

*A consortial study  
tries to find out  
if frequently taught  
information would  
make for useful  
new library  
partnerships*

# WANTED:

## E-Reserves A Model for

By Ann Okerson

**WHAT IF WE LIBRARIANS** could come up with a hierarchy of texts—a list of the “Books You Teach Every Semester” (BYTES)—that appear over and over again on collegiate reading lists? After all, faculty at American colleges and universities must frequently teach courses that draw upon this common set of readings. This article reports on the BYTES study, the results of our experiment to test those assumptions. We

wanted to explore the possible implications for library management of the coincidence of titles taught. We wanted to find out if frequently taught information would make for useful new library partnerships with publishers, faculty, and students.

We expected the BYTES study would result in a list of titles so regularly taught that it would be valuable to create improved or alternative sources to supply them to students. These sources might transform the way in which a growing number of libraries

provide electronic reserves and readings. Possibilities for such transformation might include cooperative digitization by libraries of frequently assigned readings, collaboration with publishers (for material under copyright), or coordination of a larger joint project designed to identify, track, and manage a growing collection of such titles.

In the BYTES project, funded to the tune of \$42,000 by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the NorthEast Research Libraries consortium (NERL) set out to explore our hypotheses as they related to one-year courses in history and English-language literature. To keep the project manageable we restricted the inquiry to those two broad humanities courses commonly taught to undergraduates. BYTES compiled and studied the

reserve reading lists; it did not seek to evaluate electronic reserves services. We focused on course reserves as a representative collection of potentially heavily used materials. Libraries maintain reserve reading lists (and books) in small, sequestered collections, so that was a good place to start.

In all, nine schools were represented in the BYTES study (see Table 2, p. 58). We examined 972 courses (60 percent history, 40 percent English), yielding nearly 13,000 titles. Only 1.2 percent of the items included in the study were published before 1925. That meant that virtually all titles are presumptively covered by copyright protection. Although we ended up tracking the use of 13,000 titles, we knew that this was an imperfect study.

### Surprise: few titles are shared

We learned that the institutions studied do not teach from a common set of readings or titles (see Table 3, p. 58). Some authors—no surprise—were more popular than others. For example, Yale/New York University literary critic Harold Bloom was the author with the most works on reserve in the year 2000. Bloom was there in 86 instances with 31 separate titles (mainly anthologies of critical essays and articles) on reserve in

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six of the nine schools in the study. Other popular authors were William Shakespeare, William Faulkner, and Edward Said.

When we looked at overlap, further patterns emerged. Two authors (Said and Shakespeare) had a total of 17 titles on reserve at seven of the nine schools in the study. Six schools had 59 works by four authors on reserve. Five schools had 45 works by 13 authors on reserve. Four schools had 164 titles by 47 authors on reserve in the year 2000. Some 278 works by 123 authors were on reserve in three schools during the combined spring and fall terms.

### University presses dominated

One of the most striking findings of the study was that a total of 375 separate publishers produced the nearly 13,000 books on reserve in the nine schools during 2000. University presses clearly played a significant role in supporting undergraduate teaching in history and English literature. Our list of the top 51 publishers accounted for 65.5 percent (8,468) of the total volumes in the database. Of the ten most frequently found publishers on this list, eight were university presses. Of the 20 most frequent publishers, ten were university presses. The ten most frequently appearing university presses accounted for 2,988 titles or 23% of the total number of titles in the database. University presses accounted for 3,574 titles (58%) of the publishers with 50 or more titles. The ten most frequently appearing nonuniversity (scholarly and trade) publishers accounted for 1,655 titles (27%) of the publishers with 50 or more titles. Nonuniversity presses accounted for 2,569 (42%) of the publishers with 50 or more titles (see Table 1, at right).

About half the titles were published after 1986 and well over a third after 1991. The 1960s were represented by about 100 titles per year for the decade, the 1950s by about 50, and before that the yearly numbers were insignificant. We simply had too little data to determine the role of journal articles in the courses studied.

### What we found

There is a high interest on the part of those who have heard of the BYTES project in seeing the lists of titles and learning about the findings. Every reader may come to somewhat different conclusions. For the project team, several obvious points emerge:

**TABLE 1 Publishers of 50 or More Titles, 2000**

Listed in Rank Order by Representation in Collections

RANK	PUBLISHER	TITLES
1	Oxford University Press	743
2	Cambridge University Press	428
3	Harvard University Press	333
4	Penguin	330
5	University of California Press	309
6	Princeton University Press	272
7	University of Chicago Press	240
8	Cornell University Press	216
9	Yale University Press	215
10	Norton	214
11	Routledge	199
12	HarperCollins	158
13	St Martin's Press	153
14	Johns Hopkins University Press	133
15	Knopf	132
16	Vintage	130
17	Random House	121
18	Longman	109
19	Macmillan	109
20	University of North Carolina Press	99
21	Stanford University Press	98
22	Doubleday	98
23	Indiana University Press	95
24	Houghton Mifflin	92
25	Blackwell	90
26	Columbia University Press	88
27	Prentice-Hall	86
28	Viking	84
29	University of Wisconsin Press	71
30	Scribner	64
31	University of Illinois Press	63
32	Basic Books	63
33	Duke University Press	62
34	Harcourt	61
35	Pantheon	60
36	Rutgers University Press	59
37	Methuen	57
38	McGraw-Hill	56
39	Little, Brown	53
40	Hill & Wang	50
41	New York University Press	50
<b>Total Number of Titles</b>		<b>6,143</b>

SOURCE: The BYTES Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

■ **Reserve readings focus on secondary literature—not the original works of literature that students more often purchase in paperback.**

■ **The reserve reading lists indicate a high degree of customization and individuality in teaching of what are in many cases standard undergraduate topics in history and literature.**

While Columbia University, one of the BYTES participants, has a highly struc-

tured program in the humanities, one that is required of all first-year students, there are no such comprehensive programs in the other eight participating universities. At the same time, our study found that there is enough overlap, even within one calendar year in a limited number of neighboring institutions, that a case can be made for making certain works ubiquitously available in colleges and universities.

■ **The publication dates of the works cluster strongly toward the present.**

Even when literary texts long out of copyright are taught, the unmistakable teacher preference for readings appears to be for recent editions.

■ **The books of American and British university presses account for two-thirds of the supplemental book readings assigned.**

The preponderance of a small number of the leading university presses suggests that those publishers have successfully found their readers and the authors to address those readers in ways that are widely welcome.

■ **Pedigreed anthologies are important in undergraduate readings.**

The abundance of titles listed under Harold Bloom is an interesting indicator of an existing practice in the print publishing market. Many of Bloom's titles are not his own works of criticism but come from a Chelsea House series that Bloom edited a decade and more ago. The series comprises dozens of volumes of collected scholarly and critical essays about major works of literature, from authors ranging from A.R. Ammons to William Butler Yeats. The existence and influence of this series suggests that the task of selecting and packaging critical literature for academic use plays an important part in the publishing system. The digital equivalent of such a process remains to be invented. The difficulties recently experienced by the editors of the Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism offer a similar lesson—selecting and compressing material for teaching within the traditional bounds of print is increasingly difficult and scholars and editors are increasingly restive.

■ **Works of highly regarded academics are important in undergraduate teaching.**

For example, the list of most popular authors holds few other surprises. M.H.



**TABLE 2 Title Duplication Between Pairs of Schools**

	YALE	UMASS	UCONN	SYRACUSE	NYU	HARVARD	DARTMOUTH	CORNELL
<b>Columbia</b>	52	13	41	31	17	79	35	35
<b>Cornell</b>	32	14	28	16	9	42	13	
<b>Dartmouth</b>	15	9	15	6	15	23		
<b>Harvard</b>	48	24	49	31	25			
<b>NYU</b>	14	9	12	7				
<b>Syracuse</b>	9	4	11					
<b>UConn</b>	16	14						
<b>UMass</b>	19							

SOURCE: The BYTES Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Abrams of Cornell is one of the most eminent of living literary critics and, at age 89, has held that eminence since at least the publication of *The Mirror and the Lamp* in 1953. Peter Brown of Princeton single-handedly ignited the burgeoning study of late antiquity in the English-speaking world with books published in 1967 and 1971 and has taught for most of the time since at UC-Berkeley and Princeton.

■ **Reserve services, both print and electronic, are labor-intensive.**

Librarians who provide such services have documented their efforts elsewhere.

■ **Currently there is no effective e-books business model that can support electronic reserves services in academic libraries.**

Certainly none exists that in any way can scale to multiple courses over multiple semesters over the years. Evidence from the BYTES study reveals a need not only for an e-book database but also for an appropriate business model to accompany it. Libraries might be willing to pay a reasonable fee for short-term use of books, or parts of books, placed on reserve in an electronic repository for a class during a semester or part of a semester. The library would not need to buy the book or multiple copies of the book so that more than one student could use it at a time. This is in contrast to models like netLibrary, for instance, in which the print or print-plus price of a book is charged for each e-copy. A library would not pay an access fee in perpetuity for readings that are not desired in perpetuity. The models offered by netLibrary.com, Questia, and ebrary do not meet classroom readings needs.

■ **Faculty as teachers are currently more interested in e-books than faculty as scholars.**

Limited conversations with faculty dur-

ing this project suggest that faculty can be very enthusiastic about easy access to books for their classes, whether these books are required or supplementary. Some believe that electronic availability could meet their teaching needs very well. Not all faculty who are enthusiastic about e-readings for students are so enthusiastic about e-readings for their own work. For e-books to take hold in academia, they should be pitched toward students.

■ **Electronic access to frequently used texts is an important unmet need.**

Short-term access to chunks or chapters of books is an entirely new kind of service, dependent on a content-rich

**TABLE 3 Overlap of Titles Across Schools**

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	DISTINCT TITLES	TOTAL VOLUMES
6	11	66
5	16	80
4	65	260
3	198	594
2	829	1,658
1	10,275	10,275
<b>Total Volumes</b>		<b>12,933</b>

SOURCE: The BYTES Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

database. Readers should be able to click on the URLs in an online catalog and check out the titles for a given amount of time. Access (from the publisher's point of view) should be at least as secure as a paper copy, thus meeting the publisher's need to take in even more revenue than with paper alone. The community is served by increased and remote access to the title as well as enhancements to access—dictionary lookup, text to speech, etc. What we need, for the purpose of teaching, is subscription access so that multiple students in a single course can access the titles or portions of them simultaneously.

## Key collaborations

To the participants, the coincidence of publishers was the most interesting finding of the study, and it could be the basis for possible next steps of the BYTES project. The most fertile ground for more research and demonstration projects associated with BYTES involves the value of book content now owned and managed by university presses and a few key trade publishers, heavily present in humanities teaching and learning. The BYTES participants could envision three kinds of collaborative action between libraries and publishers.

First, the *digitization*, "just-in-case," of large bodies of content (from backlists of out-of-print titles) is needed. It should be based on expected and real educational needs, identified from ongoing BYTES-like analyses.

This would be accompanied by *consortial copyright clearance* activities conducted in tandem with university presses.

These would lead to the development of a *business model* that allows college and university libraries to license relevant portions of books for electronic course support, for a semester at a time, for classes of varying sizes, at costs that are reasonable and competitive with print reserves costs.

## The content dilemma

The dilemma is content. Currently no e-book provider, either already in the marketplace or planning to be in the marketplace, offers the array of books keenly needed as supplementary course readings. A corollary dilemma is the lack of a suitable, affordable business model for delivering the needed books in electronic format. In order to advance e-books to the vital position that they could occupy for academic libraries and their users, these problems need urgently to be overcome. It will take librarians and publishers working together to design a future for e-books in academia. ■

**NOTE:** The BYTES study and this article would not have been possible without the contributions of Paul Conway, Project Manager; Joan Emmet, NERL Librarian; and Paul Seeman, Research Assistant. They developed the database and research methodology, as well as the queries that led to results identified here.