



VCU

Libraries

Guidelines for Collections

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1. Overview and Purpose.

A global transformation in the way information is created, accessed, and used presents a rare opportunity for academic libraries to evaluate all aspects of their collection practices and redefine how to best meet the needs of teaching and research in the 21st Century. Research, scholarship, pedagogy, and scholarly communication are undergoing fundamental changes. How academic libraries provide access to information is evolving in response to these transformations. Our guidelines for developing collections, while recognizing the strengths of traditional collection practices, must be responsive to changing information needs while also preparing for unfolding technologies.

Collection Analysis and Investment builds and manages collections at VCU Libraries. Adhering to the mission and values of Virginia Commonwealth University and VCU Libraries, the purpose of collection management is to develop exemplary collections that support the University's academic programs, research agenda, health care and outreach efforts, and the overall direction of the future of VCU in its local and global presence. Materials are chosen that best serve the University's identity: strong instruction, community engagement, and innovative research. For instruction, the collections represent materials that reinforce and also enhance the interactive quality of teaching in all courses. University faculty depend upon VCU Libraries to provide resources that enliven the learning experience. In turn, students rely on VCU Libraries for materials including media and technologies that allow for the creation of new knowledge. Because research is an integral university activity, VCU Libraries provides resources and services to assist faculty and students in the intellectual inquiry



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and experimentation that form 21st Century research. We are committed to building a collection that allows researchers at all levels across the VCU community to engage with information in the most creative ways possible.

2. Role of Collection Librarians.

Collection Librarians select all library materials except those housed in Academic Outreach and Special Collections and Archives. Librarians in these departments select materials for their collections in consultation with Collection Analysis and Investment and in accordance with their individual collection guidelines. Because it is essential that library collections serve instructional and research programs, collection librarians maintain a working liaison relationship with University faculty in the selection and management of resources. Collection Librarians consult regularly with individual faculty to solicit their recommendations for additions to the collections and to learn of their teaching and research interests. Purchase requests in support of teaching and research are welcome and receive high priority.

3. A Collection of Diversity.

To help foster a university environment characterized by a spirit of open inquiry and discussion, and to reflect the University community's diversity, VCU Libraries selects materials that as a whole present a variety of viewpoints and provide balanced coverage of issues. VCU Libraries subscribes to the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, which pledges us not to exclude materials because of the origin, background, or views of their creators. The philosophy behind the Library Bill of Rights fosters collections that represent the diversity of knowledge and those who create knowledge.

In addition to these aspects of diversity, the increasing interdisciplinary nature of scholarship requires diverse research approaches and methodologies, many of which are made possible by new technologies. Database design, for instance, supports how different strands of research are interwoven, revealing information that was once obscured or marginalized. Our collections directly support and advance the interdisciplinary quality of instruction, research, and scholarship at VCU.

4. Collection Formats.

The collection is also diverse in the kinds of materials that support teaching and research. A broad spectrum of information resources in a variety of formats is collected. These include printed and electronic books, electronic and printed journals and serials, streaming media and media in other formats, electronic resources (databases, images, data, reference materials, among others), microforms, and government documents. The preferred format for collections is increasingly digital. Open access publications are a key focus of collecting, and critical for scholarly communication and the future of education. Accordingly, collection librarians choose open access publications whenever available and appropriate to support a discipline.



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5. Collection Evaluation.

The ongoing evaluation of collections is an important component of a comprehensive collection management program. Collections must grow and change to reflect evolutions in both the scholarship of each discipline and the curricular needs of the institution. Systematic evaluation of the collections by means such as use and user studies, collection comparisons, circulation studies, shelf list counts, citation analyses, list checking, and other methods is imperative to insure that available resources continue to be of maximum benefit to students and faculty. Assessments may also identify materials to be moved among VCU Libraries locations, withdrawn, or preserved. The following criteria guide librarians in these decisions: curricular or program additions or changes; existing or emerging areas of research; usage, physical condition, cost, accessibility; long-term research value; complementarity to established collection emphases; uniqueness; and duplication.

6. Consortia Membership.

VCU Libraries is a member of several consortia. Purchases of digital resources by consortia affect VCU Libraries' local collection decisions. Generally, these purchases by consortia have greatly expanded VCU's access to digital resources.

7. Gifts.

Donations of books and other materials within the scope of the Libraries' collections are welcome. Donated items that fall outside of instruction and research needs for the collection may be sold at periodic book sales, which benefit the Libraries. Librarians and archivists select gifts for addition to the collection in consideration of the gifts' physical condition and usefulness. In all cases we employ selection criteria stated in our collection guidelines in making these decisions.

8. Preservation.

VCU Libraries endeavors to extend the useful life of all materials in its collection. Preserving aging but still useful materials is a collection management responsibility equal in importance to selecting new materials. Retrospective sources can retain their value to the library and their utility to users only if they are maintained in serviceable condition. The choice of a preferred preservation method is a decision made by Collection Librarians in consultation with the Libraries' preservation staff. Preservation staff determines treatment for routine problems, such as loose covers or a few missing pages. Collection Analysis and Investment addresses the disposition of materials requiring more extraordinary preservation measures.

9. Organization of Subject Policies.

To establish the structure for building collections, Collection Librarians formulate specific guidelines for all program areas. These guidelines—adapted from the work of the Research Libraries Group--use descriptors to characterize the level of collecting activity.



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- 5. Comprehensive Level.** A collection in which the library endeavors, so far as it is reasonably possible, to include all significant works of recorded knowledge for a necessarily defined and limited field.
- 4. Research Level.** A collection that broadly comprises major source materials useful for dissertation and independent research. It is intended to include important reference works and a wide selection of specialized monographs, as well as extensive holdings of journals and major indexing and abstracting services in the field. A collection at this level supports doctoral and other original research.
- 3. Instructional Support Level.** A collection that provides coverage of the primary topics of a subject area. It includes a broad collection of basic monographs, key journals on primary topics, selected journals and seminal works on secondary topics, and fundamental bibliographic and reference tools pertaining to the subject. This level supports undergraduate through master's courses.
- 2. Basic Information Level.** A selective collection of materials that serves to introduce and define a subject and to indicate the varieties of information available elsewhere. It may include dictionaries, encyclopedias, selected editions of important works, historical surveys, bibliographies, handbooks, and major periodicals.
- 1. Minimal Level.** A subject area in which few selections are made beyond very basic works.