition to discussing findings about policies and practices at other academic media collections, the purpose of this chapter is also to highlight the benefits of increasing user access to media materials in spite of the potential problems of doing so.

The historical model for audiovisual collections at colleges and universities has been that of a reserve collection where films were purchased at faculty request as classroom support, held in closed stacks for immediate availability to faculty while student access was limited, and rarely was resource sharing through interlibrary loan allowed. The survey results that are described below show that while this model of limited access to video collections still exists, it is no longer the only model. I argue that by treating video collections more like circulating print collections rather than as a limited access special collection, awareness will increase as will usage of the library's nonprint collections. Internal circulation as well as the interlibrary loan of media materials will be addressed. In addition to immediate benefits to the users, increased usage can support advocacy for greater financial support of those collections.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Guidelines*

The *Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries* (ALA, 2006) should be referred to when evaluating a library's policies and practices regarding its video collection. While recognizing that classroom support remains an integral part of academic video collections, the guidelines also present expectations that media collections be fully integrated into normal operations of the library; for example, videos should be included in the library's catalog. Of the assumptions and expectations outlined, the ones most relevant to this article are those included under part 5, User Services, which while recognizing that a media collection has unique needs, state that it should circulate and receive typical collection services. Libraries are also encouraged to participate in resource sharing through interlibrary lending of videos.

### *History*

Because film collections were historically developed as classroom support, with the 16mm films and viewing equipment being managed and delivered to classrooms by a media services unit that was often a separate entity from the library, it is not surprising that films were housed in

closed stacks. A model of closed stacks for video collections has, however, remained in spite of the shift from unwieldy and expensive 16mm films to the much more portable and relatively less expensive formats of VHS tapes and DVDs (Brancolini, 2002).

In the previous research reported by Albitz (2001), Brancolini (2002), Brancolini and Provine (1993, 1997), and Laskowski and Bergman (2004), it is seen that collection size and budget rarely correlate to the size of the institution. Budget and other support for video collections seem to relate more to the perceived value of the collection at each institution. Libraries vary greatly in the percentage of funds and amount of staffing dedicated to nonprint materials, which have often had to fight the perception that they are taking funds away from the book and serial budgets (Brancolini, 2002). This problem is exacerbated because of the issue of changing formats, which complicates collection development immensely. Media librarians must not only select good content, but they must make judgment calls as to what format is best for their users—now and in the future.

#### *Format Changes*

Format changes are an ongoing concern for librarians dealing with audiovisual materials. Video librarians have dealt with 16mm film reels, 3/4 inch U-matic tapes, Beta tapes, laser discs, 1/2 inch VHS tapes, DVDs, and now high-definition DVDs read by blue lasers, plus the potential for streaming video. After their public introduction in 1995, DVDs have quickly become the preferred format for consumer usage, to the extent that U.S. entertainment distributors have now discontinued production and sales of VHS tapes in the American market. The educational film market is, however, very different from that of feature films. Although new educational films are being released on DVD, many older films continue to be available only on VHS tape because of the expense of relicensing and transferring existing films to DVD. Although libraries have embraced DVDs into their collections, librarians have found that the discs are more susceptible to irreparable damage than VHS tapes. Within the past five years, the potential for streaming video as a significant delivery mechanism in academic libraries has become a topic of much discussion among media librarians on the Videolib listserv (an online discussion group for media librarians) and at conference meetings of the ALA Video Round Table, ALA-ACRL Media Discussion Group, National Media Market, and the Consortium of College & University Media Centers (CCUMC).

#### *Loan policies*

*Policies by Patron Class.* Video lending policies have long reflected their origins in media centers providing classroom support and therefore the treatment of video collections as a special collection with restricted access has continued. Many video collections remain in closed stacks, filed by accession number rather than having been classed with library call numbers.

In regards to circulation policy, in 1993 Brancolini and Provine (as quoted in Albitz, 2001, p. 4) gathered data on video recording circulation policies. They found that among the sixty-one respondents,

- 20 (33 percent), of students may borrow for viewing outside the library;
- 43 (70 percent), of faculty members may borrow for viewing outside the library;
- 21 (34 percent), of all university staff members may borrow for viewing outside the library;
- 52 (85 percent), of faculty members may borrow to use in the classroom;
- 40 (66 percent), of students may borrow for use in the classroom (presentations);
- 10 (16 percent), of community residents may borrow for viewing outside the library;
- 14 (23 percent), of all video recordings must be viewed in the library.

The results showing that at some libraries even faculty could not remove video recordings from the library for previewing purposes seem remarkable even for 1993. (One hopes that those not allowing films to leave the library at all provided suitable preview equipment within the building and extensive operating hours.) But these responses serve to demonstrate the history of media in academic libraries as a reserve or special collection, rather than a part of the general collection.

Security is often given as a reason for closed stack shelving of film titles. In some cases, this is fear of outright theft. In many cases, it is security of ensuring title availability to faculty at a moment's notice. In a discussion aptly named "Security-Service Quandary," Albitz (2001) found common themes in the twenty responses received to a question about whether videos were allowed to circulate outside of the library and the classroom. The ten libraries not lending videos for other than classroom use gave the following reasons for their policy: they felt that they had adequate in-library viewing facilities; that immediate accessibility was more important than convenience of home use; that the purpose of the collection was for classroom support; and that the avoidance of wear and tear extended film life, which was important due to the high replacement cost (or irreplaceability) of film.

The ten libraries that did allow undergraduates and other nonfaculty to borrow videos did so for reasons that were both philosophical and practical. The most common reason for circulation was the service philosophy that access to information should not be limited because of format. On the more practical side, another reason was that limited viewing facilities, staffing, and/or hours meant that open circulation policies that allow patrons to view the films at their convenience outside the library are good public relations. Albitz (2001, p. 6) summarizes these attitudes in the following statement: "If videos go unused, why purchase them at all? In most

cases, media centers are established as working collections, not archives. If these collections go unused, then the mission of the institution goes unsupported."

*Interlibrary Loan.* Interlibrary loan is another aspect of video lending that has historically been limited (although fee-based film rental libraries were maintained by many large universities at one time).

Albitz and Bolger (2000, p. 75) comment that "despite a long history of sharing resources to advance scholarship and teaching, many librarians have yet to embrace fully the idea that information is information, whatever form it takes." The results of a regional survey showed that although 67 percent of respondents were willing to request videos for their patrons, less than half were willing to lend their video holdings and many had restrictions as to what they would lend to whom. They found that the barriers that must be overcome were the treatment of videos as part of a reserve collection, which must provide immediate faculty access to all materials; concern about the fragility of tapes and discs; and concern about the high cost should an educational title need to be replaced because of loss or damage. It is, however, those high costs that create a compelling need for libraries to engage in increased resource sharing.

The *Guidelines for the Interlibrary Loan of Audio Visual Formats* were established in 1998 by the Video Round Table of the American Library Association (ALA), and mirror the *Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States* (ALA, 2008, revised). They outline typical resource sharing practices and encourage libraries to lend videos as freely as possible. They recognize that special circumstances may preclude lending of specific items, due to high use or fragility, but advocate that limits should be item-by-item, not a broad class (age, price, etc). Libraries are also encouraged to lend beyond a regional subset, that is, not just within one's state or consortium.

## METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

For my research, I conducted two different but similar surveys five years apart. The surveys were designed to build upon the data gathered in the previous research by Albitz (2001) and Brancolini (2002). In September 2004 and June 2009, I solicited survey responses from Videolib listserv subscribers to questions about video collection policies. I specifically asked academic librarians to respond to questions about circulation policies and practices regarding accessibility of their video recording collections. Both surveys were administered with an online survey program allowing responses to be submitted anonymously via the website. The 2004 survey contained twenty multipart questions asking about several aspects of video collection management. The 2009 survey was a deliberately brief, and less formal, eight-question survey that asked only a few key questions for comparison with the more extensive 2004 survey data. The longer 2004 survey received sixty-eight responses; the data from 2009 includes

sixty-four responses. Videolib is a longstanding listserv devoted to media librarians. It has approximately six hundred subscribers consisting of academic and public librarians as well as some video vendors. The majority of people who actively participate in discussions are academic librarians. After the 2009 survey was closed, several respondents self-identified as having responded previously to the 2004 survey. The survey responses were analyzed to provide information on the following issues, which are discussed below: collection size, shelving arrangements, classification, circulation policies, resource sharing, and emerging formats.

#### *Collection Size*

In spite of the high cost of educational video materials, and therefore frequently inadequate budgets, collections appear to have grown considerably over the past few years thanks to the addition of DVDs. In 2004, most of the respondents indicated a collection size of less than 10,000 items, with only 15 percent having larger collections. The 2009 results showed 55 percent having 10,000 or more video recordings. The more detailed results from the 2009 respondents showed that the size of video collections ranged from tiny (253 items total) to an immense collection of 45,000 VHS plus 22,000 DVD. The median of the responses was a collection of 3,500 VHS and 10,500 DVD. Collection size average was 4,909 VHS and 4,417 DVD. Of the 2009 survey respondents, fifteen indicated that their video collections still had a greater number of VHS tapes than DVDs. On the other hand, twenty-seven collections had at least twice as many DVDs as VHS tapes. Reasons for this may be early and/or aggressive purchasing of DVDs, and in some cases possibly combined with aggressive weeding of VHS tapes.

Virtually all respondents in 2009 commented that they are watching developments in the availability of digital licenses and evaluating what options will best benefit their users. Many respondents commented that they believe that streamed video has good potential in educational settings in spite of the issues involved.

#### *Collection Management*

*Shelving.* Shelving of video collections is slowly shifting from exclusively closed stack arrangements to more openly accessible housing. The number of libraries providing open, and therefore unmediated, shelving for video collections is slowly becoming more common, although by no means a definitive majority. In 2004, 37 percent of respondents indicated a primarily open stacks arrangement. A few responses indicated that although their collection was primarily in closed stacks, a subset of videos were in open stacks or would be in the near future. Of the 2004 respondents, thirty-one (48 percent) reported that their collections were exclusively in closed stacks.

For the 2009 responses, a slight majority indicated that at least part of their collection is in open stacks (see Table 1). Twenty-five percent have completely open stacks and 27 percent indicate some variation of partial open stacks. Of those with a mixed shelving scheme, ten libraries indicated having a circulating collection in open stacks, while having the remainder housed in closed stacks. An additional four libraries make the collection browsable by displaying cases in open stacks, while storing the actual video in closed stacks for security purposes. This appears to be a popular way of balancing the competing demands of ensuring that materials are available for classroom use and for browsing. It should be noted here that it is assumed that videos that are reserved and/or booked for classroom use are most likely not housed in the open stacks.

Table 1. How is the video collection shelved?

Closed stacks	31 (48%)
Open stacks	16 (25%)
Mixed open and closed	12 (19%)
Cases browsable; videos behind counter	5 (8%)

Comments made in both surveys indicate that the shift to open shelving, whether complete or partial, has sometimes been for prosaic reasons. Although some respondents indicated that the change was a result of having reevaluated their service philosophy and determined that a more open circulation policy would better serve the student population in addition to the faculty, other responses indicated that the change was made for very practical reasons, such as having run out of space in the closed stack area or having experienced a reduction in staffing for material retrieval.

*Classification.* The classification of videos according to call numbers is another area that appears to have a correlation as to whether collections are being shelved in open versus closed stacks. In 2004, twenty-eight (41 percent) of the libraries surveyed indicated that they had classified their videos using Library of Congress call numbers. Five libraries used Dewey decimal numbers, and three shelved alphabetically. Twenty-one used accession numbers (not surprising only two of those libraries used open stacks). Ten used mixed systems, such as LC for nonfiction titles and an alphabetic arrangement for feature films. One library had a split collection with videos in open stacks having call numbers while continuing to file by accession in closed stacks.

#### *Circulation Policies*

*Patron Class Policies.* Although video departments appear to universally include viewing facilities onsite as a service to their patrons, they continue to vary in terms of who may borrow videos for use outside the library (See Table 2). All libraries reported that faculty can check out videos—in con-



trast to the severely limited lending policies reported by Brancolini and Provine (1993). The percentage of libraries allowing undergraduates to check out videos has increased over the years. The responses show that 80 percent are now allowing student checkout. This appears to correlate with the greater number of collections with at least a portion of the collection in open stacks. Perhaps an even more significant change, since it shows an even greater shift in philosophy, is that nearly 50 percent are allowing alumni and/or community borrowing (some require those borrowers to pay a Friends of the Library fee).

Table 2. Who may borrow videos for viewing outside the library?

Faculty	64 (100%)
Staff	57 (89%)
Undergraduate students	51 (80%)
Alumni, community	29 (45%)
Other libraries (Interlibrary loan)	22 (34%)

*Resource Sharing.* Interlibrary loan of videos among libraries is slowly increasing, based on the lower percentages seen in the previous surveys, although resource sharing of audiovisuals cannot yet be taken as a given. Twenty-two libraries (34 percent) responding to the 2009 survey indicated that they did not lend videos through interlibrary loan, but the remaining forty-two, a majority of 64 percent, indicated at least some video resource sharing. Only 22 percent indicated that they had unrestricted lending, that is, will lend to any requesting library, but this was a higher percentage than anticipated given even lower percentages reported in previous surveys. A larger number of respondents (36 percent) indicated that they participated in video lending, but with some restrictions. The majority of these libraries indicated that lending requests are filled based on the borrowing library being within the same consortium, state, or library type. Nine libraries indicated that they are reciprocal lenders—meaning that they will lend to libraries that are also video lenders, but conversely do not fill video borrowing requests from nonlenders. Several libraries are willing to lend their VHS tapes, while still denying requests for DVD loans. Additionally, ten libraries responded that although their library's official policy status is as a nonlender of videos, they would consider lending on a case-by-case basis based on the title requested. Naturally videos that are reserved, booked, or otherwise high-use titles, are not included in any library's lending pool.

#### *Emerging Formats*

As expected, streaming video is gaining a foothold as a library format. In response to the question of whether they had purchased streamed videos for the library's collection, the majority of respondents have purchased



digital licenses or are in the planning process to do so. Thirty-nine percent (twenty-five libraries) of the 2009 respondents indicated they have already purchased “a few titles,” six have purchased “many” titles, and another six indicated that they are in the process of purchasing access to some titles. Seven said that they had not yet made any purchases, but have added some of the freely available titles (such as PBS Frontline and Annenberg/CPB productions) to their catalog. Thirty-three percent (twenty-one libraries) answered that they had not purchased streaming video, but some appear to be included in the count of those considering to doing so (See Table 3).

Table 3. Has the library purchased streamed videos for the collection?

Yes, some	25 (39%)
No, none	21 (33%)
No, but have added catalog records for free streamed videos	7 (11%)
Yes, many	6 (9%)
Will be adding titles in 2009	6 (9%)

Almost every respondent, commenting in response to an open-ended question about their “crystal ball prediction” for the future, felt that, although not a perfect delivery method, digital delivery was the direction that educational video will take as the next step. Although generally optimistic about the potential of online video delivery, several librarians expressed concern that just as libraries are starting to allow more resource sharing of videos, digital licensing of streaming video will limit their ability to do so. Licensing also presents the problem of often leading to a subscription model involving ongoing costs, which is not a desirable condition when many libraries are facing substantial budget reductions.

Only one library mentioned having purchased Blu-Ray discs and playback equipment; others specifically stated that they will not be purchasing Blu-Ray because of its focus on entertainment films and the need for a special player.

## DISCUSSION

Library literature includes examples of librarians that have evaluated their video collections practices and policies, for example, see Merry (2004), Walters (2003), Laskowski and Bergman (2004), and Wu and Benedetti (2002). The details of their decisions and implementation processes will be of interest to libraries considering making policy changes. A significant external impetus change to video collection composition and management appears to be the need for a policy review. Merry and Walters both recount processes of policy review that occurred when an existing film center collection was absorbed into the library’s video collection. Wu and

Benedetti focus on the establishment of an open stack recreational viewing collection in conjunction with the launch of a film studies program. In their case, the feature films were moved out of a closed stack environment in response to patron requests, limited shelf space, and the feeling that new products now provided adequate security for an open arrangement. This policy change was balanced by leaving the educational films in their existing closed stack space.

*Experience at Minnesota State University, Mankato*

I conclude this paper with an informal case study in the form of a personal account of my experience at Minnesota State University (MSU), Mankato. This summary draws on and updates the paper "Academic Media Center Collection Development and Circulation Policies: A comparative analysis" (Laskowski and Bergman, 2004). The article described the then recent changes to practices at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Memorial Library that had been made with the support of the other librarians and the library dean to better comply with the expectations of the *Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries* (2006) and the *Guidelines for the Interlibrary Loan of Audio Visual Formats* (1998).

Although the primary purpose of MSU Library's video collection is still classroom support, policies were revised in 2002 to make the collection more user-friendly and accessible. The video collection had previously been cataloged and assigned Library of Congress call numbers, which made for an easy transition into subject-browsable open stacks. In preparation for open stacks, the VHS tapes were tattle-taped and the DVDs were placed in cases with locks and tattle-tape (this had the side benefit of standardizing packaging). The physical switch to open stacks occurred as part of a remodel of the entire lower level of the library, with the staff area and video stacks making a literal swap. Now assistance is available to patrons during most library hours, while the videos are available during all open hours. Circulation to students, community, and interlibrary was already in place, but the move provided a good opportunity to further advertise this fact and remind faculty of the importance of bookings and reserves. Our biggest challenge during the past few years was the loss of an integrated booking module due to a system migration. Now, five years later, we have finally been able to leave behind a homegrown make-do booking database and use the new system's booking module. Student borrowing has been successful because the students, unlike the faculty, can be charged late fees and automatically billed for nonreturns. The default replacement cost is set at \$200, which tends to cause a speedy return of an overdue feature film.

To further assist our patrons, the special formats cataloger suggested and implemented a revised classification system for the feature films so that their call numbers would be more distinctive from each other. Using

the literature classification schedule, feature films were reassigned call numbers so that they now file by country of origin of the director, then the director, and then alphabetically within director's films. In spite of occasional curiosities (*Brokeback Mountain* files with Asian films because it is directed by Ang Lee), this modification has worked well for us. International students and modern language learners, who frequently ask for films in a specific language, find it especially useful to be able to easily browse the relevant titles.

Librarians often express concerns about the potential for theft from open stacks. MSU's experience is that although a modest number of replacements have had to be purchased due to DVDs that have disappeared, they have been a mere handful of the total number of feature films. Since it was found that many of the missing movies tended to reappear at the end of the school year, the library maintains a Netflix subscription to provide emergency backup while we determine if new copies need to be ordered.

Having the videos in open stacks, especially as the number of DVDs has visibly grown each year (from 200 to 2,500 in five years), has led to greatly increased circulation statistics. As media librarians, we know that a single screening in a classroom is seen by dozens of students, but for the dean and other librarians who only see the checkout statistics as counted by the circulation module, every checkout is equal. It probably sounds crass to compare circulations as if they are a profit margin, but when asking for budget funding for a very expensive collection, it does not hurt to have a clear annual statistic showing that the DVDs circulate four times per DVD, while items in the book collections circulate at .02 or less. It is not necessarily a bad thing to have patrons using the library for their Saturday night entertainment as well as curricular needs.

Interlibrary loan of videos at MSU has been very successful with minimal problems. MSU subscribes to the principle of reciprocity, meaning that we do not ask to borrow formats that we do not lend. Therefore, when our policy changed to allow video lending, we also allowed our patrons to request videos. Contrary to the skeptics' fears, we found that our patrons consistently make twice as many borrowing requests as lending requests received. This makes MSU a net borrower, meaning that our patrons receive a greater benefit than our "cost" of lending. Reciprocity also means that if a requesting library indicates that they do not lend specific formats (usually videos, music, and/or audiobooks), we will deny their lending request. This is unfortunate for the patron at the other library, but reciprocal lending is a common practice meant to encourage other libraries to broaden their own lending practices. When advocating the interlibrary loan of videos, the issue of replacement cost for lost or damaged films is often raised. I have found that even otherwise experienced librarians are not aware that interlibrary loan principles (as listed in the ILL guidelines) are that if the worst happens and an item is lost or damaged, the borrow-

ing library pays the replacement cost. Librarians should therefore worry more about what their own patrons have borrowed. Although we have not had to make use of it, the preservation clause in section 108 of the U.S. Copyright Code has made us more confident in loaning titles that we know are out of print.

Supporting multiple formats provides unique challenges. At MSU we are looking ahead at the potential for licensing streaming video, but we also recognize that existing formats remain significant. I have encountered difficulties in explaining to the information technology staff, who provide classroom technology support, why VHS tapes will remain a viable educational medium for several more years and therefore that the classrooms continue to require videotape players.

The focus of this article has been the importance of reevaluating media collections policies. Librarians charged with this task should be aware of the value of the ACRL *Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries* (ALA, 2006) and the *Guidelines for the Interlibrary Loan of Audio Visual Formats* (1998). The following questions as posed by Albitz (2001, p. 8) serve as a good starting point for policy review:

- Can your facilities adequately contain all use within the library, or will students and faculty be better served by allowing these titles to leave the library?
- What percentage of the media collection is on reserve for use for instruction? Can those titles be placed in a noncirculating (reserve) collection while the others circulate?
- Does your media budget permit new as well as replacement purchases?
- Does the faculty demand the ready availability of the collection, or does it expect the comfort and convenience of previewing titles at home?
- Which circulation policy best reflects the overall circulation policy within the library?
- What policy does the established lending expectation in your institution and on your campus suggest?

## CONCLUSION

Although the evidence suggests that policies and practices for video collections in university libraries remain considerably more restrictive than for print collections, there does appear to be a slow but steady move toward more open access. While more collections are being housed in open stacks and interlibrary loans to nonfaculty are being more frequently allowed, for many other collections, practices still resemble reserve collection policies. For future research, it should be noted that almost all of the data about video circulation has been collected from media librarians subscribing to Videolib. It would be useful to survey other academic libraries, especially those that do not have a designated media librarian,

to see if the same historical norms and apparent trend toward more open access are found in those libraries as well.

In light of changing expectations, my conclusion from the results of the studies reported here, my own informal surveys and experience, is that librarians should be encouraged to review their video collections policies and procedures. Digital licensing and delivery of streamed video are anticipated to become significant factors for academic video collections, but there is still much contention over standards and issues such as copyright fair use. These are all issues that will determine future developments and will need further study.

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manager of video collections at this comprehensive university library. She is a frequent contributor to the Videolib listserv, a member of ALA's Video Round Table, participant at recent National Media Market meetings, and has presented at conferences of the Consortium of College and Media Collections. She has published and presented several works about media collections in academic libraries.