ABOUT    COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES    GIFTS    TOPIC TALKS    🔍

# The Question of Intent: Building E-Book Collections in the Academic Community / Melissa Goertzen (mjg2227@columbia.edu)

▦ GABBARD2014

MAY 12, 2015

**SHARE THIS:**

[ⓦ PRESS THIS]   [🐦 TWITTER]

[f FACEBOOK]

**LIKE THIS:**

[⟲ Reblog]   [★ Like]

Be the first to like this.

Two years ago I arrived at Columbia University Libraries (CUL) and was tasked with completing the E-Book Program Development Study. The central goal was to document the e-book landscape on campus and within the academic community in order to create collection development recommendations and strategies that will shape future e-book services at CUL. When I read the project description, the opportunity seemed both exciting and daunting – the opportunities for experimentation were enormous, but I knew that the complexities involved with e-book collection development, not to mention the speed at which formats and technologies are evolving, would present significant challenges. In the beginning, I felt like I had to provide solutions that would solve the collection development challenges we face on a daily basis. Now, I believe that discovering the right questions to ask in this evolving landscape is the work that will guarantee the long-term success of collection development policies and strategies.

1

Our questions set us on a journey of discovery and open our minds to opportunities for innovation. When we challenge our assumptions, look at issues from multiple perspectives, and test what we believe against evidence collected along the way, we begin the process of pulling back the layers of a problem to uncover the golden thread – the core issue that ties together all of the seemingly disconnected elements of an investigation. This process provides a context for research findings and can be the starting point for strategic planning and collaborative relationships that define how collections and services will be delivered in the future.

Several months into the study, I realized that I was operating on the assumption that users prefer electronic content for research, teaching, and learning activities. Throughout society, we rely so heavily on the Internet, mobile technologies, and social media to gather and disseminate information, that I assumed users would have a preference for e-books for all scholarly activities. However, as I started to collect usage statistics, examine discovery and access trends, and speak with faculty, students, and library staff through interviews and focus groups, I realized that my initial impressions of content use were far too simplistic and did not tell the full story. As I dug deeper into data sets, I started to ask more and more questions about when, how, and why users gravitate towards certain formats (e.g. print, electronic, archival materials) to support scholarly activities and build knowledge around specific subject areas.

At first, I worried that the discovery of questions rather than solutions would result in a lengthy list of proposals for future studies. But, the opposite turned out to be true. The inquiry process provided a focus and pulled everything I had observed into one overarching question: what is the intended use of e-book content? For instance, are individual titles requested by the user community for inclusion in course reading lists, research pursuits, general reference, or archival purposes? As an example, I'll refer back to a previous blog post that discussed CUL's strategy to acquire the *Interaction of Color* app. After considering the text's value to the academic community and the unique learning environment provided by the electronic format, CUL wanted to acquire an archival copy to guarantee long-term access. Once the intent was determined, a decision was made not to pursue a license through the iTunes Store (which would only guarantee short-term access) but instead, discuss e-book preservation with the publisher of the app. CUL discovered that academic publishers are also grappling with the issue of preservation and we are now exploring business models that allow for long-term access to enhanced e-book content.

I believe that every e-book collection development decision we must make, ranging from business models, license agreements, acquisition workflows, the marketing of collections, and preservation hinges on the issue of intent of use. Once we have answered this question, we can enter into meaningful conversations with stakeholders, advocate for the needs of users, and develop collections that aim to meet immediate and long-term information needs.

As the E-Book Program Development Study comes to a close, I look forward to setting out on a new journey of exploration and continue advocating for the needs of our users.