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Collection Development  
Term Paper

## **Educational and Documentary Video Collection Development: An Overview for Academic Libraries**

### **SCOPE**

Without exception, every authority on video collection development emphasizes the differences between collection development of print and video materials.

This brief overview of the topic of academic library video collection development includes discussion of policies, selection, and acquisition as they are unique to educational and documentary video collections. It is not a complete guide of all matters of collection development that relate to academic video collection. Rather it is intended as an informative guide for those already familiar with collection development of books. Areas where the collection development of books and videos are essentially the same have been excluded, namely community analysis, weeding, and collection evaluation.

Every attempt to use the most current sources on the subject was made, since both the video market and the existence of video in library collections have changed drastically since the advent of VHS. However, very little has been written about video collection development in the past decade, making the majority of material on the subject as obsolete as VHS has become.

For the purposes of this paper, video is moving images recorded on any tangible format currently available for purchase. The most common format is currently DVD, though some VHS is still available and Blu-Ray, having already secured a position in the feature films market, may soon make its way into the educational video market as well. Online streaming video, video on demand, and other video that is housed on servers require separate treatment that will not be attempted here.

## **VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM**

Few would argue that some things are best learned by seeing them in action. For visual learners, a good video will always be the preferred format over print. However, not all subjects lend themselves well to video, and not all videos present material in a way that is better than print. Evans and Sapanaro (2005) explained how the video format can enhance the presentation of information – or have no effect:

There are films in which there is no action, just ‘talking heads,’ or if there is motion, it may not be very relevant. In contrast, one can read hundreds of pages and look at dozens of still photographs of cell division and still not fully understand how it occurs... [video] can sometimes produce a more accurate understanding than one can achieve through hours of reading. (p. 205)

Though the value of movement may vary between individual titles on a given topic, one should still consider whether understanding of the subject is improved when presented as video rather than text or some other format.

Video is certainly being used for higher education instruction. Lillian Gerhardt asserts that “classroom use of videos in education institutions, elementary through graduate school, is the steadiest growing area of video use” (cited in Evans & Saponaro, 2005, p.215; and Slyhoff, 1993, p. 36). She attributes this growth in part to a younger generation of teachers who grew up with television and movies and society’s widespread view of video as a legitimate educational medium (Slyhoff, 1993, p. 36). Brancolini (2002) cites virtually identical reasons for the increasing use of video in higher education classrooms (p. 48). Video also has a place in research.

Though instructional use of video is common and virtually all academic libraries collect video to some extent, they “almost never build collections of motion media with the same intensity devoted to print materials” (Brancolini, 2002, p. 47-48). Whether it is the cause or effect, there is a clear link between this fact and the struggle to obtain regular and adequate funding of video collections.

Librarians collecting video in academic libraries should be prepared to advocate for funding of the collection.

## **COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES**

It is widely accepted that a separate collection development policy for video collection is an essential first step before beginning, expanding, or reorganizing any video collection (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2006, section 6.1; Brancolini, 2002a, p. 58; Scholtz, 2002, 247-248).<sup>1</sup> It is logical for a collection with different characteristics and challenges to have its own policies. According to Bergman, Peters, and Schomberg (2007), the “video policy should address the specific issues unique to non-print materials in relation to both content and format” (p.60). Scholtz (2002) makes the same point and adds that “a separate video selection policy is essential because it reinforces the library’s commitment to the medium” (p. 260). With its own policy, the video collection is more likely to be seen as a legitimate part of the library.

Walters (2003) provides an excellent summary of the necessary components of a video collection development policy as garnered from a variety of sources on the topic (p. 162):

1. Introduction and goals...
2. Overview of the collection and the community served
3. Scope of the collection...
4. Selection tools...
5. Evaluation criteria for video titles
6. Selection responsibilities and procedures
7. Copyright compliance and public performance rights
8. Handling of gift materials
9. Withdrawal and replacement
10. Preservation and storage
11. Policies for the reconsideration of challenged materials
12. Collection evaluation techniques and procedures
13. Related collections and cooperative collection development strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, it is a step that is often skipped: “Many academic library media centers do not possess a discrete collection development or selection policy” (Scholtz, 2002, p. 272).

Some components of a video collection policy are largely the same as a policy for print materials, but most sections will have entirely different content than the print counterpart. See Brancolini (2002a, p. 58-61), Scholtz (2002), and to a lesser extent Bergman et al. (2007, p. 60) for more information about creating a video collection development policy.

## **RESPONSIBILITY FOR SELECTION**

Though faculty members play a dominant role in video selection at many academic libraries (Brancolini, 2002a, p. 62-63; Scholtz, 2002, p. 272; Walters, 2003, p. 163), relying heavily on faculty requests should be avoided. Brancolini (2002a) reasons, "Faculty tend to have very narrowly defined subject interests; if given too much control over the process, they can skew the collection toward their academic specialty" (p. 62). Faculty input requests are certainly valuable, especially since discovering available titles can be a challenge, but librarians who specialize in video bring essential expertise to the selection process by evaluating the recommended purchases to determine whether they are in fact the best available.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (2006) guidelines state that "the selection of media resources materials should be the shared responsibility of librarians specifically charged with building the ... [video] collection and the subject selectors" (section 6.2). Brancolini (2002) elaborated on an earlier version of this guideline, explaining that format specialists are knowledgeable on issues with distributors, video evaluation, and video collection promotion (p. 63). Subject librarians also have their role, as they assist with content evaluation and are familiar with the needs of the academic departments they represent. Ideally, the video librarian would work closely with both the appropriate subject librarian and faculty member(s) in the selection process.

## **DISCOVERY OF AVAILABLE TITLES**

The best ways of discovering titles is through distributor catalogs (current titles), reviews (current titles), and, in some cases, directories and lists (retrospective titles). Though the use of distributor catalogs for discovery is a recommended practice, relying on the obviously biased information contained in them to make a selection decision is a poor choice. As Slyhoff (1993) stated, it is a “good idea to browse through [producer/distributor catalogs and brochures] ... to familiarize yourself with the company’s offerings. The descriptions are, of course, subjective but offer a good starting point” (p. 36). Unfortunately, reliable information about educational and documentary videos is scarce (Albitz, 2002, p. 343-344; Laskowski, 2004, p. 225; Scholtz, 2002, p. 250; Walters, 2003, p. 168).

Some academic video review resources do exist, namely *Video Librarian*, *Educational Media Reviews Online*, and – to a much lesser extent – *Booklist* and *Library Journal*. Some reviews on Amazon.com may be helpful as well. Unfortunately, with so few educational video review publications in existence, unbiased reviews for documentary and educational videos are hard to find, leaving selectors with few options for evaluating an item sight unseen (Walters, 2003, p. 163).

The few retrospective selection tools available are largely inadequate. However, when the available sources are used in combination, they can be quite useful (Evans & Saponaro, 2005, p. 216; Laskowski, 2004, p. 225). Listings and descriptions of available selection tools may be found in Albitz (2002), Bergman et al (2007, p. 61-62), Laskowski (2004, p. 221-225), Scholtz (2002, p. 250-251), and Slyhoff (1993).

## **EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF VIDEO**

Reviews, when they can be located, are an excellent way to decide if a title is worth pursuing further. The best way to evaluate a title is to personally view it. Many distributors will send a copy for preview at low or no cost. In addition, items may be requested via interlibrary loan.

When evaluating any video, it is important to assess the content of the work as well as the presentation. Mason-Robinson (1996) provides an excellent explanation of each factor to consider, represented in the outline below (p. 20-27).

- Content
  - Presentation of information
  - Organization
  - Script/dialog
  - Appropriateness for instruction or research
- Technical aspects
  - Visual presentation
  - Sound
  - Editing
- Applicability/usefulness

## **ACQUISITION OF VIDEO**

After issues of selection, the acquisition of documentary and educational titles is perhaps a video librarian's biggest challenge. The two largest issues are difficulty of verifying title information for an item and locating specific titles in order to purchase them.

The first challenge is verifying title information. Once a title is discovered in a review or some other source, the title must be confirmed for accuracy and the distributor determined prior to attempting to order it. Bergman et al. (2007) explains that "videos often do not have a clear author and there may be multiple videos with similar titles or even multiple versions of the same film" (p. 61). Further complicating matters, videos often do not have ISBNs (Bergman, Peters & Schomberg, 2007, p. 62; Laskowski, 2004, p. 221). Though there are some print directories that can assist with this process, frequent changes, including titles passing to new distributors, make the internet an excellent resource for verification. OCLC WorldCat is likely to have more up to date information than a print resource, but may also be out of date if changes are recent. See Walters (2003) for excellent advice for locating a distributor for a particular title (p. 165).

Why are we so concerned with identifying a distributor? The answer to that is the second major acquisition challenge. Unlike books, educational and documentary videos must often be purchased individually from many different independent distributors since most materials are not available through a jobber or vendor (Bergman, Peters & Schomberg, 2007, p. 62; Laskowski, 2004, p. 220; Walters, 2003, p. 165). This makes the purchase of video titles significantly more work intensive than book titles.

Other acquisitions issues to consider are pricing (institutional pricing, varying prices from different distributors, possible discounted price of replacement etc.) and performance rights issues.

## **PERFORMANCE RIGHTS**

Anyone who has ever looked at the price of documentaries and educational videos has inevitably noticed that they are often drastically more expensive than the feature films found on store shelves. While the latter is in the \$15-20 range, educational videos are often a couple hundred dollars or more. Though this is in large part due to the difference in market size – titles with a larger market are able to sell more copies, spreading production costs across a multitude of buyers, which results in a lower price per copy – performance rights may also be a factor (Evans & Saponaro, 2005, p. 216). The right to perform a work is reserved for the copyright owner, who may at his or her discretion extend that right to organizations or individuals, generally for a fee. Some titles are only available for purchase with public performance rights included, for others it is optional, and some cannot be purchased with rights.

Copyright laws reserve a number of rights for the creator of a work, the right of public performance being the most relevant to this discussion. Any time a video is played it is a performance of the work. The sticky issue becomes identifying exactly what constitutes a public performance. It is widely agreed that public performance rights are not necessary when a patron checks out a video to

view at home (home use) or when a video is utilized as a part of face-to-face instruction in the classroom<sup>2</sup> (Evans & Saponaro, 2005, p. 215; Handman, 2002, p. 288). Some activities are nearly universally regarded violations of copyright law when public performance rights have not been obtained, including any group showings open to the public, regardless of whether an attendance fee is charged. Campus movie nights, lecture series, and staff meetings are examples of such occasions.

Just as in the realm of books, copyright laws as they apply to video use are not cut and dry. For example, depending on one's perspective, viewing a library owned video at an individual viewing station within the library may be a violation of copyright laws if public performance rights have not been obtained. Some, especially copyright holders, view this as a violation whereas others, such as most librarians, perceive it as the same as an individual using any other material in house (Evans & Saponaro, 2005, p. 216; Handman, 2002, p. 289). That said, the use of individual viewing stations "has become an almost universal practice in academic libraries with video collections," perhaps because student use of such stations is seen as an extension of the face-to-face teaching exemption (Handman, 2002, p. 290).

Because of the high cost of obtaining public performance rights, it is important to determine whether there is a need for them. Public performance rights truly "are not required in most educational contexts" (Walters, 2003, p. 166; also Laskowski, 2004, p. 220). This is especially true if your library chooses to interpret copyright law to allow in house individual viewing of videos that do not have public performance rights. Luckily, the decision may be made on a title by title basis and rights (either one-time or ongoing) can usually be purchased at a later time should a public performance be required by contacting the copyright owner and negotiating a fee, or through a licensing agency. Agencies also provide blanket licensing options, allowing public performance of all titles by certain copyright holders (Evans & Saponaro, 2005, p. 216).

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<sup>2</sup> There are some restrictions to this face-to-face teaching exemption. See the "Exceptions for Instructors in U.S. Copyright Law" tool at <http://librarycopyright.net/etool/toolcovers.php> for assistance in determining whether an instance is eligible for exemption.



## FORMATS AND CHANGE

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, libraries were faced with a challenge unique to video collections. VHS video collections in academic libraries were widespread, if not universal (Brancolini, 2002a, p. 48). Libraries had invested significant funds into the building of VHS collections and into providing VCRs for on-site viewing of materials. In February of 1997 DVD was introduced in the United States (Brancolini, 2002b, p. 421). As more and more institutions and individuals acquired DVD players in early 2000s and the number of available titles continued to grow, libraries gradually responded by adding the new format to their video collections. However, many that the library served still relied on VHS well into the mid-2000s. This created a number of challenges. Do you purchase a VHS and DVD version of each new title? If so, for how long do you (or can you) continue to do this? Where will this new format be shelved? Do you purchase DVD replacements for your VHS titles? At what point do you weed out the VHS collection in favor of DVD? How will you fund the purchase of DVD players for on-site viewing? Perhaps because of these challenges, libraries were reluctant to make – and struggled with – the transition (Brancolini, 2002b, p. 426-429; Oder, 2005).

Discussing the transition from VHS to DVD in 2010 may seem like old news, but there are still lessons to be learned. Librarians are beginning to face the rising success of Blu-Ray<sup>3</sup> and streaming online video, both of which will challenge DVD as the dominant format. Other formats may emerge in the future. Librarians charged with video collection development must monitor current trends in the video market so they may anticipate upcoming challenges and be prepared to make decisions regarding the adoption of new formats and abandonment of old formats. As James C. Scholtz (2002) asserts, “Librarians and libraries need not be on the cutting edge of [video] technology, but they *do* need to keep

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<sup>3</sup> To read more on how libraries are responding to Blu-Ray, see Jeff T. Dick’s 2009 article “Bracing for Blu-Ray.”

abreast of technological trends and technological impact. They need to follow closely behind in adopting and practically applying emerging technologies once accepted by the mainstream” (p. 274).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to monitoring such trends, the video librarian must also monitor the needs and desires of the community the academic library serves. What format is preferred by your patrons? Are players for that format available to the extent that collecting the format makes sense? Since academic library video collections are likely to be used in the classroom, video librarians should be involved with, or perhaps lead, campus-wide discussions regarding format transition. A collection of Blu-Ray videos does no good if classrooms on campus are not equipped with Blu-Ray players and vice-versa.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Though very few sources addressing video collection development have been published in the past decade, there are some essential readings available. The most important work by far is Gary Handman’s *Video Collection Development in Multi-Type Libraries: A Handbook* (2002). This volume, contains the best articles on the topic written by a variety of experienced practitioners gathered together to create the most comprehensive video collection development resource created since the emergence of DVD. Though some of the information is dated eight years later, most of the core concepts remain relevant for anyone involved in collecting any type of video in any type of library. For the academic librarian collecting educational video, the following five chapters/articles will prove most useful:

- “Video Collections in Academic Libraries” by Kristine R. Brancolini
- “Developing Video Collection Development Policies to Accommodate Existing and New Technologies” by James C. Scholtz
- “Some Guidelines for Evaluation Non-Theatrical Videos” by Beth Benz-Clucas
- “The Rights Stuff: Video Copyright and Collection Development” by Gary Handman
- “Video Reference Tools and Selection Aids” by Rebecca Albitz

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<sup>4</sup> This point was later incorporated into the Association of College and Research Libraries “Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries” (2006, foreword).

The *Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2006) is an essential read. Though it is a set of guideline and not a how-to guide, it is an excellent framework for the development video collections and services.

“Video Collecting for the Sometimes Media Librarian: Tips and Tricks for Selecting, Purchasing, and Cataloging Video for an Academic Library” is one of the most current sources on the topic (Bergman, Peters, & Schomberg, 2007). Though the 21-page article is very brief compared to Handman’s book, it contains a treasure trove of information for the academic video librarian. Its conciseness, along with the authors’ spunky tone, makes it a very accessible read for those seeking a brief introduction to the collection development topics listed in its subtitle.

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