

Building Distinctive Collections: A Survey of Association of Research Libraries' Member Institutions Acquisitions Infrastructure

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This study explores how acquisitions practices and infrastructure influence building diverse distinctive collections within Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions. Through a survey of the existing acquisitions practices within ARL institutions, this study interrogates the collections-based methodologies that are utilized to purchase distinctive collections resources. The researchers analyze the aggregate data; the results highlight current efforts and practices to decenter dominant narratives and Western ways of collecting in acquisitions programs to build distinctive collections.

Introduction

The current and historical scholarly communication ecosystems have entrenched notions of dominant Western narratives as the default. These systemic deficiencies impact the ways in which libraries develop their collections. Decisions and actions taken by those responsible for prioritization, selection, acquisition, description, access, and use of collection materials are neither neutral nor objective, and these reflections are ever-present in collection building practices. Existing scholarship focuses primarily on collection development and resources metadata and discovery, and the critical intersection between these two areas has garnered significant attention in the profession. However, there has been little focus on acquisitions. Acquisitions departments play an essential role in building library collections, but relatively little attention has been paid to the acquisitions process and its impact on equity, diversity, and inclusion (hereafter mentioned as EDI) either in library collections development in general or in distinctive collections specifically.

This study aims to address this gap by shifting the focus of building diverse collections from selection activities to acquisitions practices.¹ Library acquisitions exercises agency in interpreting, dismantling, and reconstructing current systems of knowledge creation, supply,

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distribution, and consumption. By extension, library acquisitions may influence building distinctive collections, particularly around notions of EDI. This study explores the role of acquisitions by taking a closer look at the acquisitions infrastructure, namely the business, financial, and legal aspects of collections stewardship.

Background

This study focuses on impacts of collection development strategies and decisions on acquisitions at ARL institutions for distinctive collections. The Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science defines acquisitions as:

the process of selecting, ordering, and receiving materials for library or archival collections by purchase, exchange, or gift, which may include budgeting and negotiating with outside agencies, such as publishers, dealers, and vendors, to obtain resources to meet the needs of the institution's clientele in the most economical and expeditious manner. Also refers to the department within a library responsible for selecting, ordering, and receiving new materials and for maintaining accurate records of such transactions, usually managed by an acquisitions librarian.²

The Society of American Archivists' dictionary characterizes acquisition as "materials physically and officially transferred to a repository as a unit at a single time" or "the process of seeking and receiving materials from any source by transfer, donation, or purchase."³ Both dictionaries broadly define and denote the processes within the larger acquisitions context.

The term "distinctive collections" encompasses special collections of rare books, manuscripts, archives, and other formats. It also encompasses international studies collections⁴ that include specialized materials selected around ethnic identities, geographic regions, cultures, and languages, and other specialized collections of distinction. This study's focus is distinctive collections, combining special and international collections, which is also referred to as area studies. Working definitions of the terms "acquisitions," "area/global/international studies," "distinctive collections," and "selection" are provided in Appendix A. The main distinction to note is that collection development comprises the selection process while acquisitions the ordering and payment processes.⁵

Acquisitions infrastructure in this article is discussed largely within the scope of the business, legal, and financial aspects of library acquisitions. In other words, how libraries conduct business given the legal and financial protocols governing how institutions operate in the global marketplace, and the agents involved in the process.⁶ The business, legal, and financial infrastructure of libraries' collection programs have significant influence over how collections decisions are implemented as they are tied to institutional, city, county, state, provincial, federal, and international regulations, and they function beyond the scope of the library acquisitions unit.

Literature Review

Evolution of Distinctive Collections

In this study, the authors recognize that "distinctive collections" is a description that has evolved over time, with some institutions creating and maintaining distinctive collections units and others dismantling them. Carter and Whittaker attribute the beginnings of the idea

of distinctive collections to Nicolas Barker.⁷ Building upon this idea, the ARL Working Group on Special Collections, charged with addressing the changing nature of collections stewardship and ways of leveraging special collections, began nuancing this notion in February 2007. Within this Working Group, special collections was conceived broadly to include distinctive material in different formats and at various levels of endangerment due to extinction or erasure.⁸ The Working Group published its report in March 2009 and, by December of 2009, a special issue of *Research Library Issues* focusing on distinctive collections was also published.⁹ The special issue began to redefine special collections as inclusive of distinctive collections. The special issue further elaborates that, “special collections are not distinctive just because they are unique but also because of what their stewards do with them to promote use.”¹⁰ These early conceptions were important in establishing the thinking around distinctive collections, and in extending the purview to collections of distinction beyond special collections.

At the 2012 Charleston Conference, the members of Yale’s collection development group characterized distinctive collections as being somewhere between general and special collections within the larger collections continuum. They were the first to focus on distinctive collections from the financial collections stewardship framework, and suggested the mechanics of the procurement process to determine the difference between general and special collections. General collections acquisitions processes can be highly streamlined, centralized, and automated to handle bulk processing, while special collections may require a more tailored approach at the title-by-title level. The authors argue that distinctive collections may involve more consideration than general collections in negotiating and purchasing workflows, but the content may not fit the scope for special collections level in terms of collections management.¹¹ Alongside this view, Rick Anderson’s 2013 *Ithaka S&R brief* approached the question of collections from the economic standpoint, categorizing collections based on the notions of commodity (i.e., resources available through the conventional marketplace) and non-commodity (i.e., rare and unique documents), and the increasing importance of non-commodity resources in the academic library environment.¹² Collections stewardship in its totality comprises various measures of cost and expenditure, and it is important to recognize the acquisitions infrastructure and its capacity to support these varying financial activities.

In 2015, Carter and Whittaker used the shared development, challenges and stewarding of special and area studies collections as the rationale for integrating these two types of collections under distinctive collections at each of their institutions. They list the following commonalities as levers for aligning area studies and special collections to the institution’s overall needs and resources:

- a high level of expertise in a distinguishing area
- highly focused collection development
- special handling and processing concerns (e.g., fragility, languages, format)
- a targeted but international user community
- existing element of the desired intensive liaison model
- shared history of positioning as outsiders, as siloed, or as different from larger library system

They also describe the local conditions under which the formation of distinctive collections was actualized at the Ohio State University Libraries and University of Kansas Libraries. The results were of improved engagement through increased collaboration, centralized and shared support for similar activities, and scalability and sustainability for services provided

by these paired programs. Although Carter and Whittaker attribute the initial formulation of the idea for distinctive collections to Barker¹³ they, along with other research institutions, administratively operationalized the concept into implementation and codified it into organizational structures.¹⁴

Diversity and Collection Development in Libraries

This study is grounded in the acknowledgement that research libraries and librarianship are predominantly white and predominantly female.¹⁵ Further, most academic libraries developed alongside the academic institutions they represent and therefore have a deep-seated history of discrimination and white supremacy. The profession has attempted to grapple with EDI as it relates to collection development across research library collections, as well as discovery and access, instruction, reference, outreach, and the workforce through the years.¹⁶ In 2019, Cruz utilized a literature review to assess the treatment of diversity in academic libraries, specifically in the areas of staffing, culture and climate, collections, services, and programming, and determined that libraries were at a point of re-evaluation of their practices and services.¹⁷ Diversity is not easily achieved with a statement, strategic hire, or single presentation. Instead, strategic assessment and planning should be consistent and evolve as an institution's EDI needs also evolve.

In 2016, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Libraries set forth an ambitious plan, called the "Collections Directorate Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice," to "identify opportunities for archives, technical services, preservation, scholarly communication, and collections strategy staff to manifest the values of diversity, inclusion, and social justice in their daily work." A task force convened throughout much of 2016 to conduct research, engage in professional development, gather information from colleagues, and facilitate discussions across library units to develop a broad range of workable strategies and ideas that would support their goals. The suggested strategies were organized into four major sections: scholarly publishing and academic library marketplace, based on the challenges academic libraries face due to neoliberalism and the corporatization of academic libraries; representation of marginalized perspectives, in an effort to disrupt the historic and ongoing unequal distribution of power; community inclusion and outreach, in reaction to libraries' historic practices of neglecting and actively silencing alternative narratives and nondominant voices; and building organizational infrastructure for diversity, inclusion, and social justice, acknowledging that a cultural shift in day-to-day approaches to work takes commitment to regular staff training and education. The analysis and reflective work of the task force and their subsequent report in 2017 indicates an administrative willingness to support interrogation of institutional practices related to EDI values at ARL libraries, as well as library staff's willingness to hold these important discussions.¹⁸

In 2017, Conner-Gaten, Drake, and Caragher presented three major strategies for anti-racist collection development: active and continuous acknowledgement by all librarians of personal perspectives and biases; consistent engagement of works by marginalized groups with library users and the public throughout the year; and an institutional commitment to diversity outlined within collection development policies.¹⁹ Taking on these strategies wherever possible can promote future advocacy and combat existing oppressive structures. The authors argued that racism is everywhere—it is built into the institutions where we carry out our work—so library workers must be equipped with the necessary tools to build anti-racist

collections. Organizations cannot depend on statements and collection development policies alone to achieve EDI values. A willingness to enact change to established processes, standards, and avenues of acquisition is also necessary.

In their 2022 article, Jahnke, Tanaka, and Palazzolo argue that diversity in collections requires investment of time, labor, and fiscal resources during a period where libraries are becoming increasingly cost efficient.²⁰ In 2023, Jones, Lapworth, and Kim's article on assessing collections diversity in their institution's special collections and archives stresses the value in learning from their collections assessment with intentionality to implement changes for future assessments. Most importantly, however, the limitations of the tools used to conduct the analysis must be considered as "the discovery and assessment of diverse collections depend on description," and description and metadata are ultimately products of humans prone to interjecting institutional and/or personal bias into their work output.²¹

Impact of Library Acquisitions

Although library acquisitions and its infrastructure are important and critical components in building collections, there is little scholarship focusing on EDI collections through a holistic acquisitions lens, especially in comparison to the wide body of literature available within technical services regarding collection development or even metadata and discovery. Blume and Roylance's piece on building an authentic authorship model is one of the few in library literature to highlight the underlying infrastructure, workflows, and relationship maintenance within the realm of acquisitions, addressing relationship building with internal financial audit and structures, as well as externally with vendors to convey the protocols necessary for workflows in collections building.²² Lamdan's inquiry on the legal research companies selling surveillance services to government entities, such as immigration and law enforcement, through data acquired via their legal research tools and products raises ethical concerns. Lamdan calls for divestment from the unethical and dangerous enterprise built under the guise of legal research and centers the impact of acquisitions more indirectly.²³ More specifically within academic libraries, DiVittorio and Gianelli examine vendors' business practices via reviewing corporate sustainability ratings as well as accessibility reports to enact a more ethical fiscal stewardship model. Their findings underscore the importance of how libraries do business, with whom they negotiate, where library budgets are being committed as financial investments, which vendors libraries purchase from, who makes the decisions, what checkpoints exist within institutions, and various other infrastructure factors contributing to complexities in the procurement process.²⁴

There have been some efforts to incorporate acquisitions as part of the larger process. In a 2020 follow-up to "Creating a Social Justice Mindset," the MIT Libraries' diversity, inclusion, and social justice task force report, Kauffman and Anderson present the challenges and opportunities in taking on the report's proposed strategies and ideas specifically within technical services.²⁵ Because the work of technical services is seen as the most practical and systems-oriented body of work across the library landscape, department staff often struggle with making connections between the work they do and the big picture impact of the diversity, inclusion and social justice framework set forth by the task force. Dividing technical services into three main roles—cataloging and metadata specialists, acquisitions assistants, and technical services managers—allowed the authors to examine the various and most effective approaches for addressing the proposed strategies. Acquisition assistants are uniquely aware

of all collections materials that are being purchased across the library. Though the acquisitions assistants at MIT Libraries do not make selections for collections, they are able to make critical observations regarding trends in working with specific publishers, directions or discrepancies in price lists, who is being represented in the materials purchased, and how materials are being presented in physical spaces. These critical observations can, in turn, help inform the decisions of selectors and other decision-making stakeholders. An important component for technical services to ensure success in connecting with the larger library's proposed strategies is to foster, promote, and welcome inter-departmental collaboration and communication across the library.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The overarching goal for this project was to gather information about acquisitions infrastructure that has been in place since 2009 across ARL institutions, to investigate how those practices impact the building of diverse collections, and thus to advance critical conversations about building diverse collections and counter-narratives in libraries and archives. As the notion of distinctive collections began formalizing in 2009, that was chosen as the starting point.²⁶ Including only ARL institutions simplified comparisons, as the acquisitions infrastructure of peer institutions reported on their collections activities in a similar way (e.g., scale, budget, capacity).

The researchers selected a mixed-method approach to collect data through a questionnaire survey. After developing the questionnaire, the researchers recruited subject matter experts and held several cognitive interviews with information professionals who work in the targeted areas of the study. This approach gave the researchers an opportunity to “study the manner in which targeted audiences understand, mentally process, and respond to the materials [...] present[ed].”²⁷ Cognitive interview participants were asked to read the questions out loud and think out loud while the researchers took notes on how participants reacted to the questions and listened for areas to improve the questionnaire flow. The researchers deployed the thirty-two-question survey (see Appendix B) included via Qualtrics, which allowed the researchers to cast a wide net to potential participants without the need for hands-on coordination. The questionnaire asked a mixture of demographic, multiple choice, Likert scale, drag-and-drop, and open-ended questions. No questions required a response. The questionnaire, consent, and recruitment forms all received IRB approval. Despite the focus on ARL institutions and distinctive collections, this research is applicable for all libraries looking to diversify their collections by interrogating their acquisitions procedures and practices.

Recruitment and Sample

The researchers were unable to create a roster of possible participants because the complexity, and often non-descriptive nature, of job titles made it impossible to identify all qualified participants. Instead, the researchers opted to recruit survey participants by sharing an open link to the questionnaire shared via a variety of listservs of the various library professional organizations, targeting specific areas in libraries (e.g., acquisitions, special collections, subject specialists). This option meant losing the ability to communicate directly with potential research participants, as well as acknowledging that not every potential participant would be reached via listservs, effectively excluding them from participation. The survey responses

were collected from July 7, 2021, to August 6, 2021. The survey initially received 164 individual responses and the data analysis included seventy-seven survey responses.

Coding and Analysis

The 164 individual survey responses received underwent data normalization and cleaning, which included removing insufficient responses, outliers, duplicate submissions, and responses from outside the target sample. Post-data normalization, seventy-seven survey responses were deemed valid and were included in the data analysis. None of the survey questions were required, therefore no one survey was considered 100 percent complete. There were different total numbers of responses for different questions, for instance, the demographics section below shows that there were seventy-seven responses for one question, and seventy-six responses for another.

The researchers transferred the survey responses from Qualtrics to Google Sheets to perform a descriptive analysis of the results. Researchers analyzed quantitative questions using automated methods tabulating the responses, while qualitative and open-ended questions underwent manual inductive coding and thematic analysis. The survey consisted of thirty-two questions total, with the authors concentrating specifically on questions that would offer a broad overview of the survey responses.

Demographics

To gain an understanding of the individuals and institutions represented in the survey participation, respondents were asked for general demographic information. Of the seventy-seven valid submissions, forty-five different ARL institutions were represented. Of the seventy-six respondents who answered the geographical location question, sixty-nine were from the United States and seven were from Canada.

Of the seventy-seven participants who responded to the question regarding their primary area of responsibility, twenty were selectors for special collections, rare books, or archives; eighteen were selectors for international studies; thirteen were in collection development or collection strategies roles; and thirteen were from acquisitions departments. The seven respondents who fell under the "Other" category were made up of administrators, such as associate deans and directors of departments. The six respondents who made up the "Non-Acquisitions/Technical Services" category included archivists working within collection management units, electronic resources librarian, and technical services librarians.

Findings

Acquisitions Infrastructure

Acquisitions infrastructure is the business operations side of the libraries situated within the larger campus systems of business, purchasing, payment, auditing, and accountability. When conducting business, institutions implement their own business, legal, and financial operations, workflows, and philosophies on their business relations. Funding is a critical resource allocation tool to building collections and impacts collections efforts at both individual and collective levels. Funding decisions are often administrative functions taking place at the macro level and separated from the individuals making micro level selection decisions. This multilevel decision chain allows for reviews, transparency, and reduction of errors throughout the process.

The study sought to document the personnel responsible for the collections budget within institutions (see Table 1). The respondents confirmed a noticeable separation of responsibility at many institutions wherein the individual making the overall collections budget decisions was removed from the actual work of selection. This disconnect may result in the budget allocation being less attuned to user needs and the efforts to diversify the collection.

TABLE 1 Collections Budget Responsibility (n = 69)	
Responsible Personnel/Group	Number of Responses
Library Administration	57
Library's Collections Development/Strategy	42
Library's Business/Finance Office	21
Library's Acquisitions	10
Other	1

A signed contract activates the terms of agreement within the contract and demonstrates that the parties accept those terms. Signing authority therefore delineates which entity within an organization has the final authority to accept the terms of a contract on behalf of the institution. The survey asked who had signing authority for contracts, licenses, MOUs, and deeds of gifts. Of the sixty-nine responses, forty-three indicated that the library has the authority; twenty-one indicated "Campus Legal;" eighteen marked "Do not Know;" fourteen indicated "Campus Finance;" and nine responded with "Other." The "Other" category listed entities such as the Senior Information Resources Officer, University Librarian, Head of Curators, and Board of Trustees. Overall, responses to this question indicated that the vast number of libraries have more direct control over the business partnerships they maintained, even though the parent organization might still take part in reviewing the contracts to adhere to the organizational standards for contract agreements.

TABLE 2 Institutional Openness to Different Financial and Legal Practices (n = 69)		
	Financial Practice (No. of Responses)	Legal Practice (No. of Responses)
Did not know	30	41
Not open	21	15
Open	17	13
Very open	1	0

The study also sought to understand the institutional openness in ARLs to different financial and legal practices (see Table 2). When asked about how open the institutional financial and legal divisions were to new practices, the respondents' answers largely skewed to the perception that most individuals were unsure of their institutional openness, and that most institutions were not open to changing established practices. It is also worth

noting that respondents seemed to believe that there was slightly more risk aversion with legal practices than financial.

In addition to assessing the general knowledge of the acquisition infrastructure and where authority rests for decision-making, the study sought to understand the ease of the process for adding new vendors, as well as the ability to assess existing vendors. When asked about the ease of adding new vendors, thirty out of sixty-nine said it was easy; twenty-three said it was difficult; and sixteen did not know. When asked about the ease of assessing existing vendors, thirty-one out of sixty-nine said it was easy; twenty-three did not know; and fifteen said it was difficult. The process to add and assess new vendors has an impact on which businesses institutions choose to conduct business with, directly correlating with the ability to diversify

collections. There is a wide variety of vendors supplying content to libraries and they may vary significantly in terms of size and operational scale. Institutions need to strive towards inclusion by finding ways to cultivate and establish relationships with vendors needing to operate outside the norms of institutional business expectations and existing infrastructure.

In terms of the acquisition methods used to build distinctive collections, participants were asked to rank the methods from the most to least used (see Table 3).

Furthermore, participants were asked to rank the following firm order methods from the most to the least utilized: creators, book fairs, auctions, rare materials and archives dealers, purchase trips, and publishers and catalogs. Creators (i.e., buying directly from creator) were the most utilized with seventeen out of sixty, while fifteen indicated rare materials dealers.²⁸ Of the remainder, thirteen selected from catalogs; nine from publishers; and six utilized purchase trips. Although other acquisition methods, such as auctions and book fairs, are also actively used in the profession for collections building, no respondent ranked either of those options as their most-used method. Allowing for use of a variety of purchase methods in an institution similarly opens the possibility of acquiring content from a variety of markets.

Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on specific acquisitions activities ranging from funds tracking to reimbursement culture. Responses indicated that institutions generally do not assign purchasing cards to selectors (forty-four out of sixty-eight); selectors are not allowed to make purchases up front and then seek reimbursement afterwards (thirty-one out of sixty-seven); individuals at ARLs either do not know (twenty-nine out of sixty-eight) or ARLs currently do not track purchases that support EDI values (twenty-eight out of sixty-eight); and some ARLs have either discontinued or never started business partnerships with vendors because they are not able to accept certain methods of ordering (thirty-two out of sixty-eight). Similarly, some ARLs have either discontinued or never started business partnerships with vendors because they are not able to accept certain forms of payment (thirty out of sixty-eight). However, many institutions make purchases from vendors who do not use English as their primary language (fifty-one out of sixty-eight).

Challenges When Acquiring Materials for Distinctive Collections

The study further sought to identify challenges that are encountered when acquiring distinctive collections. Since this was a free text question, responses were analyzed and grouped into four themes. There were thirty-five respondents whose responses upon qualitative analysis fit into either single or multiple themes. As such the total number of thematic responses was more than thirty-five (see Table 4).

TABLE 3
Acquisitions Method Used to Purchase Distinctive Collections Materials (n = 61)

Methods	No. of Responses
Firm Orders	28
Donations and Gifts	16
Approval Plans	13
Continuations	4

TABLE 4
Challenges Faced in Acquiring Materials for Distinctive Collections (n = 35)

Challenges	Number of Responses
Infrastructure	13
Lack of Unified Library Strategic Direction	12
Budget	10
Other	6

“Infrastructure” consisted of responses that expressed challenges with payment and auditing methods within their organizations; onerous campus procurement policies; changing discovery platforms; lack of technical and legal infrastructure to handle electronic products outside of major English-language vendors; and changing in-house requirements and policies for imports due to changing import laws within countries.

“Lack of Unified Library Strategic Direction” consisted of responses that reported challenges from a lack of support and buy-in from administration; library-wide policy, strategy or initiatives that provide direction for selection, acquisitions and materials processing related work; consortial efforts around selecting and cataloging international studies collections; and workflow for interdepartmental collaboration in acquisitions.

“Budget” consisted of responses that pointed to a lack of funding which, in turn, affected several aspects of distinctive collections operations including selection, acquisitions, processing and storage capacities, and staffing.

“Other” included responses that pointed to format limitation, namely, a lack of e-formats for mostly non-English titles, and subject and language expertise limitations.

Institutional Approaches to Diversifying Collections

Building and developing diverse collections is a complex undertaking that should be prioritized, mainstreamed, and incorporated into a library’s strategic direction. It is recognized that a sound collection development strategy articulated in a policy should be the guiding principle for collecting practices. To ascertain the presence of such policies, respondents were asked whether their institution had a collection development policy for distinctive collections. Forty-three of the seventy-seven responded in the affirmative. Further, when asked if the policy had an element that specifically addressed EDI collections, twenty-seven of the forty-three responded in the negative.

Distinctive collections processes span various library units collaborating for successful operations and service delivery. The study sought to establish the level of collaboration across units, specifically between special collections and international studies. Some level of collaboration was reported by forty-seven of the seventy-seven respondents. In a follow-up open-text question, respondents were asked to explain the nature of collaborations. Responses included shared funds and collaborative purchase decisions in some areas; occasional collaboration and consultation on the acquisition of materials in the areas for which there are designated subject experts in international studies with the subject expert often undertaking cataloging of material in that area acquired for distinctive collections; and transfer of materials from one type of collection to another (e.g., general to distinctive collections).

The study sought to establish the presence of designated entities (e.g., committees, task forces or persons) within libraries that can advise on collections decisions related to EDI. Of the seventy-seven respondents, twenty-two indicated presence; forty-five indicated no presence; and ten did not know. To further understand the nature of these entities, respondents were asked to explain the local context. Most respondents indicated that committees or task forces were newly formed, others indicated that it was an aspect of one or more positions’ responsibilities, while a few reported that it was a specific role. Specific responsibilities of the designated entities reported in the questionnaire included the creation of a consultative document regarding the selection processes for subject librarians; review of collections to assess gaps and imbalances; development of rubrics for evaluating library policies in relation

to diversity, equity and inclusion; reviewing of collections development policy and providing feedback; and managing funds for EDI collections.

The study further sought to document existing initiatives within distinctive collections that correlated with EDI values. Respondents were asked to state and explain these initiatives. The responses were analyzed and placed into four categories (see Table 5). A respondent's descriptions did not necessarily fit under a single category, therefore the number of responses totaled more than fifty-nine.

"Prescribed Collecting" consisted of responses in which organizations, through their strategic and priority planning, had designed positions, collecting, and processing priority areas, as well as directed action to accomplish desired outcomes in these areas. Twenty-four responses informed this area and included such initiatives as establishment of community-driven archives, African American Life and Culture, Latin American Cultural History and US Latinx Experience, LGBTQIA+ History and Experience, Women's History and Experience, digitization of culturally important materials, oral histories, and tribal law collections. To increase focus on underrepresented and marginalized groups in library holdings, respondents reported that their libraries had created positions with specific focus on EDI coverage, such as Community and Student Life Archivist and Archivist for the Black experience.

"Planning" consisted of elements of plan formulation at all levels from individual units to the institutional level. These included an institution's strategic directions dossier that speaks to EDI values as well as anti-racist initiatives; development of a library system statement; creation of framework for collection development; award of university-wide grants to fund library EDI initiatives; evaluation of past diversity, equity and inclusion acquisitions; discussions within committees related to collections to find a way forward; and planned collections audits to investigate efforts related to purchasing items which represent diverse perspectives. Additional responses included formulation of acquisition guidelines that promote representation and diversity; new and re-imagined collections diversity statements and plans; and language in policies that address collecting material reflecting diverse creators and histories long unaddressed in special collections. For example, redesigned donor and development policies at a university have allowed for the special collections unit to collect rare and unique books that foreground, in subject or association, the university's regional context, as well as communities which have been historically silenced through erasure from the historical record. Furthermore, another institution created a new three-year strategic plan with an emphasis on EDI as major components for collections assessment and building. A significant observation from responses to this question was the accelerated focus on formulation, redesign, and updating of collection development policies and frameworks by institutions to help center historically marginalized voices and groups.

"Examining and Re-imagining Practices" included responses that were concerned with new or different individual, unit, and institutional level efforts to address EDI in the collections development and management processes. Reported efforts included the establishment of acquisition funds in honor of Juneteenth; displays of new books for heritage months cel-

TABLE 5 Current Institutional Initiatives (n = 74)	
Current Institutional Initiatives	Number of Responses
Prescribed Collecting	24
Planning	22
Examining/Re-imagining Practices	15
Library/Collection-wide Collecting	13

celebrated on campuses; blog posts highlighting diverse collections across subjects; creation of digital collections; and utilization of EDI perspectives on approval plans. At the individual level, some selectors, in the absence of an institutional acquisitions policy, developed their own strategies for building more inclusive and diverse collections. In addition, institutions were considering expanding acquisition methods beyond approval plans (e.g., GOBI, especially for English titles). For one library's current priorities, a primary collecting area was "works by and about creators from historically underrepresented/marginalized populations including Indigenous, Latinx, Black, women, and LGBTQ+ creators." To be able to support this priority, a library embarked on purchase initiatives through various channels, such as conventions, festivals, and Kickstarters.

"Library/Collection-wide Collecting" consisted of responses that reported on new initiatives that focused on the library as a whole. Responses in this category included having a working committee on EDI in collections that produced featured blog posts highlighting diverse collections across subjects; implementing EDI perspectives on approval plans; increasing digital collecting capacity; and infusing EDI into priority areas for acquisition.

Discussion

A university's mission, vision, and strategic direction are major determinants of what libraries within it can do, since they operate within the larger university framework. As libraries envision their strategic direction, EDI values should be at its core. In this study, attempts were made to determine the relationship between acquisitions practices and building diverse collections, as well as to surface the tension between individual interpretations and collective considerations taking place in EDI collections building endeavors within ARLs.

Respondents largely acknowledged the heightened need for individual awareness and intentionality to collect in ways that prioritize peripheral knowledge, and support development of diverse collections. Libraries and librarians used a variety of approaches to increase their capacity to support diverse collecting and were keen to infuse EDI ideals into all areas of the collection building process. However, data pointed to the lack of collective institutional strategies and approaches towards doing this work. As such, there is a fundamental need for top-level management buy-in into EDI initiatives to enable adequate support for the entire workflow from selection, acquisition, and description, to discovery and delivery. This is also an opportunity for library administration and those with collection development responsibilities to align institutional collecting strategies and priorities.

Libraries must embrace and advocate for new ways of acquiring materials, including purchasing from less established sources, directly from creators, and the use of alternative modes of payment. Acquisition processes often reflect the dominant culture's values through the imposition of business procedures that privilege longer established organizations to work with libraries while inadvertently creating barriers for new, often underrepresented creators and publishers. To reduce these barriers, institutional collection development, acquisition, and procurement policies should be revised to make room for doing business with underrepresented, unconventional, and new entrant businesses.

Library personnel are the agents through which any idea, innovation, or change would be implemented or adopted within an organization. There is marked development of initiatives to train and equip existing personnel to enhance service delivery, while also creating positions and designing responsibilities that specifically require developing collections representative

of global diversity. Similarly, library leadership have a role to play in engaging and advocating for structural changes to institutional procurement practices that have historically been restrictive. The community of users can also enact change through demonstrating their needs and informing the demand driven collections building practices.

Conclusion

This is the first study to begin analyzing the collections framework by looking at the acquisitions infrastructure through the EDI lens, and by examining the impact of acquisitions infrastructure in building distinctive collections. Survey results revealed that library acquisitions processes in ARL institutions were varied, and that collection building initiatives have included individual, unit, and institutional collaborations. There was willingness to incorporate EDI ideals in the collection building lifecycle, yet the supporting systems and infrastructure including policies and funding appear to be under development. Furthermore, there is a need to create and iterate a better infrastructure for collection development activities that are reflective and responsive to all people, especially underrepresented populations. An infrastructure such as this would generate a more sustainable paradigm for collections programs and services, and would actualize a clearer feedback loop within the broader institutional acquisitions operation.

The collected data pointed to three main strategies that organizations should implement to support and enhance diversity of distinctive collections: 1. find ways to make it easier to acquire materials in terms of collection development and acquisitions; 2. to whatever extent possible, purchase as much, if not more, from newly and less established sources or directly from creators and creator-communities; and 3. secure top-level management buy-in into EDI collecting initiatives, and provide adequate support to library personnel and users.

Larger budgets do not necessarily equal diverse collections, and diversity is not a given simply because collections materials may be sourced abroad—especially if the perspective reflects only the colonial, mainstream, or dominant culture. In addition, there is a need to demystify the often invisible but established acquisition processes within libraries, and to reconcile the tension between existing workflows and procurement processes with EDI values to build more holistic acquisitions programs in support of intentional EDI collections building. To increase diversity in library collections, genuine interrogation of past and present acquisitions practices—to identify and correct structural and systemic barriers that have made collecting marginalized voices challenging—should persist and increase. This will result in difficult but necessary conversations, as well as in changes to, and the adoption of, new systems, policies, processes, and practices.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

A localized glossary of terms has been developed for the purposes of this survey.

- **Acquisitions:** purchase of resources where there is a financial transaction (for example, this would include collection building methods such as donations or loans where the institution pays for the shipping costs); OR library unit that facilitates the negotiations, licensing, ordering, receipt, and/or payment for purchased resources
- **Area/global/international studies:** research and scholarship pertaining to different regions, countries, cultures, and or languages of the world
- **Distinctive collections:** rare and unique holdings of archival, special, and/or area/global/international studies collections
- **IDEAS:** acronym for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social justice. There are a number of related acronyms, including DEIA, DEI, EDI, etc.²⁹
- **Selection:** choosing content that will be added to the library's collection; collection development

Appendix B: Survey

Acquisitions Practices in Distinctive Collections

Q00 Introduction This survey is intended for information professionals in Acquisitions, Archives, Area/Global/International Studies, Collection Development, and Special Collections whose responsibilities include purchasing materials for distinctive collections at their institutions. The survey's aim is to gather acquisitions practices that have been in place since 2009 across Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions and investigate how these practices influence building diverse collections. The survey aims to cover acquisitions practices from collection policy development to acquisition and thus asks questions regarding processes you may not be familiar with. Please do your best to respond using the information you are aware of.

Note regarding COVID-19: The COVID-19 global pandemic has disrupted budgets and operations in a variety of ways, there will be a question near the end of the survey focused on COVID-19's impact on the acquisitions practices at your institution that has not been addressed elsewhere in the survey.

Glossary of Terms This glossary has been developed for the purposes of this survey.

Q1 Demographics

- Name of your institution (1) _____
- Position/business title (2) _____

Q2 What is your primary area of responsibility at your institution?

- Acquisitions (1)
- Non-Acquisitions/Technical Services (2)
- Selector (area/global/international studies) (3)
- Selector (collection development/strategy) (4)
- Selector (special collections, rare books, archives, manuscripts) (5)
- Selector (scholarly communications) (6)
- Other (7) _____

Q3 How long have you been responsible for this area at your current institution?

- 0-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-15 years (3)
- >16 years (4)

Q4 Does your institution have a collection development policy for Distinctive Collections?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)

Q5 Does the Distinctive Collections development policy include any elements that support

Inclusive, Diverse, Equitable, Accessible and Socially Just collections?

- ☐ Yes (4)
- ☐ No (5)
- ☐ Don't know (6)

Q6 What are your institution's current Distinctive Collections-related initiatives that relate to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice? Please explain.

Q7 Does your institution have a designated committee or person within the library that can advise on collections decisions related to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Social Justice?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Don't know (3)

Q8 Please explain how the designated committee or person within the library has advised on Distinctive Collections' decisions related to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Social Justice?

Q9 Do area/global/international studies and special collections collaborate to build Distinctive Collections?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Sometimes (2)
- ☐ Never (3)
- ☐ Don't Know (5)

Q10 Please explain the nature of collaboration between area/global/international studies and special collections.

Q11 Are you primarily responsible for determining the scope of purchases in your areas?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Not applicable (3)

Q12 Do you engage dealers/vendors to seek out diverse collections?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Sometimes (2)
- ☐ Never (3)

Q13 Does your institution accept donations of materials for the purpose of

Sometimes (1) Never (2) Not Sure (3)

Building donor relationships? (1)	☐	☐	☐
Cultivating future monetary donations? (2)	☐	☐	☐

Q14 What is your level of agreement with the following statements at your institution?

Agree (1) Neutral (2) Disagree (3)

Area/global/international studies builds diverse collections. (1)	☐	☐	☐
Special collections builds diverse collections. (2)	☐	☐	☐
Institutional archives builds diverse collections. (3)	☐	☐	☐
There are resources to support Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social justice efforts in developing Distinctive Collections. (4)	☐	☐	☐
Obtaining collections ethically is important. (5)	☐	☐	☐

Q15 The following attributes factor into increasing diversity of Distinctive Collections.

Agree (4) Neutral (5) Disagree (6) Don't know (9)

Country of origin (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language (6)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creator's/author's identity (7)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creation/publication date (8)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Genre/topic/subject area (9)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vendor/dealer's business location (10)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vendor/dealer's expertise (11)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vendor/dealer's identity (13)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q16 Does your institution

Yes (1) No (2) Don't know (3)

Enforce conflict of interest verifications? (1)	☐	☐	☐
Enforce ethics laws? (2)	☐	☐	☐
Require purchase approval above a certain price point? (4)	☐	☐	☐
Have a requirement to verify the provenance of potential acquisitions? (3)	☐	☐	☐

Q17 With regard to the acquisitions and legal infrastructure at your institution, how strict is it to purchase new resources?

- ☐ Very strict (1)
- ☐ Strict (2)
- ☐ Not strict (3)
- ☐ Don't know (4)

Q18 Who makes decisions on collections budget allocations at your institution? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Library's Collections Development/Strategy (1)
- ☐ Library's Acquisitions (2)
- ☐ Library's Business/Finance Office (3)
- ☐ Library's Administration (5)
- ☐ Other (4) _____

Q19 Who negotiates collections contracts at your institution? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Campus Finance (1)
- ☐ Campus Legal (2)
- ☐ Library's Technical Services (e.g., Acquisitions, Electronic Resources) (3)
- ☐ Library's Collection Development/Strategy/Selectors (4)
- ☐ Library's Scholarly Communication/Intellectual Property/Copyright Office (5)
- ☐ Don't know (6)
- ☐ Other (7) _____

Q20 Who has signing authority for contracts, licenses, MOUs, deeds of gifts, etc. at your institution? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Library (1)
- ☐ Campus Finance (2)
- ☐ Campus Legal (3)
- ☐ Don't know (4)
- ☐ Other (5) _____

Q21 How aware are you of the following at your institution?

	Very aware (1)	Moderately aware (2)	Not aware (3)
Financial auditing check points (e.g., the individual making selection decision cannot place the order, the individual plac- ing the order cannot receive the item) (1)	o	o	o
Legal auditing check points (2)	o	o	o

Q22 How easy is it for you at your institution to

	Easy (4)	Difficult (6)	Don't know (7)
Add new vendors? (1)	o	o	o
Assess profiles of current vendors (e.g., access to current vendor file in the ILS or campus financial system)? (2)	o	o	o

Q23 Drag and drop the firm order methods you utilize to build Distinctive Collections from most used to least used. Only move the methods you utilize.

Drop methods in order of importance

- _____ Creators (1)
- _____ Book fairs (2)
- _____ Auctions (e.g., eBay) (3)
- _____ Rare materials/archives dealers (4)
- _____ Purchase trips (5)
- _____ Publishers (6)
- _____ Catalogs (12)

Q24 Drag and drop the acquisition methods you utilize to build Distinctive Collections from most used to least used. Only move the methods you utilize.

Drop methods in order of importance

- _____ Donations/Gifts (1)
- _____ Loans/Leases/Deposits (2)
- _____ Firm orders (3)
- _____ Approval/blanket plans (4)
- _____ Continuations (e.g., subscriptions, standing orders) (5)

Q25 As a selector, are you able to gather the following information after a collection or resource is acquired?

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)
Country of origin (1)	☐	☐	☐
Language (2)	☐	☐	☐
Creator/author (3)	☐	☐	☐
Creation/publication date (4)	☐	☐	☐
Genre/topic/subject (5)	☐	☐	☐
Vendor/dealer/supplier (6)	☐	☐	☐

Q26 Please reflect on how your institution does the following

	Agree (1)	Disagree (2)	Don't know (3)
Tracks funding that supports Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social justice values (1)	☐	☐	☐
Makes purchases from vendors who do not use English as their primary language of operation (2)	☐	☐	☐
Has a formal process for submitting order requests for Distinctive Collections (3)	☐	☐	☐

Has discontinued/never started business partnerships with vendors because they are not able to accept certain methods of ordering (4)	☐	☐	☐
Has discontinued business partnerships with vendors because they are not able to accept certain forms of payment (5)	☐	☐	☐
Has assigned selectors their own purchasing cards for collections purchases (6)	☐	☐	☐
Has allowed selectors to purchase up-front and seek reimbursements for collections purchases (7)	☐	☐	☐

Q27 There are institutional entities that support me in managing the following when building Distinctive Collections that reflect Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice

	Agree (4)	Neutral (5)	Disagree (6)	Don't know (7)
Fund allocations (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Campus auditing check points (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Negotiations (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Contracts (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Campus vendor files (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Acquisitions methods (6)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Payment methods (7)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q28 How open is your institution's

	Very open (8)	Open (10)	Not open (11)	Don't know (12)
Finance division to new purchasing practices? (e.g., Kickstarter) (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legal division to new purchasing practices? (e.g., Kickstarter) (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q29 How has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted your work?

Q30 What other challenges (not Covid-19 related) have you faced in acquiring materials for your Distinctive Collections that have not already been addressed in the survey?

Q31 In your opinion, what initiatives could be adopted to transform Distinctive Collections acquisitions to build Inclusive, Diverse, Equitable, Accessible and Just collections?

Q32 If you would like to participate in our focus group discussions, please provide your name and email.

o Name (1) _____

o Email (2) _____

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Notes

1. The preliminary results of this paper were previously presented at Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) on April 15, 2021, and the updated survey results of this paper were presented at Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) on June 22, 2022.

2. Joan M. Reitz, "Acquisitions," in *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (ABC-CLIO, 2013), https://products.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_a.aspx#acquisitions.

3. "Acquisition," in *Dictionary of Archives Terminology* (Society of American Archivists), accessed September 13, 2021, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/acquisition.html>.

4. The authors understand the criticism surrounding the term "Area Studies" and its connection to the Cold War. Because of it, the authors chose to utilize the term "international collections" throughout the article. For more information see Szanton, *The Politics of Knowledge*.

5. The intellectual exercise of collection development in selecting resources added to library collections heavily drives what gets purchased and, because this step immediately precedes acquisitions, the authors determined it would be worthwhile to also incorporate how the different roles and positions perceive acquisitions policies and practices.

6. For examples, see Education Committee of the Acquisitions Section, "Core Competencies for Acquisitions Professionals," Report (Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, May 2018), <https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/9058>.

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26. "Special Issue on Distinctive Collections."
27. Gordon B. Willis, "Introduction to Cognitive Interviewing," in *Cognitive Interviewing* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412983655>.
28. Creator refers to "individual, group or organization that is responsible for something's production, accumulation, or formation" <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/creator.html>.
29. The IDEAS framework was introduced for the purposes of the survey, but after analysis of the responses, the authors determined that accessibility and social justice components were not addressed, so instead utilized EDI for the article; these missing terms may be a focus for future study.