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Evidence-Based Acquisition Practices of US Library Consortia: A Postprint Study

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Evidence-based acquisition (EBA) models are user-oriented and data-driven, supplemented by professional library analysis, which facilitates the optimized development of library collections. Therefore, practical research on library evidence-based acquisition models holds significant reference value. [Method/Process] This study introduces the evidence-based acquisition practices for e-books and multimedia resources in two U.S. library consortia, including operational methods, workflows, and practical outcomes, while analyzing common issues across these projects. [Results/Conclusion] Libraries implementing evidence-based acquisition models must adequately prepare data, conduct appropriate promotional activities, select suitable resource vendors, propose accurate and comprehensive usage statistics requirements, and make decisions based on multiple evidence sources. Additionally, this paper proposes development strategies for the EBA model in Chinese libraries.

Full Text

Preamble

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A Study on the Practice of Evidence-Based Acquisition in American Library Consortia

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The evidence-based acquisition (EBA) model is user-oriented and data-driven, supplemented by professional library analysis, which

facilitates the optimized development of library collections. Therefore, research on the practical implementation of EBA models holds important reference value for libraries. **[Method/Process]** This paper introduces the EBA practices of two American library consortia for electronic books and multimedia resources, including operational methods, processes, and outcomes, and analyzes common issues encountered in these projects. **[Result/Conclusion]** Libraries implementing EBA programs must prepare data adequately, conduct appropriate promotion, select suitable resource vendors, articulate accurate and comprehensive usage statistics requirements, and combine multiple forms of evidence for decision-making. The paper also proposes development ideas for the EBA model in Chinese libraries.

Keywords: evidence-based acquisition; Orbis Cascade Alliance; University of Colorado; consortium acquisition

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As user habits evolve, library collections have transitioned from print-only to a coexistence of print and electronic resources, with electronic resource usage far exceeding that of print materials. Consequently, electronic resource collection development has become a key focus of library resource construction. Over the years, library procurement methods for electronic resources have continuously evolved—from initial package purchases to later patron-driven acquisition and demand-driven acquisition (PDA/DDA), and then to evidence-based acquisition (EBA) proposed by D. Koufogiannakis [1] on this foundation. This progression has continuously advanced electronic resource collection development methods. The EBA model represents a timely, user-oriented library acquisition approach built on “wise evidence,” with decisions based on systematic, rigorous calculations and rational analysis that enhance the application of professional knowledge throughout the decision-making process, enabling optimal resource selection and better promoting library collection development [2]. The Nursing and Allied Health Resources (NAHRS) group under the American Medical Library Association, Texas A&M University Library, and Vancouver Island University Library have all applied this model to purchase electronic books. Generally, the specific operational model of EBA involves libraries first negotiating with vendors to establish an access period and budget amount, then providing readers with access to a certain quantity of resources. After the negotiated access period expires, libraries purchase resources up to the agreed budget based on the best evidence available, with library staff retaining final decision-making authority [3]. Under this model, readers can access a large volume of resources beyond what the library actually purchases, while ensuring that the resources ultimately acquired with permanent access rights are genuinely needed by the library.

A search of CNKI reveals limited research on the EBA model. Only Dang Hongli [2] introduced EBA practices at Texas A&M University Library and Vancouver Island University Library, recommending that libraries select appropri-

ate evidence-based methods according to their specific circumstances to ensure EBA effectiveness. Li Lu [4] et al. introduced the “Demand-Driven Acquisition of Monographs” recommended practice released by the National Information Standards Organization (NISO), noting that PDA/DDA models include automatic purchase, mediated purchase, and evidence-based acquisition. Automatic purchase refers to automatically triggering the purchase of permanent access to an e-book after user access or short-term loans reach a certain threshold. Mediated purchase means librarians intervene in purchase triggers based on usage data and pricing. Evidence-based acquisition emphasizes comprehensive librarian involvement in resource selection, organically combining librarians’ personal experience, library and information science expertise, reader information needs and expectations, library budget conditions, and current best practice research evidence—rather than relying solely on any single aspect for procurement decisions. Additionally, evidence selection should flexibly and diversely employ multiple forms of evidence and best evidence.

Since EBA represents a relatively novel model for literature resource construction, it has seen limited application and practice in libraries both domestically and internationally, with even fewer consortium-level EBA procurement practices. After extensive searches of foreign literature sources, the author obtained EBA practice cases from two library consortia (the Orbis Cascade Library Alliance and the University of Colorado Libraries consortium), including consortium-level procurement of electronic books and multimedia resources. These cases were selected for their representativeness and distinctive features. This paper compares and analyzes the EBA operational methods, processes, and outcomes of these two cases to explore the characteristics, commonalities, and unique aspects of EBA implementation, as well as existing problems, aiming to provide relevant references for the adoption and implementation of EBA models. Additionally, consortium procurement is widely applied in Chinese libraries, making research findings on EBA consortium acquisition models highly relevant for group resource procurement in Chinese libraries.

2. EBA Practices in American Library Consortia

2.1 Overview of the Two Library Consortia

2.1.1 Orbis Cascade Library Alliance The Orbis Cascade Alliance [5] is a library consortium comprising 39 academic libraries distributed across Idaho, Oregon, and Washington State. Its members represent highly diverse higher education institutions, including 7 community colleges, 17 private four-year universities, 14 public four-year universities (both large and small), and 1 health sciences institution. The Orbis Cascade Alliance provides information services to approximately 275,000 students and is funded through member dues. Consequently, the consortium’s procurement plans are constrained by library and university budgets.

2.1.2 University of Colorado Libraries Consortium The University of Colorado (CU), a first-tier American university founded in 1876, is one of the nation's renowned top-tier public university systems, with four campuses across Colorado: CU Boulder, CU Denver, CU Springs, and the Anschutz Medical Campus. Additionally, there are five independently managed libraries: University Libraries (Boulder), William A. Wise Law Library, Kraemer Family Library (KFL), Health Sciences Library, and Auraria Library. These libraries share a long tradition of shared licensing and cooperative procurement of electronic resources, with specific procurement work led by the Colorado Libraries Electronic Resources Team (CLERT).

2.2 Resource Types for EBA Projects

2.2.1 Electronic Books in the Orbis Cascade Alliance The Orbis Cascade Alliance's e-book model has evolved over time. The initial project aimed to create an e-book collection based on usage statistics, changing the previous situation where e-books could only be used within a single licensed campus, enabling all member libraries to access the collection. Overall, the alliance's e-book project has undergone three development phases. The first phase began in July 2011, using a demand-driven acquisition (DDA) model with book vendors and Yankee Book Peddler as bibliographic providers. The second phase, starting in September 2014, added a subscription model in partnership with Ebrary Academic Complete. The third phase, beginning in May 2016, implemented the evidence-based acquisition (EBA) model in cooperation with Wiley Publishing [6]. The alliance had a long-standing cooperative relationship with Wiley, trusted the quality of its books, and found the costs similar to Wiley's short-term loan and DDA programs, though the content of the candidate title pool had increased. Based on these advantages, the alliance selected Wiley as the pilot vendor for its EBA project.

2.2.2 Video Resources in the University of Colorado Libraries Consortium Based on evaluations and recommendations from each library, CLERT decided to establish a 9-month EBA project with the Alexander Street video database. While EBA projects typically run for 6 or 12 months, the team negotiated a 9-month term to reduce costs compared to a 12-month project while ensuring database resources remained available throughout the academic year. Alexander Street determined each library's participation cost based on its standard pricing model and considering previously purchased resources. All five University of Colorado libraries received access to the same content—approximately 43,000 video resources—and could select a certain number of videos for permanent access rights based on their participation costs at the end of the EBA project [7].

2.3 Project Preparation

2.3.1 Orbis Cascade Alliance The Orbis Cascade Alliance believed that fully presenting the candidate title pool content to readers was crucial for resource discovery and usage. Therefore, the alliance's library services platform uniformly managed Wiley e-books participating in the EBA project, with each member library able to access them through the discovery system. Metadata came from OCLC WorldShare and was imported into the alliance's library services platform Alma, with all bibliographic information displayed in Alma's Network Zone. All library users could access the resources through the Primo system, while duplicate records were processed to ensure usage statistics would not be disrupted.

2.3.2 University of Colorado Libraries Consortium For the University of Colorado Libraries consortium, establishing an EBA model for Alexander Street at the consortium level was highly challenging, primarily because member libraries had previously purchased some video content from this database, making deduplication a complex task. The Boulder branch had not purchased any video resources, so no deduplication was needed. The Auraria branch needed to deduplicate records of previously purchased Alexander Street video resources, while the KFL branch needed to deduplicate records of video resources purchased from other vendors. These deduplication efforts delayed the official launch of the EBA project by three months. Although database access was opened during this period, libraries did not provide sufficient data discovery conditions for readers, which to some extent resulted in insufficient usage during this phase and impacted subsequent evidence-based resource selection.

2.4 Data Statistics and Analysis

2.4.1 Orbis Cascade Alliance (1) Types of Usage Statistics Provided. Wiley e-books could provide usage statistics for individual libraries' purchased Wiley e-books, consortium-wide book usage statistics, monthly top 20 and top 50 most-accessed books, and usage statistics for each title.

(2) Existing Problems. Wiley e-books could not provide usage statistics for individual libraries within the consortium. Both the consortium and member libraries were not entirely clear about what types of usage statistics were needed at the project's outset. Additionally, time and effort were required to exclude usage statistics for already-purchased books.

(3) Results. The Orbis Cascade Alliance communicated with Wiley, which ultimately provided usage statistics for individual libraries to facilitate subsequent title selection.

2.4.2 University of Colorado Libraries Consortium (1) Types of Usage Statistics Provided. The Alexander Street usage platform could provide

both COUNTER standard reports and Alexander's own usage statistics. Reports in MR1, MR2, DB1, PR1, CR2, and CR3 formats were available, including statistics on subject theme play counts, play counts for each video within subject themes, video collection play counts, and play counts for each video.

(2) Existing Problems. During the project, contradictory usage statistics emerged. For example, KFL branch's June 2016 COUNTER usage report showed that most usage came from certain specific videos, yet the EBA usage report showed zero usage for these same videos.

(3) Results. Alexander Street's technical staff thoroughly investigated and resolved the relevant issues, extending the EBA project's access period to compensate for time lost due to initial delays and usage report malfunctions.

2.5 Project Outcomes

2.5.1 Orbis Cascade Alliance The Orbis Cascade Alliance's title selection criteria were based on three elements: each institution's high-usage titles (Top titles), titles most commonly used across institutions (Broadest Use), and high-usage titles with combined usage across all institutions greater than X (where X refers to a threshold based on the overall budget). [Figure 1: see original paper] illustrates the relationship between budget expenditure and Top titles and institutional usage numbers in the Orbis Cascade Alliance's Wiley e-book EBA project, presenting three scenario models involving different selection content.

Based on these criteria and corresponding results, the alliance ultimately selected Scenario 2b: selecting the top 7 most commonly used books at each institution (245 titles, accounting for 46% of the budget), then books used by six or more institutions (243 titles, accounting for 42% of the budget), and finally books with combined group usage exceeding 175 times (53 titles, accounting for 12% of the budget), totaling 541 selected titles. This method of analyzing overall usage and expenditure ensures that each branch library can permanently acquire books of greatest interest to their users, reflects the overall benefits and characteristics of the consortium model, and maximizes sharing of consortium selection outcomes.

Orbis Cascade Alliance Book Selection Strategy

Budget Percentage (%)	Number of Books	Selection Method Description
Scenario 2a		
40		Top titles at each institution (top 5 by usage)
40		Books used by 8+ institutions (excluding top 5)
20		Books with combined usage >101 times
Scenario 2b		
46		Top titles at each institution (top 7 by usage)
42		Books used by 8+ institutions (excluding top 7)
12		Books with combined usage >109 times

Budget Percentage (%)	Number of Books	Selection Method Description
Scenario 2c		
46		Top titles at each institution (top 7 by usage)
42		Books used by 6+ institutions (excluding top 7)
12		Books with combined usage >175 times

2.5.2 University of Colorado Libraries Consortium The University of Colorado considers that lower average cost figures generally indicate better financial benefits for a project. A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of around \$1 per use is a positive indicator of project success, and a positive return on investment (ROI) also represents a good return. For the entire University of Colorado EBA project, as of the end of April 2016, there was no positive cost-benefit analysis or ROI overall. However, both Auraria and KFL showed positive cost-benefit analysis and ROI during the same period. The libraries expected that cost-benefit analysis and ROI would become positive overall by the project's conclusion.

Additionally, the most surprising finding in the Alexander Street EBA project usage analysis report was that while many videos had significant usage at one or two branches, no single video had usage across all three branches, suggesting that each library's patrons may have overly dispersed video needs. This would make it difficult to sustain a consortium-level video EBA project. Nevertheless, discovering common interests and collection development patterns across campuses did help the consortium better understand how to purchase streaming media at the consortium level.

3. Analysis and Implications of Consortium EBA Projects

3.1 Common Characteristics

3.1.1 Learning Through Exploration Both consortia had limited understanding and experience with EBA projects before implementation, even expressing considerable concern about project outcomes, and encountered various problems during implementation. However, as projects progressed, libraries and resource vendors achieved relatively successful win-win cooperation. Libraries became increasingly clear about their statistical needs and engaged in productive communication with vendors, who could adjust and cooperate according to user needs in a timely manner. Ultimately, libraries selected needed resources based on multi-dimensional usage statistics, while vendors continuously improved their platform statistical capabilities and data provision capacity, providing strong technical support and personnel assistance for project implementation.

3.1.2 Selecting Familiar Partners For libraries, EBA projects represent a new undertaking. Before implementation, libraries tend to select familiar partners—first, because they understand and trust their resources, and second,

because mutual familiarity facilitates cooperation during the project, mitigating potential impacts from uncertainties associated with new procurement models.

3.1.3 Selecting Needed Resource Types and Procurement Models Before launching their EBA projects, both library consortia had experience with PDA/DDA procurement. Based on the desire to better understand overall user needs and preferences to improve collection development, these EBA practices selected resource types that were in demand across consortium members and had been previously acquired through PDA/DDA models. This approach aimed to achieve better control over collection development and precisely meet broad reader needs under the new procurement model.

3.1.4 Providing Usage Statistics for Each Member Library Although both libraries participated in EBA at the consortium level, understanding each member library's usage was also crucial. Therefore, during project implementation, both libraries required resource providers to supply statistics showing individual member library access to each resource, with unique identifiers for each member library in consortium usage reports. This demonstrates that in consortium procurement, it is essential to fully understand not only overall group usage data but also individual member library usage. Only on this basis can libraries better analyze usage commonalities and characteristics among member libraries, weigh them against overall group usage, and make optimal procurement decisions that support collection development.

3.2 Existing Problems

3.2.1 Insufficient Preliminary Preparation Before project launch, both libraries had inadequate understanding of EBA projects and lacked clear knowledge of what usage statistics vendors could provide, what statistics they actually needed, and the gaps between them—yet this is critical for project success. This insufficient preliminary preparation also led to problems during implementation, such as Wiley's inability to provide individual library usage statistics and contradictory usage statistics from Alexander Street. Although these issues were later resolved, they did affect the credibility of the "evidence" to some extent, lowered staff expectations for project effectiveness, and caused project delays.

3.2.2 Overly Single Evaluation Criteria A core difference between EBA and PDA/DDA is librarians' comprehensive involvement in resource selection. Both the Orbis Cascade Alliance and University of Colorado demonstrated a strong emphasis on usage statistics during implementation. While balancing overall budget constraints, they considered both group-wide usage and individual member library needs, making beneficial practices in balancing funding and usage demands. However, overall, librarians' proactive selection based on collection development direction was less evident. The evaluation criteria relying solely on usage statistics remain relatively singular and require continuous im-

provement to fully demonstrate the advantages of “evidence” plus “personnel” in EBA projects.

3.2.3 Consortium-Level EBA Projects Require Practical Testing Although consortium-level EBA projects facilitate sharing project outcomes while accommodating each branch’s needs, resources with relatively concentrated demands are more suitable for consortium-level EBA, better reflecting the advantages of consortium procurement. The Orbis Cascade Alliance was very satisfied with the results of its Wiley EBA project, believing that all expenditure was used to purchase books with permanent access rights that had consistently strong usage across member libraries. Their e-book procurement has developed into a long-term project that continuously builds core collections for member libraries, with plans to continue EBA projects with more vendors beyond Wiley.

In contrast, the University of Colorado’s Alexander Street EBA project usage analysis revealed that no single video had usage across all three branches, which would reduce the project’s cost-effectiveness and ROI. Consequently, the University of Colorado did not continue the EBA project after its first year, instead choosing to have each branch individually order multimedia resources. Comparatively, the Orbis Cascade Alliance’s implementation of the Wiley EBA project was more successful than the University of Colorado Libraries consortium’s Alexander Street EBA project.

3.3 Practical Implications

3.3.1 Need for Adequate Data Preparation Although loading resource MARC records onto library management platforms and deduplicating them, as well as analyzing usage report data, are not overly difficult for librarians, EBA projects often require deeper librarian involvement and continuous management of the candidate title pool to ensure users can discover content and have their needs reflected in usage data. Therefore, preliminary data processing, including deduplication and import, is a prerequisite for ensuring smooth project implementation. Ideally, a dedicated person should monitor and analyze data to support subsequent evaluation and decision-making.

3.3.2 Need for Appropriate Promotion As the EBA projects neared conclusion, branches in both consortia expressed concerns that delays in loading MARC records and lack of promotional activities might result in lower-than-expected resource usage. This reveals that EBA project content must be appropriately promoted to be fully utilized by readers and generate comprehensive usage statistics for reference. This is particularly crucial given that full EBA project content is only accessible for a limited time.

Beyond promoting new resources and collections, libraries should also consider how to align faculty and student expectations. Although EBA projects provide access to large resource volumes, patrons may still have additional needs.

Libraries must also consider the aftermath of providing extensive resource access within limited timeframes—if libraries cannot purchase all accessed content, much of it will become unavailable after the EBA project concludes, which must be clearly communicated to patrons during promotion.

3.3.3 Need to Select Suitable Resource Vendors Before launching their EBA projects, both libraries carefully considered which partners to work with, evaluating service capacity, service levels, cooperative foundation, and platform statistics quality. Selecting suitable resource vendors is crucial for EBA project success, including vendor cooperation during the project, problem resolution, and alleviating concerns associated with new procurement models.

3.3.4 Need to Articulate Accurate and Comprehensive Usage Statistics Requirements Before examining what usage statistics vendors can provide, libraries must have clear requirements for the usage statistics needed to implement EBA projects and support decision-making. They should then analyze what information can be extracted from vendors' reports, identify deficiencies and problems, communicate with vendors, and request provision of needed statistics. Only when statistical data meets requirements should EBA projects formally launch; otherwise, problems like those encountered by these two libraries may arise—inability to provide individual branch usage reports or contradictory usage statistics. As the saying goes, “To do a good job, one must first sharpen one's tools”—comprehensive and detailed usage statistics are the essential tools for implementing EBA project outcomes.

3.3.5 Need to Combine Multiple Forms of Evidence for Decision-Making Evidence-based acquisition provides effective support for scientific collection development. EBA requires long-term management of the entire procurement process and resource usage, as well as continuous tracking of collection layout and user experience. Completion of procurement does not mean libraries stop collecting and analyzing various forms of evidence. This model emphasizes the integrity and dynamism of library management, making it more scientific and sustainable. While usage data generally comes from database vendors' statistics platforms, relying solely on usage data is not optimal evidence for EBA. Combining data evidence, research evidence, and experiential evidence maximally ensures that procured resources truly represent user needs. Therefore, beyond multi-dimensional analysis of usage data, EBA also requires guidance from collection development policies. Electronic resource collection development policies refer to systematically documented policy files that regulate the development, selection, use, management, and evaluation of library electronic resources [8]. These policies involve principles, standards, and regulations regarding electronic resource selection, purchase, use, and evaluation, and incorporate librarians' selection experience and multiple forms of evidence to make the most objective and accurate procurement decisions.

3.3.6 Development Ideas for the EBA Model in Chinese Libraries

Consortium procurement is widely applied in Chinese libraries, making EBA consortium procurement model 实践经验 highly relevant for group resource procurement in China. The Digital Resource Acquisition Alliance of Chinese Academic Libraries (DRAA) was jointly initiated by several Chinese university libraries and consists of member libraries, a board of directors, and a secretariat. The alliance's mission is to unite and cooperate in digital resource procurement, standardize group procurement behavior, and secure optimal prices and best services for member libraries [9]. DRAA is primarily responsible for negotiating database consortium procurement plans and providing related group procurement services, with its database consortium procurement plans serving as implementation standards for various universities purchasing publisher electronic resources.

In annual DRAA training week user satisfaction survey reports, users consistently rate highly the consortium procurement model of joint selection and group sharing, considering it economically efficient with broad user resource access. For example, ProQuest's PQDT dissertation full-text database consortium plan belongs to this procurement model. The characteristics of group EBA models precisely meet user needs, and Chinese libraries have an extensive foundation in consortium procurement—this provides fertile ground for implementing group EBA models.

As electronic resource construction deepens, Chinese universities' demand for e-books has increased significantly. However, e-book products face challenges including difficult procurement decisions, single procurement models, platform incompatibility, inflexible pricing schemes, and long-term preservation mechanisms. Consequently, DRAA currently has few e-book consortium procurement plans, mostly subscription packages or outright purchase bundles. Yet e-books are resource types of great concern and demand for all libraries, and the subscription and bundle models are increasingly unsuitable for refined resource selection needs—a small number of books account for most usage, conforming to the “80/20 rule,” while many books have zero usage, resulting in inefficient utilization of literature resource construction funds [10]. It is recommended that DRAA explore the EBA procurement model starting with e-book EBA projects. This would address urgent needs in library resource construction, maximize the advantages of EBA projects, align with literature resource procurement development trends, break through single procurement models, better promote library collection development, and achieve optimal resource selection.

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Research on Evidence-Based Acquisition Program Management Within Two Library Alliances in the USA

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] The evidence-based acquisition model is user-oriented and data-driven, supplemented by professional library analysis, which facilitates the optimal choice of resources and can better promote the development of library collections. Therefore, it is of great reference and guiding significance to understand and study the practical experience of evidence-based acquisition models. [Method/process] This paper introduces the use of evidence-based acquisition models by two library alliances in the United States to purchase electronic books and video resources at the group level, including operational methods, processes, and results, and also analyzes the common problems of the project. [Result/conclusion] Library evidence-based acquisition programs need to make data ready for work, have appropriate propaganda promotion, choose a suitable resource supplier, come up with accurate usage statistics requirements, and combine multiple evidences to make decisions. It also puts forward the development idea of EBA model in Chinese libraries.

Keywords: evidence-based acquisition; Orbis Cascade Alliance; University of Colorado; alliance acquisition

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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