



Northeastern University Library

Collections and Information Resources: a policy overview

The collections of the Northeastern University Library (hereafter “the Library”) support the teaching curriculum and major research needs of the university community in all disciplines. This document outlines the current collection policies and practices of the Libraries and highlights significant aspects of the program. The Library of the School of Law, it should be noted, is administered separately from the University Libraries, and the contents of this document do not apply or refer to it.

As the very nature of higher education and the research habits of students and scholars undergo major changes in the electronic environment, so too must the nature of library information resources be adapted to support current methods of teaching, learning and scholarship. In addition, changes in the scholarly publishing industry and ubiquitous access to information resources have added complexities to the Library’s role in providing and mediating information to the campus.

CHANGING NATURE OF LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Print to Electronic Transition

In the past, the collections of a research library were found within its walls and it was often a challenge to obtain information from external sources, especially primary source materials. As more and more print information resources move online, the Library is now able to offer to the Northeastern community a rich array of electronic resources, including books, journals, primary source materials, multimedia works, and digitized archival collections. All of these are available on a 24/7 basis from any location, including a growing number of mobile devices, and most offer powerful search functionality and immediate access to the full text.

Students and scholars alike now regularly conduct a significant amount of their research online. With the growth of online learning and distance education programs, an increasing number of students come physically to campus for only part of their education or alternatively do their work entirely online. The students that do come to the physical library participate in quiet or collaborative learning and are demanding a larger amount of individual and group study space.

With the growing need for both online resources and user space in the library, as well as finite stack space and library collection budgets, the Library has adopted an underlying policy that it retains and/or acquires journal content in only one format and that the electronic format is to be preferred whenever possible. Under this policy, monographs in most disciplines are also being purchased and retained in only one format and the electronic format is preferred, unless the nature and quality of the content is significantly more suited to print (such as longer literary works or those containing art images and illustrations which lose their fidelity online).

Access vs. Ownership

No academic library today can afford to own or house all of the collections that are or might potentially be needed by students and scholars on campus. New models of purchasing and lending of research materials ensure that the Library is able to obtain copies of most scholarly resources as and when they are needed. As an example, the Library is often able to deliver digitized versions of journal articles that are not “locally” owned directly to the user’s desktop within a few days, often within hours.

The Library has a very strong resource-sharing/interlibrary-loan program and tries to fulfill as many requests as possible. Rising costs associated with fulfilling these requests are currently absorbed by the Library.

Due to limited financial and staff resources, borrowing requests for *print* materials for which the Library already provides access to the *online* version are discouraged and must first be justified and approved.

Primary Source Materials

Students and researchers now have greater access to primary source materials for historical research than ever before, as large archival collections are digitized and made available online. Several of these collections are freely available but others are very expensive to purchase or lease. The Library tries to offer some of these collections as funding allows and this means that members of the Northeastern University can have some of the same access as universities with large special collections and historical research collections. Access to primary source materials is now available to a significantly increased extent through the Library’s recently acquired membership in the **Center for Research Libraries** (see below).

Languages

The Library collects primarily English language materials. Collection in languages other than English is undertaken in support of the curricular study of language and literature.

Retention of Print Collections

The Library constantly reviews and updates the print collections for relevancy and value to the scholarly community at Northeastern. It is important to note that the most current and relevant material on a topic is likely no longer be found on the shelves but instead in electronic format. Print materials are normally withdrawn if the Library has negotiated and licensed perpetual access to equivalent electronic content.

Assignments Based on Print Materials

One implication of the ongoing transition to electronic resources is that the Library is no longer able to support assignments that rely on the use of specific collections of print materials in the Library and these traditional assignments may need to be redesigned. Liaison librarians can work with individual faculty members and instructors on possible options.

Gifts of Print Material

The Library no longer accepts gifts of print material, except in the case of valuable archival papers and documents. The Library retains the right to donate or sell those items which are not needed for the

collection. By law, the Library is not able to supply a valuation to donors on any gift donations of books, journals, or media.

SPECIAL TYPES OF RESOURCES

College-Level Textbooks

For purposes of this policy statement, a textbook is defined as a monograph which indicates in the preface or introduction its design for use to support specific courses and which may have one or more of the following characteristics: use of colors in the text to distinguish main points or supplementary material, provision of questions for review at the ends of chapters, frequent publication revision schedules (2-3 years), and the plastic over paper bindings which allow for colorful but poor-wearing covers.

The Library, like most other academic libraries, strongly discourages its subject librarians from the purchase of college-level textbooks for a number of reasons. Textbooks typically add little to a discipline's literature other than simplification and summarization. Their high cost, frequent revision, and generally poor bindings make most textbooks a poor investment for the Library's permanent collections. There are occasions when very selective acquisition of textbooks is warranted, but every textbook purchased means that another scholarly title cannot be purchased.

The move to electronic textbooks, with their associated web sites and online supplementary material, means that they are broadly precluded from library purchase for an additional reason: their personalized sale licensing and password conventions make them impossible to manage as shared and shareable library resources.

NU Course Textbooks

It is the responsibility of students to provide their own textbooks, study guides, etc.; the Library does not undertake to maintain a textbook or course pack collection and approves orders for titles known to be University textbooks only in unusual circumstances. Such caution does not apply for traditional academic or literary works that may incidentally also be used in University courses. Faculty may donate textbooks to the library or for use in course reserves. Faculty are urged to direct students to licensed information resources rather than asking them to pay for course pack collections and expensive textbooks.

Media

The audio and video collections of the Northeastern Libraries support the instructional and research needs of the campus. Since media is often used as a part of classroom instruction, the foundation for selection and purchase is closely linked to the current curriculum. Media materials are offered in all subjects, in support of university departments and programs of study. Some disciplines (Media and Screen Studies, Music, Communication Studies, for example) rely more heavily on non-print formats, as the media is intrinsic to the message.

Funding for the purchase of media in the Library is often problematical, as prices may be much higher

than those of print or electronic text materials. This is especially true for documentary films. Purchase requests over \$250 will be carefully reviewed and the department may be asked to share the cost. It may not be possible to afford accompanying public performance rights. In addition, physical media formats are often superseded and must be replaced, adding to their ongoing cost. When affordable, streaming media is now the preferred format for lease or purchase.

The Library's goal is to provide an improved infrastructure for the increased use of streaming media for classroom instruction. Licensing restrictions and rising media costs must still be accommodated.

Text Mining

Responding to increased interest from the academic community in the provision of electronic data sets and collections appropriate for text and data mining, the Library works to include, whenever possible, text mining rights in its negotiated licenses for electronic resources. The purchase of costly text collections specifically to support data mining activities must be negotiated between the Library and the appropriate College or Department.

Archives & Special Collections

The Library's Archives & Special Collections Department contains two major types of collections. The Northeastern University historical collections include the historical records and publications of Northeastern University - its colleges, centers, and administrative units. Among these materials are master theses and doctoral dissertations, as well as other Northeastern University Publications, including NU course catalogs, newspapers, photographs, and yearbooks. The Archives also preserves historical records of administrative and academic units, and selected individuals and outside organizations with ties to the University.

Special Collections preserves the records of Boston-area social justice organizations that serve under-represented communities. The archival records of these groups are actively sought and acquired. Special Collections also includes rare books, faculty publications, and the Northeastern University Press collection.

Software

The Library does not purchase software for academic departments or individuals. Responsibility in this area falls to [Information Technology Services](#).

FUNDING FOR INFORMATION RESOURCES

Institutional prices for scholarly research materials have risen and continue to rise at a pace (average of 6-8% per year over the last decade) which far exceeds the increases in collections budgets of most academic libraries. Northeastern is no exception. This has several implications as the Library works carefully to balance the collections budget each year:

- Library purchasing/leasing must be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that materials are still needed for teaching or research. In order to afford new subscriptions or one-time purchases,

an equivalent amount of current purchases must normally be cancelled. Library selectors work with academic colleges and departments to understand their most current research needs.

- The Library sometimes purchases or leases expensive, comprehensive collections on a multi-year basis in order to afford new content.
- It is important to alert the Library as early as possible about research needs of new faculty or programs. Whenever possible, money for required additional information resources should be included in grant applications or set aside by departments to help support the information needs of new hires.
- If there are specialized or extremely expensive scholarly resources required by one department or college, the Library will work with the faculty according to the hybrid management model to share costs or provide full funding for the material. This is especially true for resources needed for new programs.
- At times, the Library is presented with extraordinary and unacceptable price increases by vendors and publishers. When it proves necessary to cancel these materials, as important as they may be, Library selectors will work with the appropriate faculty to alert them and to look at possible options.
- In order to continue access to as many scholarly resources as possible, the Library undertakes to implement and evaluate new business models such as pay-per-view, short-term rentals, limited “seats” for licensed online access, and more.

Note: If a department is considering purchasing or has purchased electronic access to a resource for local departmental or college use, it is important that the Library be informed, as it may be possible to extend access to the rest of campus for no or little extra cost. The Library is happy to manage technical access to electronic resources as well as negotiate licenses and contracts for information resources.

EXPANDED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Library participates in several important partnerships and is taking advantage of new business models that significantly increase access to scholarly research materials for the community.

Center for Research Libraries (CRL)

The Library has been a member of the [Center for Research Libraries](#) (CRL) for the past few years. CRL is an international consortium of university, college, and independent research libraries that supports advanced research and teaching in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences by preserving and making available to scholars the primary source material critical to those disciplines.

CRL acquires and preserves newspapers, journals, documents, archives, and other traditional and digital resources from a global network of sources. Most materials acquired are from outside the United States, and many are from five “emerging” regions of the world: Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Latin America. An important aspect of CRL membership for Northeastern is the ability to freely borrow materials from the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology.

CRL enables member institutions to provide students, faculty, and other researchers liberal access to these rich source materials through interlibrary loan and electronic delivery. CRL loan and electronic delivery are designed to support major research projects, such as the production of scholarly

monographs and studies, the writing of dissertations, and seminars at the graduate and advanced undergraduate levels.

HathiTrust

The Library is a member of HathiTrust, a partnership of major research institutions and libraries working to ensure that the cultural record is preserved and accessible long into the future. HathiTrust currently has available in digitized form: 16,714,320 total volumes, 8,115,337 book titles, 448,496 serial titles, and 5,850,012,000 pages of materials. 6,266,787 volumes (~37% of total) are available in the public domain and their catalog records can be accessed from the search box on the Library's homepage. Full text from the public domain works can be searched from the [HathiTrust portal](#). Note that digitized versions of all in-copyright works are accessible online for members of the Northeastern community certified as having a print disability; consult the Disability Resource Center for more information.

Boston Library Consortium

The Library is an active member of the Boston Library Consortium (BLC), together with 17 other research libraries in the New England area, including MIT, Boston University, Boston College, Tufts University and many others. The majority of collections in the BLC libraries are available to be loaned free of charge to members of the Northeastern community. BLC members are also able to visit the other libraries and borrow needed materials or access electronic resources onsite.

In addition to sharing resources, BLC libraries increasingly engage in joint ventures such as a program of shared purchase and access to electronic books.

Demand-Driven Acquisitions

A new business model in academic libraries for the purchase of monographs is that of "demand-driven acquisitions". Records for a wide array of book titles are presented to patrons in the library catalog and the Library pays for those that are most heavily used. Northeastern has successfully introduced this model for e-books to increase access to monographic literature at a more moderate cost.

SUPPORT for OPEN ACCESS

The Library purchases sustaining memberships in Open Access (OA) efforts such as BioMed Central in order to encourage and support faculty publishing in selected Open Access publications. The Library also provides an OA platform, [the Digital Repository Service](#), for the publishing of dissertations, articles, books and more by members of the Northeastern community. More on the Library's position in supporting OA can be found at <https://subjectguides.library.northeastern.edu/openaccess>.

COMPREHENSIVE SEARCH ACCESS

It is the goal of the Library to provide comprehensive search access via Scholar OneSearch (<http://onsearch.library.northeastern.edu>) to all its available information resources in all formats (journals, books, media, articles, etc.), whether held physically in the Library or accessible via the Internet. The Library is also working to provide appropriate links back to purchased resources from wherever the user starts their search (e.g., Google Scholar). Members of the Northeastern University community should remember to check on Library access before paying for a piece of information on the web.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact Amira Aaron, Associate Dean for Scholarly Resources, a.aaron@neu.edu, x4961, with questions or comments about this document.

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