Partnership
Canadian journal of library and information practice and research
Revue canadienne de la pratique et de la recherche en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information

Dealing with Unwanted Donations: A Content Analysis of Small Academic Canadian Library Webpages
Gestion des dons non-désirés : une analyse de contenu de sites Web de petites bibliothèques universitaires canadiennes

Paula Cardozo

Citer cet article

Cardozo, P. (2022). Dealing with Unwanted Donations: A Content Analysis of Small Academic Canadian Library Webpages. *Partnership*, *17*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v17i1.6300

Résumé de l'article

Alors que les archives et les collections spéciales continuent d'accepter des ressources uniques et précieuses, les petites bibliothèques universitaires peuvent avoir du mal à gérer des offres de dons destinées à leurs collections principales. Il est nécessaire d'être sélectif compte tenu de la chute du nombre de prêts de la collection physique, de l'augmentation de la charge de travail du personnel et des restrictions d'espace. De plus, les budgets limités pour l'achat de ressources récentes et populaires peuvent être contraints par le coût plus élevé pour traiter le matériel donné. Ces pressions sont aggravées par les donateurs potentiels qui cherchent un foyer pour les items dont ils ne veulent plus, par la perception que les petites bibliothèques universitaires ont besoin de tous les dons, et par un manque de compréhension des qualifications et de l'expertise du personnel des bibliothèques universitaires. Une communication claire et des lignes directrices révisées régulièrement peuvent contribuer à décourager les dons non-voulus de manière à ne pas aliéner nos usagers. Cet article fournit une analyse de contenu de pages Web sur les dons des petites bibliothèques universitaires canadiennes afin d'identifier les tendances et de fournir un soutien aux bibliothèques qui révisent leurs propres politiques et procédures dans le but de gérer les attentes des donateurs.

Dealing with unwanted donations: A content analysis of small academic Canadian library webpages

Gestion des dons non-désirés : une analyse de contenu de sites Web de petites bibliothèques universitaires canadiennes

Paula Cardozo
Professional Librarian
University of Lethbridge
paula.cardozo@uleth.ca

Abstract / Résumé

While archives and special collections continue to welcome unique and valuable resources, small academic libraries can struggle with how to manage donation offers intended for their main collections. There is a need to be selective considering falling print circulation, workload increases for library personnel, and space restrictions. Additionally, limited collections funds needed for more current and higher-demand resources can be strained by the higher processing costs of donated materials. These pressures are compounded by prospective donors seeking a home for items they no longer want, a perception that small academic libraries need all donations, and a lack of understanding about the qualifications and expertise of academic library workers. Clearly communicated and regularly reviewed guidelines can help discourage unwanted donations in ways that lessen alienating our patrons. This article provides a content analysis of donations webpages from small academic libraries in Canada to identify trends and provide support for libraries reviewing their own policies and procedures in an effort to manage donor expectations.

Alors que les archives et les collections spéciales continuent d'accepter des ressources uniques et précieuses, les petites bibliothèques universitaires peuvent avoir du mal à gérer des offres de dons destinées à leurs collections principales. Il est nécessaire

d'être sélectif compte tenu de la chute du nombre de prêts de la collection physique, de l'augmentation de la charge de travail du personnel et des restrictions d'espace. De plus, les budgets limités pour l'achat de ressources récentes et populaires peuvent être contraints par le coût plus élevé pour traiter le matériel donné. Ces pressions sont aggravées par les donateurs potentiels qui cherchent un foyer pour les items dont ils ne veulent plus, par la perception que les petites bibliothèques universitaires ont besoin de tous les dons, et par un manque de compréhension des qualifications et de l'expertise du personnel des bibliothèques universitaires. Une communication claire et des lignes directrices révisées régulièrement peuvent contribuer à décourager les dons non-voulus de manière à ne pas aliéner nos usagers. Cet article fournit une analyse de contenu de pages Web sur les dons des petites bibliothèques universitaires canadiennes afin d'identifier les tendances et de fournir un soutien aux bibliothèques qui révisent leurs propres politiques et procédures dans le but de gérer les attentes des donateurs.

Keywords / Mots-clés

donations, collections management, small academic libraries, Canada; dons, gestion des collections, petites bibliothèques universitaires, Canada

Introduction

It began with a casual remark at lunch time in the staff room. When I was the donations coordinator at my previous institution, a library technician mentioned, "I don't think any of the books from that big donation you took a few years ago have gone out." The observation became a question that was answered with a review of circulation statistics when I returned to my desk. She was right. The large donation of older social sciences monographs I had been pressured to accept when I was new to my position had not logged a single checkout or in-house use. The time I spent evaluating each title represented a fraction of the hours put in by multiple staff members checking the list against the catalogue, generating a tax receipt, processing, and cataloguing each individual item. The funds expended could have been directed to the backlog of recently published resources requested by our faculty, which would have presumably been more likely used by patrons. Faced with a growing number of donations offers, pressure to acquire new items with a smaller collections budget, and a finite number of staff members with workload pressures of their own, I started to wonder how other small academic libraries were dealing with unwanted donations.

In 2017, Empey, a librarian at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), published a content analysis on the donations webpages of twenty-one Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) members. As CARL members tend to be large, research-intensive libraries, I decided to apply relevant elements of her study to my questions about how small Canadian academic libraries deal with unwanted donations. Are there trends that can be identified by reviewing their donations webpages? Are they asking for monetary donations instead of gifts-in-kind? Are they placing moratoria on donation acceptance? Are there diplomatic ways they communicate their needs and limitations to the public? In an attempt to answer these

questions, I embarked on an exploration of unwanted donations literature and a review of donations webpages at small academic libraries in Canada.

Literature Review

Along with the growth of electronic publishing, other contemporary realities like shrinking budgets and limited human resources in libraries have impacted donations; however, it is surprising how little the discourse around unwanted donations changed over the decades. In fact, libraries have long been concerned with unwanted donations, with Bybee stating in 1999, "Today gifts are received with increasing misgivings" (p. 16). In 1988, Nelson described the need to formalize and regularly revise their procedures at the Brigham Young University Law Library as "experience proved that hordes of donated material can detract from library collection development goals and take up valuable space and time" (p. 54).

While acknowledging the critical role that donations played in collection development in the founding of many early American libraries, Carrico (1999) pointed out that the previous practice of accepting everything offered has given way to more careful consideration due to time, space, and need. This recognition of the benefits of past donation acceptance weighed against current offers has been echoed elsewhere in the literature (Bishop et al., 2010; Canevari de Paredes, 2006; Emanuel, 2014).

Academic libraries have become more selective with an emphasis on developing unique collections to serve the specialized needs of their own scholarly communities (Thomas, 2012). Thomas and Shouse (2014) declared we should not be "dumpsites for peoples' used books" and lamented the lack of "relevant materials" on offer (p. 63). Williams (2014) was even more blunt when he declared his "love affair with free books has waned almost to the point of dread" (p. 1). Edem's (2010) multiyear study of 2,462 volumes donated to the University of Calabar Library led to the observation that some resources, such as romance novels, "seem to have been made with little application of critical judgment" and their redistribution to more appropriate organizations impacted the library's "staff time, labour and handling costs" (p. 75). Great care must be taken with donations, as gifts can be both a blessing and a curse in academic libraries (Emanuel, 2014; Gregory, 2011; Norris, 2002). Sturges and Gastinger (2014) wrote that "refusal is often good librarianship," yet stressed the need for tact when doing so (p. 38).

The psychology on both sides of the donation conversation can be difficult to navigate. On a personal level, the pressures placed on library personnel to accept unsolicited donations are fraught with complex emotional responses (Buis, 1991). When faced with the need to declutter or downsize, well-meaning donors may find the thought of simply discarding books unthinkable and instead wish to save them by depositing their collections in a library (Emanuel, 2014). In some cases, an individual's library can take a lifetime to build, and some donors may interpret a refusal of their gift as a personal or professional rejection (DeWitt, 1989). Library personnel can likewise be offended by potential donors' "attitude toward the missions of the academic library and their professional activities" (Korolev, 2002, p. 91). Denning (1999) explained that "well-meaning donors, thinking every book is valuable to any library, often fail to realize how

marginal their gifts may be; while others simply wish to unload unwanted books and perhaps take a tax deduction" (p. 1).

Academic libraries also face internal institutional pressure to accept donations based on the misconception that book donors are likely to become cash donors (Canevari de Paredes, 2006; Thomas & Shouse, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2015). Dickinson (1997) pulled no punches when he observed:

> There is little published information on the economics of gifts-in-kind to libraries, and librarians, for the most part, are not well acquainted with even such information as available. Fundraisers in the development office usually know even less. Often, therefore, librarians are pressured to accept gifts-in-kind that they neither want nor need in order to serve the "greater good" of institutional fundraising. (p. 4)

He went on to explain that the library must have authority over gifts-in-kind because the entire burden of the donation typically is borne by the library. Given the institutional politics that can come with donations, it is perhaps not surprising that Gregory (2011) declared, "Gifts can be one of the trickiest aspects of collection development" (p. 50).

Because donations can be so complex, it is a worthwhile practice to assign authority to one person who is publicly identified on the library's website and who has collections knowledge, experience, tact, and decisiveness (DeWitt, 1989; Empey, 2017; Gregory, 2011). This person not only liaises with donors but also coordinates the process in-house by working with support staff and subject specialist librarians (Thomas & Shouse, 2014). Saying no to a community member can be difficult enough, but rejecting gifts from faculty colleagues is even harder. Nevertheless, a cost-benefit analysis conducted by Ballestro and Howze (2005) of a 906 book offer from their Economics department revealed an 89% overlap with the library's holdings that resulted in only 189 additions to their collection, and they urged librarians to be "aware of the costs, as well as the benefits, before offering to take an unsolicited collection off the department's hands" (p. 61). When one must reject an unsuitable donation, it is advisable to provide the donor with an alternate organization to approach, such a public library that accepts the materials on offer or a charity that redistributes the resources (Bostic, 1991; Fischer, 2007).

In addition to the International Federation of Library Association's (2008) guidelines for gifts, the literature provides advice for streamlining donations with an emphasis on clear policies and regularly reviewed procedures to benefit both library users and employees (Cassell et al., 2008). To help frontline staff members, DeWitt (1988) wrote that policies can be "shields that offer protection from assertive donors" (p. 361). In her content analysis of the donations webpages of the twenty-one English language member libraries of the CARL, Empey (2017) pointed out the importance of local considerations and found that libraries' donation websites were quite consistent in terms of "clear contact information, details about the screening process, examples of unacceptable material, a statement of transfer of ownership to the library, and some form of donor acknowledgement" (p. 12).

Research Method

Discussions about dealing with donations have been occurring for a long time; however, there is a gap when considering small academic libraries. With an emphasis on aspects of unwanted donations, I used relevant elements of Empey's (2017) study of larger libraries as a guide when I embarked on my initial readings of the donations webpages of small Canadian academic libraries. Sections I borrowed from Empey included monetary donations, the screening process and appropriate resources, costs related to donations, tax receipts, and unsolicited donations. Additional sections that revealed themselves and were added in subsequent re-readings focused on preambles and alternative recipients for donations.

In November of 2019 I consulted the Universities Canada "Enrolment by University" webpage to identify libraries serving student populations under 10,000. I visited the library websites to gather information posted for potential donors. I concentrated on donation offers intended for the main collections as opposed to archives or special collections. I cannot read French and had to exclude 10 libraries, mostly in Quebec. I was unable to locate any donations information on 11 library websites. One library was excluded because it was governed by the donations policy of a parent library that is included in this study. Two others were excluded because the donations information was a small part of the main collections policy and were not stand-alone policies. I also decided to exclude three libraries that collect for their own book sales and the resources were not being evaluated for inclusion in their collections. I was left with 30 English library donations webpages (Appendix A).

For the included libraries, I visited their donations webpages to read the information they are providing to potential donors. There were several common components that either tacitly or explicitly attempted to manage expectations about the process including moratoria, preambles, a preference for cash donations, information about unsolicited drop-offs, the screening process, inclusion and exclusion lists, costs to libraries, tax receipt information, and alternatives for either the library or the donor.

Some of the more obvious categories, such as mentions of moratoria or unsolicited drop-offs, were pre-selected prior to analysis based on Empey's study; however, other topics were more subtly related to unwanted donations and emerged during subsequent readings such as preambles and alternatives for donors. This necessitated additional manual readings of each website. Fortunately, copies of the text of each website were made in November of 2019, as donations website information can change. I created an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of each website, the sections, and my notations.

Results

Moratoria

Of the 30 donations webpages I visited, 20% (n=6) had either a moratorium on donations or exceptionally restrictive acceptance criteria that discouraged most offers from prospective donors. While one moratorium appeared to be permanent, the

remaining five implied the situation was temporary. Five of the six libraries indicated that they would continue to consider "significant" gifts.

Preambles

It is common for the library donations webpages reviewed to include a preamble. Typically, this is a short entry that attempts to set the tone for the process. Thirty-six percent (n=11) implicitly discouraged unwanted donations by highlighting selection criteria in this introduction. Some also recognized the generosity of donors or the positive impact of previous donations (23%, n=7). When it came to selectivity, a common component was the explanation of how library donations should be relevant to the university's teaching and research needs (36%, n=11). Some preambles addressed duplicates by referring to existing collections (17%, n=5), appealed for cash donations (13%, n=4), discussed costs to the library or space limitations (10%, n=3), or encouraged potential donors to contact the library first (7%, n=2).

Figure 1

Preamble components on library donation webpages
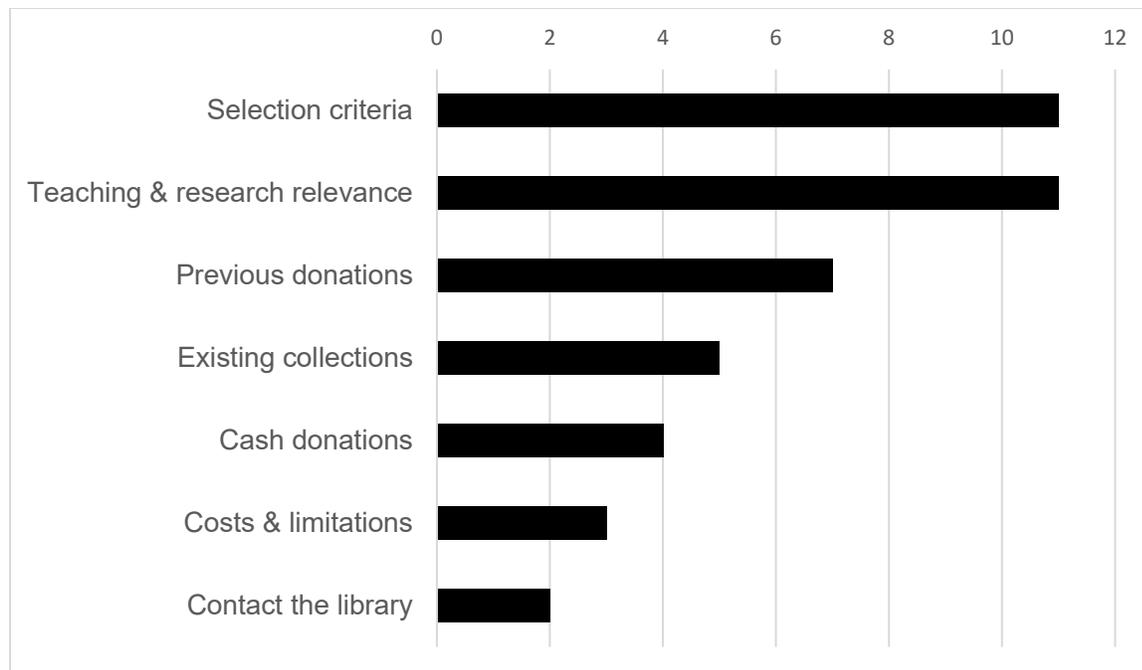
Unsolicited Donations

Of the 30 donations webpages I visited, only 13% (n=4) explicitly discouraged drop-offs by using the word "unsolicited." They made it clear that these donations would either be refused or that the library bore no responsibility or liability for resources that had not received prior approval. On the other hand, 33% (n=10) of libraries requested donors contact the library first, perhaps a more inferred way of discouraging unsolicited

resources. Sixteen percent (n=5) of libraries would accept unsolicited drop-offs based on the size of the offer, with limits ranging from 20 to 100 books.

Cash Donations

Fifty percent of the libraries (n=15) asked for monetary gifts on their donations webpages, typically near the top of the page. Most of the libraries cited the need to use the money to buy library resources; however, others cited digitization projects, renovations to existing spaces, and archives. Eleven of these 15 libraries directed potential donors to their university advancement or equivalent department.

Screening Process and Appropriate Donations

A common component of donations webpages is a description of the screening process and details on appropriate resources. Seventy-seven percent (n=23) of the libraries discussed the screening process. Typically, they requested donors provide an itemized list for each book, often asking for the title, author, date, and place of publication. A few only required a list if the donor was interested in a tax receipt, while others based the need for a list on the size of the donation. For libraries not requesting a list, they encouraged the donor to contact a specific librarian to discuss whether or not the library was interested in the items on offer. It was more common for the webpages to list resources they do not want (70%, n=21) than what they do (30%, n=9). Twenty-seven percent (n=8) of libraries specified both unwanted and acceptable resources. It was also typical to point out that donated books meet the same selection criteria as new purchases as mandated by a main collections policy.

Costs of Accepting Donations

Sixty percent (n=18) of the library donations webpages visited included information for the donor on the costs of accepting donations to the receiving library. In some cases this information was quite lengthy as the libraries attempted to correct the assumption that donations are free. Standard limitations cited were processing costs, staff time, and a lack of space. Some libraries pointed out that a donated book can be more expensive than a new purchase due to the extra time needed to screen, process, and catalogue.

Alternatives for the Library or for the Donor

Sixty-three percent (n=19) of libraries discussed alternate recipients, either for the library or the donor. Libraries used it as an opportunity to reiterate that they become the sole owner and reserve the right to determine retention or disposal, as recommended by the IFLA guidelines (Cassell et al., 2008). Common alternatives for the libraries were discarding, recycling, book sales, sending resources to charities, or recommending other libraries that may be better suited to accept the offer. Donors were encouraged to seek out other charities or speak to the donations coordinator as alternatives.

Tax Receipts

Tax receipts were discussed on 77% (n=23) of the 30 donations webpages. One of the libraries that instituted a moratorium stated they would take books for their sale but no tax receipts would be issued. Regarding tax receipts, 67% (n=20) indicated they issued them; however, two explained that receipts would only be completed for significant donations, with one citing a minimum of $10,000. The other 30% (n=10) of libraries stated minimum amounts that ranged from $10 to $100. Half of these libraries set their minimum amount for the issuance of a tax receipt at $100.

Discussion

Moratoria

A notable finding was 20% (n=6) of the small academic libraries donations pages communicated either a moratorium or acceptance criteria so restrictive as to discourage most donation inquiries from the outset. One moratorium appeared to be temporary while the library was dealing with a backlog of donations while also preparing for a move. A common feature was to include information about gifts of special significance that would still be considered by the library. For example, the library donations page at Bishop's University (n.d.) stated, "Until further notice, the Library will not accept gifts of books, journals and other items. However, the library may accept items of local significance for our Eastern Townships Collection" (para. 1). This language provides the library with flexibility to consider relevant gifts perhaps better suited to Archives or Special Collections; however it does not imply unconditional acceptance or encourage unsolicited drop-offs. It sets the stage for the donations process as a consensual exchange between the *prospective* donor and the library.

Preambles

The preambles on the donations webpages I analyzed were particularly telling. They provided both a glimpse into each individual library's circumstances while collectively telling a larger story about how small Canadian academic libraries are managing gift offers.

In terms of tone, the recognition of past gifts while setting expectations on future donations was perhaps more tactful than an outright refusal: "The generosity of donors has helped UNB Libraries, over its long history, to build strong collections in support of the University's research and instructional mission. The Library encourages and appreciates appropriate donations" (University of New Brunswick Library, n.d., para. 1). In this case, the word "appropriate" does the heavy lifting as it attempts to remind potential donors that their gift must be suitable to the specific needs of an academic library. This is a sound strategy for libraries dealing with well-meaning donors who do not initially understand why their gifts are not welcomed with open arms.

The preamble is the earliest and best opportunity to manage donor expectations, educate patrons on the active nature of collection development, and reinforce that an offer is not a foregone conclusion, but the start of a conversation:

> The TRU [Thompson Rivers University] Library's mission is to advance inquiry, discovery and engagement by providing the TRU Community with quality resources, services and technologies to support teaching, learning and research. The Library welcomes inquiries regarding donations of academic materials, monetary gifts and other gifts-in-kind that extend, complement and support the current teaching and research programming at TRU. (Thompson Rivers University Library, n.d. para. 1)

The challenge is to concisely communicate donations realities in a friendly yet firm tone in the first paragraph while one has the reader's attention. Many of the preambles did this in a relatively uniform fashion, which is not surprising as we tend to consult others' policies when writing or revising our own. While only 13% (n=4) of libraries mentioned cash donations in their preambles, it will be interesting to see if this trend increases in the future, particularly in provinces that have had their higher education budgets slashed.

Unsolicited Donations

As with preambles, the tone around unsolicited donations is worthy of discussion. From the literature, my own professional experiences, and conversations with colleagues, I know that unsolicited donations are an issue; however, they were not mentioned in most of the donations webpages I visited. Only 13% (n=4) discouraged unsolicited donations. Some may wonder why libraries are not more explicit, but in our desire to create welcoming environments and encourage engagement, we know it is counterproductive to offend our communities.

Nevertheless, the number of libraries that directed donors to contact the library first, a full one third, can be interpreted as evidence that unsolicited donations are generally discouraged.

Cash Donations

An interesting trend observed in this study was the appeal for monetary gifts, with half of the libraries mentioning this option, often early on or in a prominent location on their webpages:

Figure 2

University of the Fraser Valley Library. (n.d.).
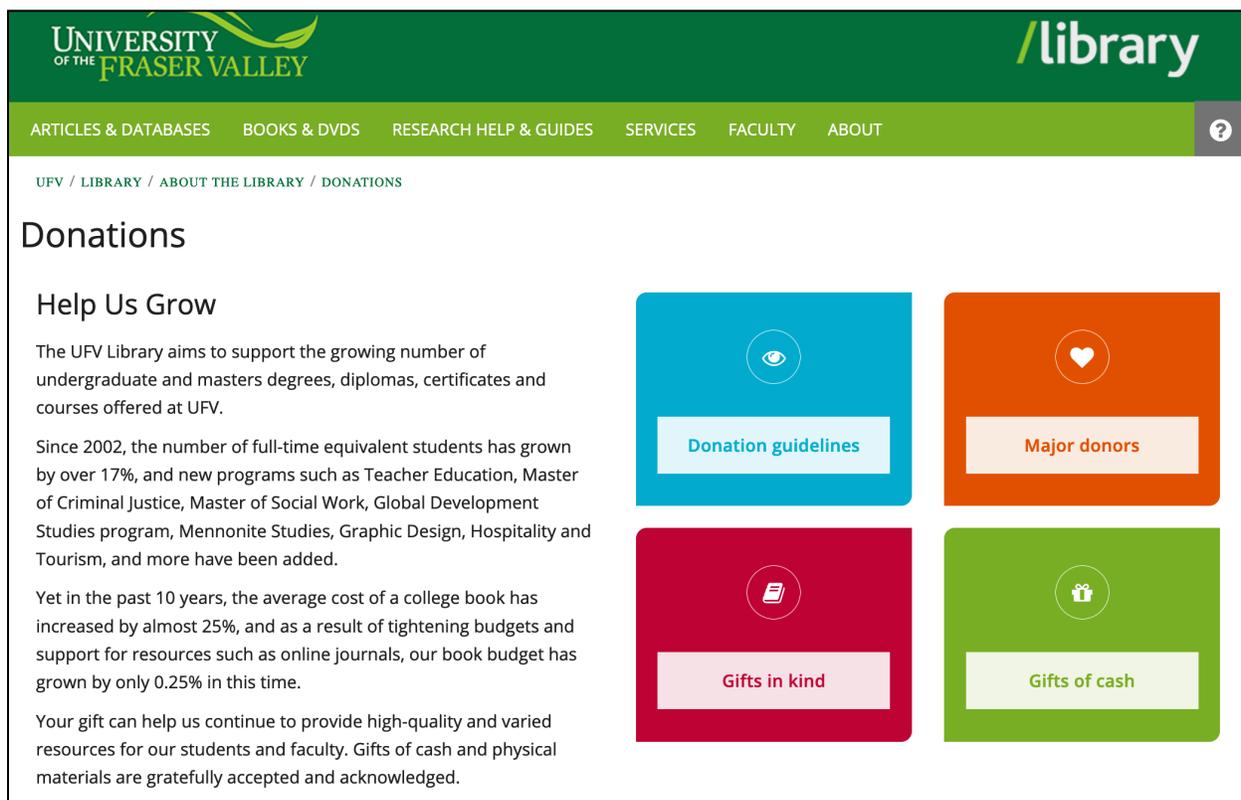
As we continue to navigate the demand for costly electronic resources while print circulation is dropping, it is not surprising that some libraries prefer cash over gifts-in-kind. Most of the libraries I looked at directed donors to their university's advancement offices. In addition to not having to process and evaluate physical gifts within the library, an added bonus of cash gifts going through advancement is that their staff members can handle the work of the tax receipt and donor acknowledgment. While libraries may be wary of the optics of appealing for cash donations, the webpages I visited communicated the preference for cash in a positive way that highlighted their mission to serve their unique academic communities.

Screening Process and Appropriate Donations

Of the 77% (n=23) of libraries that mentioned a screening process would be used prior to acceptance of a donation, an itemized list was sometimes required. For example, the library at St. Francis Xavier (n.d.) stipulates, "Prospective donors must provide a list of titles to be donated, including names of authors and publication dates" (para. 1).

Echoing Korolev's (2002) work, when people pressure library personnel to accept irrelevant resources, it can feel like a lack of respect for our professional qualifications, knowledge of our collections, and duty to our patrons. In a previous position, I observed a large increase in donations offers after we moved into a new building as members of

the public assumed we needed to "fill the space." As for working in a small library in a small city, it was uncomfortable to reject an offer from someone you were likely to encounter again in the community. Nevertheless, donations coordinators are not only gatekeepers for the quality of the collection but also for the workload considerations of their coworkers. It is imperative that the person coordinating donations has the ability to tactfully yet firmly perform the unenviable task of declining unsuitable donations. Furthermore, the donations coordinator must know that their supervisor will support them should a prospective donor complain.

Another notable trend that speaks to the need to manage unwanted donations was that the number of libraries that described what they did not want was more than twice the number of those that identified resources appropriate for their collections. Perhaps this is an unsurprising finding when considering the nature of repeated unwanted donations offers. A bulleted list is more effective than a paragraph as it draws the eye without overwhelming the reader:

Figure 3

Thompson Rivers University Library (n.d.).

- Textbooks and workbooks
- Duplicates or additional copies of materials already held by the Library
- Complimentary or review copies of books
- Loose-leaf publications
- Self-published materials
- Materials requiring outdated technology (LP's, 3 ¼ inch floppies, cassettes, etc.)
- Materials requiring special conditions (temperature & humidity control, etc…)
- Photocopied materials
- Materials to which the donor has attached restrictions
- Materials in poor condition (marked, underlined, mold, mildew, pests, etc…)
- Popular paperbacks
- Journals, magazines and newspapers
- Materials under licensing, copyright or other restrictions

Typical unwanted items included duplicates of resources already in the collection, textbooks, self-published materials, items that require outdated technology, non-academic resources, serials, conditional donations, and materials in poor physical condition.

Costs of Accepting Donations

Another common component of the webpages was an explanation of the costs of donations with 60% (n=18) providing these details. Many people outside of libraries do not know how much time goes into collection building by multiple staff members, not to mention the specialized knowledge and skills they possess (Korolev, 2002). Extending this logic to donations, it is unsurprising that donors may not realize the effort it takes to make a resource available and discoverable.

When we openly discuss the negative impacts of budget cuts, it must be confusing to members of the public when considering donations. Small libraries may find themselves having to explain why they would turn away a "free" gift:

> While donations are very much appreciated, it is not widely understood that donated material frequently requires more time to screen, organize, catalogue and process than new material. For this reason, the decision to accept a donation cannot be taken lightly. (University of the Fraser Valley Library, n.d., para. 2)

King's University Library (n.d.) expanded on the need to balance the gift relative to the investment of staff time:

> While donated materials may be intended to be free of charge, they require significant staff resources to assess, catalogue, process, and maintain. The following guidelines help library staff members ensure that all donated materials are worth the expense of the time that needs to be devoted to them. (para. 1)

Pointing out the hidden costs is an effective way to communicate the realities libraries face with less emphasis on the undesirability of an unwanted donation, which some donors may feel is a more professional or personal rejection (DeWitt, 1989). It also signals that libraries are not book disposal services (Thomas & Shouse, 2014). This could prove necessary as baby boomers continue to retire and clean out their offices or downsize their homes. It is conceivable that there will be an increase in faculty members and the general public seeking out homes for their own libraries. If they are of no use to academic library patrons, we must resist pressures to accept unwanted resources that further strain limited library budgets and staff members.

Alternatives for the Library or for the Donor

A common method of dealing with unwanted donations is diverting them elsewhere. With 63% (n=19) of the library websites I visited providing information regarding alternate recipients, either for the donor or the library, this is a frequent component of many small academic library donations webpages.

Most libraries focused on alternatives for disposal of unwanted items that provided them with flexibility after receipt: "Items that are not added to the collection may be sold to a bookseller, discarded or disposed of by other means" (Brandon University Library, 2003, para. 11). Again, the public may not understand that this still adds to staff workload and expense if the library must sort, package, and ship the items to another library or charity.

The best strategy for ensuring unwanted items don't cross your threshold is to encourage pre-delivery conversations. Acadia University Library stated, "There are other recipients who might be able to make better use of your donations, and we can help connect you with them" (n.d., para. 7). Although it may still result in work for the donations coordinator, diverting an obviously unsuited donation will most likely result in far less work for the library overall. This is important. As Emanuel (2014) explained, we

know people have a hard time disposing of books. In cases like this, it is helpful to have an alternative available for prospective donors when it is clear that the offer does not meet the library's acceptance criteria. If there is a local public library that holds a book sale, they may be interested; however, academic libraries should do their public library colleagues the courtesy of asking first and following up on a regular basis to ensure that they are not merely passing along the burden of unwanted gifts.

Tax Receipts

Another common topic was tax receipts. They were discussed on 77% (n=23) of the webpages I visited. Since the production of receipts can be labour intensive, across the library and often involving the advancement department, it is reasonable for libraries to set a minimum fair market value on donated resources added to collections. Typical minimum amounts ranged between $100 to $250. For libraries considering a minimum amount, they must determine at what point the positive public relations associated with issuing a tax receipt are outweighed by the specialized staff time needed to evaluate each item to the maximum of $1,000 for an in-house appraisal listed by the Canada Revenue Agency (2020). As with information providing insight into the hidden costs of donation acceptance, it may be helpful to explain to patrons why the library has set minimum amounts and to manage expectations in terms of timing: "A set time for accepting, processing, and evaluating donated material cannot be guaranteed" (Mount Saint Vincent University Library, n.d., para. 17).

These initial conversations are another opportunity for libraries to set reasonable expectations for any potential exchange, negotiate terms of acceptance for items they do want, and discuss other important issues like tax receipts, processing time, and donor recognition.

Limitations and Further Research

One of the limitations of the research is that not all libraries publish their donations information online. Is this a way of discouraging donations, or is it meant to provide library staff with maximum flexibility? Without contacting these individual libraries, their motivations are unknown. I am unable to read French and did not have the time or resources to arrange an adequate translation, and the exclusion of French-speaking university libraries is a major limitation of this study of small Canadian academic libraries.

There is potential for a longitudinal study to track trends. In addition to replicating the website analysis every five years, I also plan to conduct in-depth interviews with donations coordinators at small academic libraries. Additionally, I wish to survey the perceptions of donations across staff groups, particularly with library technicians, whose experiences and insights are critical to these conversations.

At the time of review and publication of this article, many university campuses are adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic. This content analysis was conducted in late 2019, pre-dating the pandemic. In the midst of the pandemic, Karst (2020) reported that

Diabetes Canada was desperately asking people to stop dumping donations outside their clogged bins, making it clear that people were increasing their donation efforts during lockdown. As such, I intend to monitor small academic library webpages to see if they put temporary moratoria in place. Beyond the pandemic, this trend is likely to continue as baby boomers keep retiring and downsizing (Friedman, 2018). From cleaning out work offices to reducing personal collections, it is possible that libraries will be under more pressure to receive donations and issue tax receipts, thereby necessitating more study and conversation about this complex topic.

Conclusions

As we continue to evolve to serve our communities, we do so while navigating the competing pressures of limited funding, strained human resources, and the realities of the academic publishing landscape. These challenges can be compounded by a lack of understanding by the general public, and even within our own institutions, of the true rigours of library work. This is especially relevant when it comes to unwanted donations. While most donors wish to help libraries, they may not realize that their gifts can be a burden. It can be especially tricky in small academic libraries where some people assume we need anything and everything. We must be honest about what we need, manage donor expectations, and protect the time and dignity of all library personnel. Diplomatic yet direct donations webpages in an accessible location benefit all stakeholders, and they should be reviewed on a regular basis with input from all staff members working on donations.

References

Acadia University. (n.d.). *Donate to the library*. Retrieved November 2019.

Ballestro, J., & Howze, P. C. (2005). When a gift is not a gift: Collection assessment using cost-benefit analysis. *Collection Management, 30*(3), 49-66.

Bishop, J., Smith, P. A., & Sugnet, C. (2010). Refocusing a gift program in an academic library. *Library Collections, Acquisitions & Technical Services, 34*(4), 115-122.

Bishop's University Library. (n.d.). *Donation & gift policy*. Retrieved November 29, 2019.

Bostic, M. J. (1991). Gifts to libraries: Coping effectively. *Collection Management, 14*(3/4), 175-184.

Brandon University. (2003). *Library donations policy*. Retrieved November 2019.

Buis, E. (1991). Killing us with kindness or what to do with those gifts. *Collection Building, 11*(2), 10-12.

Bybee, H. (1999). Reducing gift anxiety through carefully worded gift policies. *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship, 11*(22), 15-31.

Canada Revenue Agency. (2020). *Gifts and receipting.* Retrieved April 20, 2021.

Canevari de Paredes, D. (2006). Gifts-in-kind in the academic library: The University of Saskatchewan experience. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services, 30*(1-2), 55-68.

Carrico, S. (1999). Gifts and exchanges. In K. A. Schmidt (Ed.), *Understanding the business of library acquisitions* (2nd ed., pp. 205-223). American Library Association.

Cassell, K., Johnson, S., Mansfield, J., & Zhang, S. (2008). *Gifts for the collections: Guidelines for libraries*.

Denning, C. (1999). Introduction. *The Acquisitions Librarian, 11*(22), 1-3.

DeWitt, D. L. (1989). Unsolicited marginal gift collections: Saying no or coping with the unwanted. *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory, 12*(3-4), 357-362.

Dickinson, D. W. (1997). Free books: Are they worth what they cost? *Library Issues, 17*(5), 1-4.

Edem, M. B. (2010). Gifts in university library resource development in the information age. *Collection Building, 29*(2), 70-76.

Emanuel, M. (2014). Managing in-kind gifts with getting it started toolkit's gifts and deselection manager. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services, 38*(1-2), 21-27.

Empey, H. (2017). Content analysis of Canadian academic library gift and donation webpages. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research, 12*(2), 1-15.

Fischer, C. (2007). Group therapy: Screening of donations. *Against the Grain, 19*(3), 79-80.

Friedman, R. A. (2018, June 20). Baby boomers are downsizing and there's a problem: What to do with all their stuff. *Wall Street Journal*.

Gregory, V. L. (2011). *Collection development and management for 21st century library collections: An introduction*. Neal-Schuman.

Karst, T. (2020, April 7). Diabetes Canada asking people to keep textile donations until after business resumes. *My Lethbridge Now.*

Korolev, S. (2002). Gifts to a science academic librarian. *The Acquisitions Librarian, 14*(27), 87-94.

Mount Saint Vincent University. (n.d.). *Donation policy*. Retrieved November 2019.

Nelson, V. C. (1988). Buried alive in gifts. *Library Journal, 113*(7), 54-56.

Norris, J. G. (2002). A subject-oriented approach to gifts management and donor relations. *Collection Management, 27*(1), 41-57.

St. Francis Xavier Library. (n.d.). *Guide for prospective donors*. Retrieved November 26, 2019.

Sturges, P., & Gastinger, A. (2014). Libraries, donations and freedom of expression: The case of Scientology. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 46*(1), 32-40.

Thomas, M. L. (2012). Disruption and disintermediation: A review of the collection development and management literature, 2009-10. *Library Resources & Technical Services, 56*(3), 183-198.

Thomas, W. J., & Shouse, D. (2014). This is not a dumpsite: The problem of evaluating gift books. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services, 38*(3-4), 63-69.

Thompson Rivers University Library. (n.d.). *Donation policy and guidelines*. Retrieved November 28, 2019.

Universities Canada. (2019). 2019 full-time and part-time fall enrolment at Canadian universities.

University of New Brunswick Library. (n.d.). *Gifts policy*. Retrieved November 28, 2019.

University of the Fraser Valley Library. (n.d.). *Donations: Help us grow.* Retrieved November 26, 2019.

Wilkinson, F. C., Lewis, L. K., & Lubas, R. L. (2015). *The complete guide to acquisitions management* (2nd ed.). Libraries Unlimited.

Williams, J. A. (2014). Is trash a library's treasure? A study of gifts-in-kind practices and policies among New York State libraries. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services, 38*(1-2), 1-9.

Appendix A: Library Donation Webpages

Acadia University. (n.d.). *Donate to the library*. Retrieved November 2019, from
https://library.acadiau.ca/donate.html

Algoma University. (2012). *Donations policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from
https://library.algomau.ca/policies-and-copyright/

Bishop's University. (n.d.). *Donation & gift policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from
http://www.ubishops.ca/library/library-information-services/donations/

Brandon University. (2003). *Library donations policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from
https://www.brandonu.ca/library/services/donations-policy/

Cape Breton University. (n.d.). *Donations to CBU library*. Retrieved November, 2019
from https://libguides.cbu.ca/c.php?g=703083&p=5015356

École Polytechnique de Montréal. (n.d.). *Donate books*. Retrieved November, 2019
from https://www.polymtl.ca/biblio/en/collections

Emily Carr University. (n.d.). *Making a donation.* Retrieved November 2019, from
http://www.connect.ecuad.ca/library/donate

First Nations University of Canada. (2014). *Donation of library materials*. Retrieved
November 2019, from
http://fnuniv.ca/img/uploads/library/Donation_of_Library_Materials.pdf

King's University. (n.d.). *Donation's policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from
https://www.kingsu.ca/services/library/about-simona-maaskant-library/donations-
policy

King's University College. (2016). *Gifts collection policy*. Retrieved November 2019,
from https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/library/gifts_collection_policy
v2(1).pdf

Lakehead University. (2016). *Giving to the library*. Retrieved November 2019, from
https://libguides.lakeheadu.ca/about/reports-policies/giving-to-the-library

Laurentian University. (2017). *Donations to the J.N. Desmarais Library*. Retrieved
November 2019, from
https://biblio.laurentian.ca/research/sites/default/files/pictures/LibraryDonationsP
olicyFeb2014.pdf

Mount Allison University. (n.d.). *Library gifts in kind: Information for donors*. Retrieved
November 2019, from http://libraryguides.mta.ca/about_the_libraries/policies

Mount Saint Vincent University. (n.d.). *Donation policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/library/aboutthelibrary/policiesprocedures/collection policy/librarygiftsdonations/donationpolicy.aspx

Nipissing University. (n.d.). *Guidelines for prospective donors*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://www.eclibrary.ca/library/content/donation-guidelines-library-collections-print-materials

Nova Scotia College of Art & Design. (2016). *Library donations policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://guides.nscad.ca/c.php?g=700126&p=4971436&preview=ecdd1544eb7ff3 917247ffae890f743a

OCAD University. (n.d.). *Support the library: Donations and gifts.* Retrieved November 2019, from https://www.ocadu.ca/services/Library/about-the-library/support.htm

Redeemer University College. (n.d.). *Library donations & gifts policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from http://libguides.redeemer.ca/library/donations-gifts

Royal Roads University. (n.d.). *Donations policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from http://library.royalroads.ca/library-policies/donations-policy

Thompson Rivers University. (n.d.). *Donation policy and guidelines.* Retrieved November 2019, from https://www.tru.ca/library/about_us/policies/donations.html

Saint Mary's University. (2017). *Policy of acceptance of gifts*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://smu.ca/webfiles/GiftPolicyandAgreement_2017.pdf

Saint Paul University. (n.d.). *Donations of library materials policy*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://ustpaul.ca/en/jean-leon-allie-omi-library-policies_477_276.htm

St. Francis Xavier University. (n.d.). *Guide for prospective donors*. Retrieved November 2019, from http://www2.mystfx.ca/library/guide-prospective-donors

Trinity Western University. (2017). *FAQs: Does the library accept donations of books?* Retrieved November 2019, from http://libguides.twu.ca/c.php?g=401226&p=2756371

University of Lethbridge. (n.d.). *Donations*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://library.ulethbridge.ca/donations

University of New Brunswick. (2019). *Gifts policy.* Retrieved November 2019, from https://www.lib.unb.ca/about/policies/gifts_policy.php

University of Northern British Columbia. (n.d.). *Collections & donations*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://library.unbc.ca/about/planning-policies/collections-donations

University of Prince Edward Island. (2011). *Collection development policy – appendix C – donations*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://library.upei.ca/collection/appendixc

University of the Fraser Valley. (n.d.). *Donations: Help us grow*. Retrieved November 2019, from https://library.ufv.ca/about-the-library/donations/

University of Winnipeg. (n.d.). *Giving*. Retrieved November 2019, from http://library.uwinnipeg.ca/about-us/giving.html