

12/13/2021

Traditionally libraries have held a collection of books, but now collections are so much more than just books. Yes, they still have books, both regular and large print, but they also have DVDs, audio books, non-traditional items, and downloadable and streaming services.

Books still make up the majority of the collection here in Bennington with 55,000 books accounting for about 64% of the physical circulation numbers.

3,500 DVD's account for another 33% of the circulation figures.

Audios, with a 3,400 collection, account for about 2 % of the circulation numbers.

Non-traditional items makes up the balance of the circulation numbers of physical items.

Our non-traditional collection includes area passes, snow shoes (these have been so popular that we are increasing the number of snowshoes we have this year), a telescope, a backpack with binoculars and nature books, puzzles, and a moisture meter. In the children's room we have backpacks with books and manipulatives, most of these are bulky and do not fit on traditional bookshelves. Libraries are not built to house these non-traditional items, so although we would like to expand our holdings to include ukuleles, cake pans, garden tools and seeds, we first of all have to come up with a storage space and figure out access for the patrons.

Downloadable and streaming collections have a small, but loyal following. They are a way to expand our collection to the computer savvy among our patrons.

Hoopla has been popular most users maximize their allowable checkouts each and every month.

Overdrive/Libby has a steady stream of users. Patrons are not keen on the long wait/hold times, followed by the necessity for instant download.

We used to offer RBDigital, but now this is no more, we eagerly look forward to the new offering through the state.

We are fortunate here in Bennington to have a dedicated Vermont History room to house the Library's special collection of Vermontiana and materials on local and New England History. Due to our geographic location we also spill into some New York locations, ones that are close at hand. These items do not circulate, but patrons and visitors are welcome to browse the shelves and most of the items housed in the room are visible in the catalog. Highlights of the Vermont History Collection include: Town of Bennington National Register of Historic Places Sites and Structures Survey, Urban Sites and Structures Survey, and Rural Sites and Structures Survey, Vermont State Yearbooks (1915-1999), local high school yearbooks, and subject files maintained on topics related to Bennington County and Vermont. Last year we had our high school yearbooks digitized.

As part of the Catamount Library Network(CLN), we already share our catalog with 21 libraries from around the state; this is an excellent way to increase the selection for our patrons. Patrons can place holds on other libraries items, as long as they are not classed as new, and staff may do so on behalf of the patron. All members of CLN are in the courier service which we find invaluable. On an average month Bennington will ship out about 400 items and receive slightly less. A shared catalog comes with its drawbacks as well as its advantages; duplicate records in the catalog make it harder for patrons to locate a specific copy of an item. With at least 21 different catalogers adding items, all with different levels of knowledge, the consistency of records in the system is varied. To fix a catalog of all duplicates and to ensure good, consistent

records takes time; time that a busy cataloger generally does not have. The importance of training all catalogers so that only good records are added to the catalog is essential.

For those hard to find items and as a last resort we go to CLOVER. There are very few items that get requested on CLOVER and many of those are unique, specialist titles. Only very rarely are we unable to fill the patrons desires.

Since I started my current position, I have been in charge of the fiction collection at Bennington, and I have been attempting to diversify the collection. After having been curated by the same person for 30 plus years the whole collection seemed to be very one-note. Either mystery or romance and usually with a cast of white characters.

With any project it is necessary to measure your baseline so any changes you make can be quantified. I have made some inroads towards a more diverse collection, by first weeding out dated, unused and broken books, and then adding a Diversity collection code to the collection database to easier define that growing collection, and to follow the usage statistics. I have spent the last three years looking for diverse titles, and finally I am ready to start a full diversity audit of the collection. This will not be a quick process as each and every title needs to be analyzed. I feel that this could be a wonderful project for a student.

Our patron demographic spans all ages, however there are larger numbers at either end of the scale. Our more mature patrons enjoy browsing the shelves and had a hard time during lockdown. Although we offered to select some books for them, we were very seldom taken up on our offer. Our very young patrons enjoy coming to the library to use the manipulatives and enjoy the displays and activities featured each month. Patrons with children are more inclined to check out materials for their children than themselves.

Submitted by
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