

Collection Assessment: American Literature

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Introduction

Following guidelines established by the WLN Collection Development Service (which provide an overview of a library's current holdings and the level of activity at which the collection is being developed), the American Literature collection (Library of Congress classification PS) is rated an overall 3cP (Advanced Study Level, with English as the primary language). The American Literature collection is central to the University curriculum, since it supports study for degree programs in English at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels and degrees in language arts and secondary education offered by the School of Education, as well as study by K-12 teachers pursuing the Master's degree. The collection also supports students taking a minor in English along with the degree in their major field. Refer to the checklists, tables, and conspectus sheets which follow this narrative for a more detailed examination of the Library's holdings.

Books

The American Literature collection contains 51,206 book titles in classification PS, representing an increase of 6,394 titles over the previous assessment done in 2009 and also taking into account the 327 items withdrawn from the collection in the period 2010-2015. This number includes the 14,795 microfilm titles in the *Wright's American Fiction* series and is supplemented by 4,507 titles in the adult fiction PZ1 through PZ4 classifications. An additional 12,751 titles are included in the juvenile PZ5 through PZ10 collection. Electronic books (e-books) contribute a further 825 titles to the total count. Audiocassettes and videocassettes have been deselected and on a case-by-case (as needed) basis replaced with CDs and DVDs. These materials have been integrated into the collection and dispersed to their respective subject floors in the Library. They are represented in the title count grand total. The grand total of titles from all these sources is 84,084. The expenditures in this area show a consistent downward trend when compared with the 2009 assessment, which displayed spending with spikes in 2005/2006 and 2006/2007.

Expenditures (for *ENGLISH* as an academic discipline)

Fiscal Year	Amount Expended for Books	Amount Expended for Serials
2011/12	\$45,630.61	\$28,598.89
2012/13	\$40,896.28	\$29,839.56
2013/14	\$32,405.26	\$30,843.06
2014/15	\$36,151.93	\$29,308.57
2015/16	\$33,305.93	\$31,227.20
Totals	\$188,390.01	\$149,817.28

The amounts are for all literatures. Regarding the figures given for books, it is impossible to subdivide expenditures for “literature” into subcategories such as for period or nation, and serials have migrated away from the individual subscription model to the aggregator and subject database models. Dollar amounts spent on aggregator databases cannot be sub-divided into subject categories, but subject specific databases are included in fiscal reports. The list of titles by subject in EBSCO’s Publication Finder (<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edspub&profile=jsueds&plp=1>) presents a more accurate reporting of Library support for serials.

Books

Expenditures

Because the category of American Literature does not have a separate fund code in the Houston Cole Library acquisitions budget -- the budget line is for just “literature” -- a formula is required to derive a cost estimation for it. The method used here takes the number of titles collected by Houston Cole Library in LC class PS for the years surveyed and multiplies them by the combined mean average cost per book as listed in the Yankee Book Peddler New Title Reports (<http://www.gobi3.com/hx/Falcon.ashx?location=welcome>). This provides a useable approximation of annual expenditures.

Monographs Expenditures

Fiscal Year (October – September): # titles purchased x avg. cost	Expenditure
2011/12 (313 x \$45.92)	\$14,372.96
2012/13 (381 x \$27.02)	\$10,294.62
2013/14 (337 x \$26.47)	\$8,920.39
2014/15 (391 x \$27.47)	\$10,740.77
2015/2016 (326 x \$27.48)	\$8,958.48
Total: 1748	\$53,287.22

Comparison of Houston Cole Library book acquisition levels in Library of Congress classification PS with those of libraries at Jacksonville State University's peer institutions reveals the following:

**Peer Institution Comparison Table
(Institutions used based on student population 6,000-12,000)**

OCLC Code *	Library Name	Approximate Student Enrollment	American Literature Book Collection
AJB	Jacksonville State University, AL	8,514	7,459
LNE	University of Louisiana at Monroe, LA	9,115	1,339
NCX	North Carolina Central University, NC	8,645	2,369
LNW	Northwestern State University of Louisiana, LA	9,002	2,990
TTU	Tennessee Technological University, TN	9,609	3,058
ANO	University of North Alabama	7,490	3,807
KMS	Murray State University, KY	10,495	3,435

*Enrollment data is from <http://www.oclc.org/contacts/libraries>

The following table reveals the Library's holdings when compared against curated checklist bibliographies for the field of American literature. A collection ratio of above 40% is considered acceptable and above 70%, good.

TITLE	HELD	LISTED	%
<i>ARBA 2009</i>	15	20	75
<i>ARBA 2010</i>	10	19	53
<i>ARBA 2011</i>	9	16	56
<i>ARBA 2012</i>	9	17	53
<i>ARBA 2013</i>	4	17	24
<i>ARBA 2014</i>	5	12	42
<i>ARBA 2015</i>	12	21	57
ARBA Total	64	122	52
<i>Best Books for Academic Libraries (2002)</i>	2,707	5,706	47
<i>Best Books for Academic Libraries (2004 Supplement)</i>	221	467	47
<i>Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles, 2007-2011 (2012)</i>	76	91	84

Periodicals and Serials

Much of the serials coverage for American literature is in literary scholarly journals which are general or multi-national in scope. Some journals deal exclusively with American literature; some take a more general approach to literature but include articles on American literature; and some general reviews cover a diversity of subjects, among which is American literature. While not comprehensive, this group does include the major titles for the discipline.

The Houston Cole Library currently subscribes to 44 print journals in the American literature classification PS, which represents an increase in 16 titles from the 2009 Assessment. This number includes journals in the PS classification which have ceased publication or to which the subscription has been cancelled, and is supplemented by several journals in the Languages and General Literature classes (P through PN), by general reviews in classes AP through AS, and the occasional journal found in another classification. Serials access is further increased by journals included in the aggregator databases to which Houston Cole Library subscribes. The EBSCO Publication Finder <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edspub&profile=jsueds&plp=1> lists 87 periodical titles under the rubric for American Literature, 178 for Literature and Writing (general), and 135 titles for Literary Theory and Criticism, resulting in a total of an even 400 serials titles.

The serials holdings for American literature are complemented and strengthened by the many print Gale Literary Criticism series owned by Houston Cole Library or accessible through various proprietary databases. These number some hundreds of volumes and provide selective access to criticism in journals to which the Library has never subscribed and for which the back files of the Library's subscription databases are not deep enough. Further complementing the serials collection are the full text journal articles accessible through the Library's aggregator database subscriptions. Consult the EBSCO Publication Finder or the Library's online catalog for details regarding a specific title.

Access to periodicals and serials is multi-tiered, and when viewed in this manner, it can be seen that Houston Cole Library offers a four-deep system of access to content in serial publications:

- 1) Magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals in print format, supplemented by
- 2) Selective full text access in some 300 electronic databases, which may be searched individually by subject or title and in groups by provider, supplemented by
- 3) Selective full text in free access internet websites, supplemented by
- 4) Gale/Cengage's literary criticism series books.

Additionally, the argument can be made that there is a fifth tier underlying these four, which is essay anthologies such as Prentiss-Hall's series *Twentieth Century Interpretations* and *Twentieth Century Views* or the many Chelsea House (now InfoBase) series edited by Harold Bloom. The special value of these books is that they contain already published articles from journals to which the Library may never have subscribed and which are too old to be indexed in electronic databases. In some instances, they are the final option in trying to access a particular journal article.

The following indexes and bibliographies were checked against the Library's holdings for serial titles pertaining to American literature, revealing the corresponding percentages:

TITLE	HELD	LISTED	%
<i>Magazines for Libraries</i> 23 rd ed. (2015)	117	196	60

To quote from this edition of *MfL*, “[t]he fact that a journal is listed in *Magazines for Libraries* indicates that it is considered to be a core title for the listed audience and recommended to the libraries serving them.” Therefore, a collection ratio of 60% core titles is closer to the 70% rating for “good” than it is the 40% rating for “acceptable.”

Defined Access (Access to Electronic Resources)

The Library's defined access is rated a 3c (Advanced Study or Instructional Support). Houston Cole Library subscribes to an extensive collection of remotely accessible electronic resources such as indexes, journals, electronic books, full text aggregator databases, and special subject-related services. Most of the electronic journal titles are integrated, analyzed, and accessible through the Library's online JaxCat catalog.

Houston Cole Library's print holdings in American Literature are enhanced by access to electronic resources such as the *MLA International Bibliography Online*, EBSCO's *Academic Search Premier*, and Gale/Cengage's *Literary Sources* and *Literature Resource Center*. Full text articles pertaining to American literature also can be accessed through aggregator databases covering other fields such as psychology or sociology. Additionally, subject specialist librarians review and recommend sites from the World Wide Web for inclusion in the JaxCat online catalog. The LibGuide for Survey of American Literature (<http://libguides.jsu.edu/eh201-202>) offers an example of how these digital resources can be packaged for optimum use.

There are 825 e-books in the American Literature collection. These can be located via a direct link to the vendor's website or through the Library's online catalog.

Preservation Commitment

The Preservation Commitment is rated a 2 (Physical Preservation Level). Material is retained for its useful life and mended whenever possible. When the item is beyond mending, efforts are made to replace it. Because materials on literature have a longer useful life than those in, for example, the physical sciences, there is no systematized deselection or planned replacement program for the American Literature collection.

Supplemental Support

Holdings in the related collections of English Literature; Western European Literature; Languages and Related Literatures; History; Art; Drama; Music; Auxiliary Sciences of History; Philosophy, Ethics, and Religion; and General Works provide supplemental support to the American Literature collection.

SUMMARY

Strengths

Total holdings, conspectus evaluation, and checklist comparisons indicate that the American Literature collection (class PS) has maintained the 3cP level. While the strength of the print monograph collection has diminished according to the percentages shown in checklist bibliographies, e-books and other online resources restore the collection to a 3cP rank.

The primary purpose of the collection is to support teaching and research activities at the Core, Baccalaureate, and Master's level curricula. Given this stipulation, not every subgroup of any national literature will be ranked at the highest level, but intensive collection in the areas for curriculum support and faculty research balances the overall collection level. The statistics in the checklists and tables confirm this ranking. Most of the checklist bibliographies show comparison figures above 40% (acceptable), and a few exceed the 70% figure (good).

The lower percentages in the checklist indicate a focused collection strategy, as exemplified by the monographs checklist bibliographies and, especially, some of the ARBAs. The unpurchased titles, which lower the percentages, are for books that are out of scope. The lower percentages indicate a prudent allocation of limited resources.

For curriculum support, particular attention is given to the areas of History and Criticism (by form and period) and Literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. These already-strong areas continue to be strengthened. Recently, increased attention has been given to the post-1960 period (Contemporary Literature,

PS3551 and above). Contemporary works of American drama, fiction, and poetry are regularly added to the collection but, until recently, this has not been the case with criticism of these works. Critics have not yet given the newest authors the same attention as authors firmly within the canon; and this feature is even more noticeable in the call number range of PS3601 and above, which is a post-2000 expansion of the class to include literature of the twenty-first century.

This top end of the American Literature collection at present consists almost entirely of primary source materials -- i.e. works of drama, fiction, and poetry -- but as secondary materials become available they will be added to the collection. This portion of the American Literature collection may display the most rapid growth for the immediate future, a prospect which catalyzed total shifting of the PT and PZ collections on seventh floor to make room for books classified in the PS3601 + range.

Almost as important as curriculum support is the need to support faculty research interests, and select areas of American literature receive additional attention for this reason. Canon expansion has prompted curriculum expansion, which in turn has triggered a broadening of research interests among faculty. This research also must be supported through acquisitions.

The American Literature canon has expanded beyond the more traditional focus of period, region, genre, and individual authors to include critical approaches focusing on authors' ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, among others. Genre studies of detective/mystery fiction, literature of the fantastic, and literature of the American West also are increasing and must be represented in the collection. Most of this activity occurs in the range of PS1-478 (General Criticism and History), the anthologies in PS501-690 (Collections), and in the contemporary authors section (PS3551 and above). The nascent twenty-first century portion of the collection contains works by American authors that reflect a more global perspective, and this characteristic plays a role in both canon and curriculum expansion. Collection activity is particularly heavy in PS100-379, which covers period, region, and genre studies as well as ethnic literatures. The collection from PS700-893 (Colonial & Eighteenth Century) is not very strong, but materials in Library of Congress classes B, E, and F support this area. Class E also supports literary study from an ethnic approach, while class H provides supplemental materials for the interdisciplinary study of literature from the perspectives of gender, sexual orientation, or other angles of approach.

Weaknesses

The acquisitions level was rated between a 3a and 3b in the 2003 assessment. This had been improved as of the 2009 assessment but still is not quite at the solid 3c overall level desired. Improved access to electronic resources is what nudges the collection over the 3c benchmark. At present the biggest obstacle to attaining a solid 3c level is the budget. The Houston Cole Library acquisitions

department has worked wonders; but every year book (and other) costs increase, forcing the subject specialist librarian to adopt a rigorous selection method.

Recommendations

- Collection activity should continue to try to reach an overall 3cP level.
- Areas that are receiving increased emphasis within the curriculum should be monitored to keep pace with demand.
- The collection should be selectively expanded for curriculum and research support.
- Use of electronic databases should be maximized to its full potential.
- Liaison between the subject specialist librarian(s) and the academic faculty should be maximized to its full potential.

**Checklists and Tables:
American Literature Assessment (2017)**

American Reference Books Annual (ARBA)

ARBA 2009

Section	Held	Listed	%
<i>AMERICAN LITERATURE</i>	15	20	75
General Works	9	12	75
Individual Authors	6	8	75

ARBA 2010

Section	Held	Listed	%
<i>AMERICAN LITERATURE</i>	7	11	64
General Works	5	7	71
Individual Authors	2	4	50

ARBA 2011

Section	Held	Listed	%
<i>AMERICAN LITERATURE</i>	13	17	77
General Works	11	13	85
Individual Authors	2	4	50

ARBA 2012

Section	Held	Listed	%
<i>AMERICAN LITERATURE</i>	6	10	60
General Works	0	3	0
Individual Authors	6	7	86

ARBA 2013

Section	Held	Listed	%
AMERICAN LITERATURE	6	10	60
General Works	6	10	60
Individual Authors	0	0	0

ARBA 2014

Section	Held	Listed	%
AMERICAN LITERATURE	7	15	47
General Works	4	11	36
Individual Authors	3	4	75

ARBA 2015

Section	Held	Listed	%
AMERICAN LITERATURE	6	17	35
General Works	6	17	35
Individual Authors	0	0	0

Best Books for Academic Libraries (2002)

Category	Held	Listed	%
Generalia: dictionaries, encyclopedias, general history and theory	375	617	61
Collections	38	72	53
Individual authors: 17 th & 18 th centuries	8	15	53
Individual authors: 19 th century	508	2681	19
Individual authors: 20 th century	1,778	2,281	78
Totals	2,707	5,706	47

Best Books for Academic Libraries (2004 supplement)

Category	Held	Listed	%
Generalia: dictionaries, encyclopedias, general history and theory	96	224	43
Collections	5	16	31
Individual authors: 17 th & 18 th centuries	1	1	100
Individual authors: 19 th century	37	60	62
Individual authors: 1900 - 1960	57	106	54
Individual authors: 1961 -	25	60	42
Totals	221	467	47

**Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles, 2007-2011
American Literature**

Section	Held	Listed	%
Generalia	15	19	79
18 th & 19 th centuries	18	21	86
20 th & 20 st centuries	43	51	84
Totals	76	91	84

Magazines for Libraries, 23rd edition (2015)

Section	Held	Listed	%
<i>American Literature (Total)</i>	117	196	60
General Fiction	1	11	9
Mystery and Detective Fiction	0	10	0
Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror	6	33	18
Literary Reviews	25	31	81
Literature	72	81	89
Little Magazines	13	30	43