Defining Popular Culture Within the Academic Library

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http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/136345
Defining Popular Culture Within the Academic Library
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What is popular culture?
A collection area? Area of study? Research tool?
At U-M, popular culture materials may be:
- graphic novels
- computer and video games
- movies and television
- popular news and magazine sources
- popular fiction and non-fiction
- music
- in a variety of languages
- from all over the world
- online and print
- used by researchers in all disciplines
- diffuse
- all subjects, formats, and locations collected and processed by many people and in many different ways
- require a holistic approach

Research Project
How useful are patron requests in building pop culture collections?
Research project is a mixed methods approach
ILL and purchase request monograph requests were collected
Pop culture materials are manually identified and tagged
Results will be analyzed and reviewed against current acquisitions practice
Faculty will be interviewed to supplement the data

Lessons Learned
Popular culture is not part of any single individual's job duties, therefore sustainability requires active time commitment on part of organizers
Increased awareness among library staff of academic interest and activity related to popular culture, along with our collections strengths, and library's capability to respond to these campus needs

Next Steps
Build capacity for outreach and publicity activities related to popular culture materials
Continue to work across the organizational structure to identify opportunities for collaborative collection development
Work directly with faculty to support their popular culture needs

Environmental Scan
Identifies relevant academic departments (5 primary, over 20 other programs)
Overview of faculty and courses related to pop culture
Sampling of course titles
Identifies relevant primary and secondary sources

Discussion Group
Staff involved with selection, processing, reference, acquisitions, cataloging
Goal is to have common understanding of what we have across our library system - pop culture collections do not reflect our organizational structure
Topics include:
- highlighting sub-collections who is collecting what
- potential exhibits, activities and other ways to highlight pop culture materials
- collaborations
Special issues and problems discussed:
- processing and description challenges for unique formats (for example: mini-comics, cataloging by character)
- international acquisitions challenges
- purchasing challenges (non-standard vendors, ephemeral formats, volume of materials)
- cataloging (reclassification of materials)

Purchasing Decisions
More holistic approach (many heads involved)
How to move and process items across collections (for example: magazines moved from shorter term collections to longer term)
Active focus on purchasing pop-focused content (for example: EBSCO pop magazine archive)
Committing more funds to enable large purchases

How useful are patron requests in building pop culture collections?