INTRODUCTION

The *Suggest a Library Purchase* program is a collection development tool that aims to satisfy the collection needs of patrons. Patrons submit a *Suggest a Library Purchase* online form, stating the title of the material needed and other additional information. The University of Colorado Boulder (UCB) offers this program to members of the university and the community. Although the Collection Analyst Librarian screens and orders the majority of the submissions received, there appears to be a need for subject specialists to play a role in the promotion of this program to their constituents, and in utilizing the information contained in the submissions for collection development decision-making.

This paper will examine the relevancy of the information contained in the requests to make collection decisions, based on the following criteria: *Department* of the requester, *Affiliation* of the requester, and *Language* of title requested. The focus of this paper emerged after receiving numerous *Suggest a Library Purchase* requests from one graduate student. These requests prompted a curiosity to investigate UCB's *Suggest a Library Purchase* program in terms of its functionality as a collection development tool.

The data collected shows that *Suggest a Library Purchase* submissions may be one tool to locate potential collection gaps that are unknown to subject specialists but have been noticed by constituents, and to identify subject trends in patrons' needs. The data also reveals that subject specialists make limited use of this data for collection development decision-making. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to determine whether data gathered from UCB's *Suggest a Library Purchase* submissions can aid subject specialists to make meaningful collection development decisions.

BACKGROUND

The University of Colorado Boulder is a public research university offering both undergraduate and graduate academic programs and majors. As of April 25, 2019, the Office of Data Analytics reported that UCB had a Spring 2018 enrollment of 31,089 students with the highest percentage of enrollment in the Arts & Sciences (55.4%), followed by Engineering and Applied Sciences (21.3%), and the Leeds School of Business colleges (11.4%). Most of the students enrolled are Colorado residents with a 43.6% female representation. Graduate students constitute 17% of the student body.

UCB Libraries consists of a central branch (Norlin Library) and five branch libraries. Thirty-two subject specialists are responsible for instruction, reference, research consultations, liaison engagement, and collection development. Additionally, subject specialists build and maintain relationships with vendors and publishers, participate in service groups and activities, and produce scholarly work. As noted in the University Libraries' Facts and Statistics webpage, UCB's University Libraries has a collection of 7.5 million volumes, the largest library collection in the Rocky Mountain region.

The University Libraries at UCB created a $10,000 *Suggest a Library Purchase* fund, which went into effect on October 2018. Prior to this, title suggestions were purchased using a combination of the Missing Books Fund, General Books Fund, and Subject Specialist Fund. This policy change is consistent with a van Duinkerken et al. (2013) article about changing fund structures at Texas A&M University. van Duinkerken refers to the creation of a new fund structure that considers supporting "user requests" and meeting all information needs that are seen as "reasonable requests" (143).

The Collection Analyst Librarian at UCB always informs subject specialists of a *Suggest a Library Purchase* request that falls within their subject jurisdiction regardless of whether they have been automatically ordered or not. This decision to inform the subject specialists of all orders is in accord with the recommendations of a program discussed in Reynolds et al. (2010) article, which refers to a survey at Texas A&M University, where subject specialists were concerned that they were only notified of requests over $150. Reynolds et al. consider this issue a failure in communication noting that liaison librarians should be notified of a request no matter the cost of the material (250-251).

The *Suggest a Library Purchase* form at UCB contains relevant information for subject specialists such as: subject trends, departments using this service, the language sought by requesters, and the affiliation of requesters (i.e., Faculty, Staff, Graduate Student, Undergraduate Student, Alumni, Community Member, Other). Similarly, the requests may be useful to assess requesters' preferences regarding year of publication. Stone and Heyhoe-Pullar (2015) referring to patron driven acquisition at the University of Huddersfield, affirmed that patrons preferred newly published titles. This assertion may guide collection development decision making to purchase certain publication dates aligned with users' needs. The *Suggest a Library Purchase* program also helps subject specialists build relationships with faculty, students, and university staff, which is paramount to the liaison work.
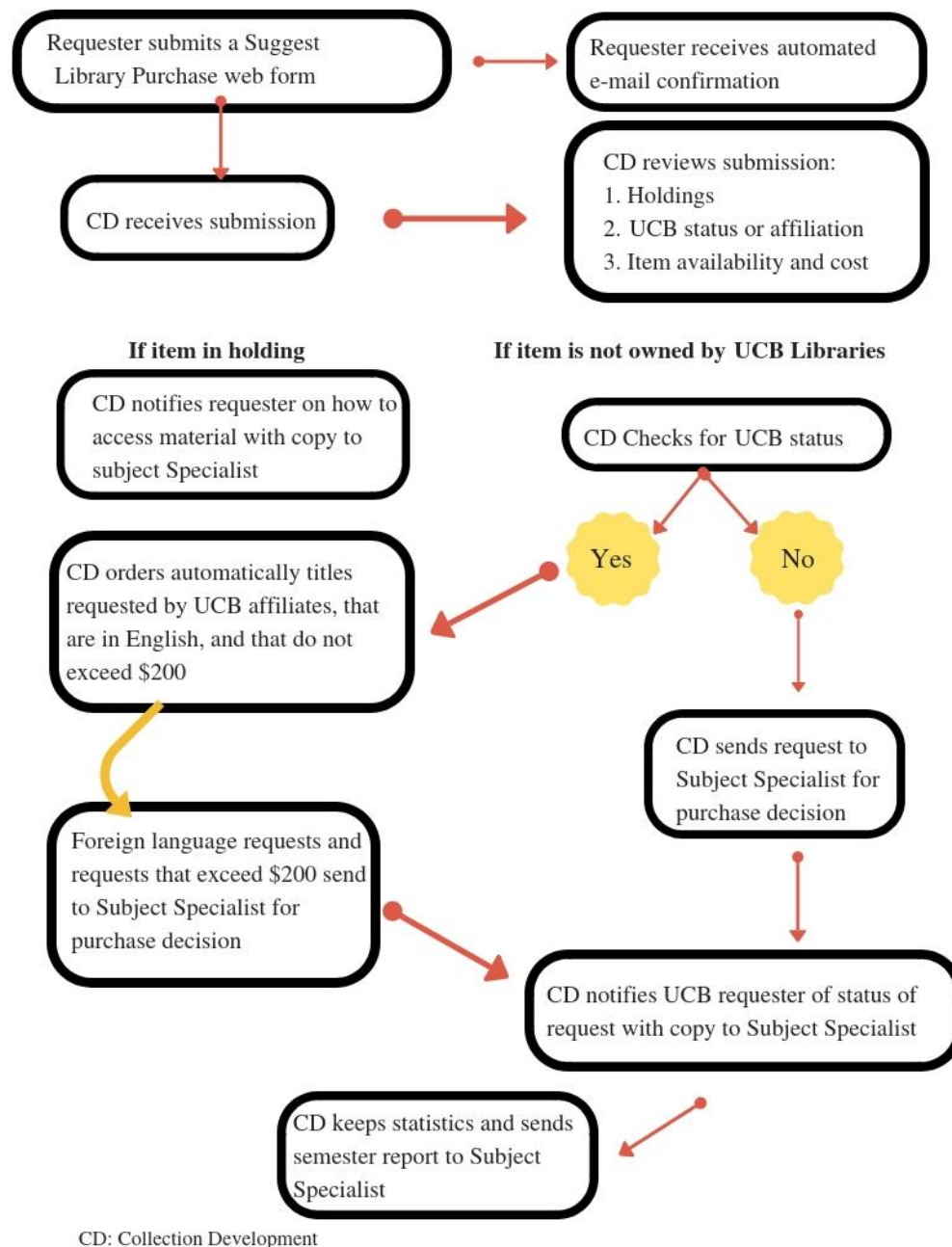
METHOD
The author collected data from 643 *Suggest a Library Purchase* submissions, examining requests for books from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences at UCB from July 2017 to December 2018. However, 196 of the 643 requests were submitted by one graduate student, the outlier. Then, graphics, omitting the outlier, were created to plot the data of the fields: *Affiliation* of the requester, *Department* of the requester, and *Language* of the title requested. In addition, a survey was sent to 32 subject specialists at UCB containing the question: How do you use the information contained in the *Suggest a Library Purchase* submissions to make collection development decisions? 18 specialists answered the survey.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The *Suggest a Library Purchase* process starts when a request is submitted via an online form and is received by the Collection Analyst Librarian. The Collection Analyst Librarian orders the item if:
- it is not owned by UCB libraries
- the requester is affiliated with UCB
- the item is in English, and
- the cost of the item does not exceed $200.

Figure 1. Suggest a Library Purchase Workflow at UCB.

Requester submits a Suggest Library Purchase web form

Requester receives automated e-mail confirmation

CD receives submission

CD reviews submission:
1. Holdings
2. UCB status or affiliation
3. Item availability and cost

If item in holding

CD notifies requester on how to access material with copy to subject Specialist

CD orders automatically titles requested by UCB affiliates, that are in English, and that do not exceed $200

Foreign language requests and requests that exceed $200 send to Subject Specialist for purchase decision

If item is not owned by UCB Libraries

CD Checks for UCB status

Yes   No

CD sends request to Subject Specialist for purchase decision

CD notifies UCB requester of status of request with copy to Subject Specialist

CD keeps statistics and sends semester report to Subject Specialist

CD: Collection Development

If the title is in a foreign language, exceeds $200, or the requester is not affiliated with UCB, then the Collection Analyst Librarian notifies the corresponding subject specialist, who will decide whether to purchase the item or not. For UCB requesters, once it is approved for purchase, the Collection Analyst Librarian sends an e-mail to the requester informing them of the purchase decision, and introducing the appropriate subject specialist. In the case of community members, if a submission has been approved by the corresponding subject specialist, the item is ordered, but unlike UCB requesters, community members are not notified of an approved purchase. All approved requests are treated as rush orders, which means that purchase orders are

processed within a week of submission. Then Circulation will notify the requester when the material is ready for check out.

Figure 2. Affiliation of Requesters

Total sample size, n = 447

Faculty: 207
Graduate Student: 145
Staff: 34
Undergraduate: 23
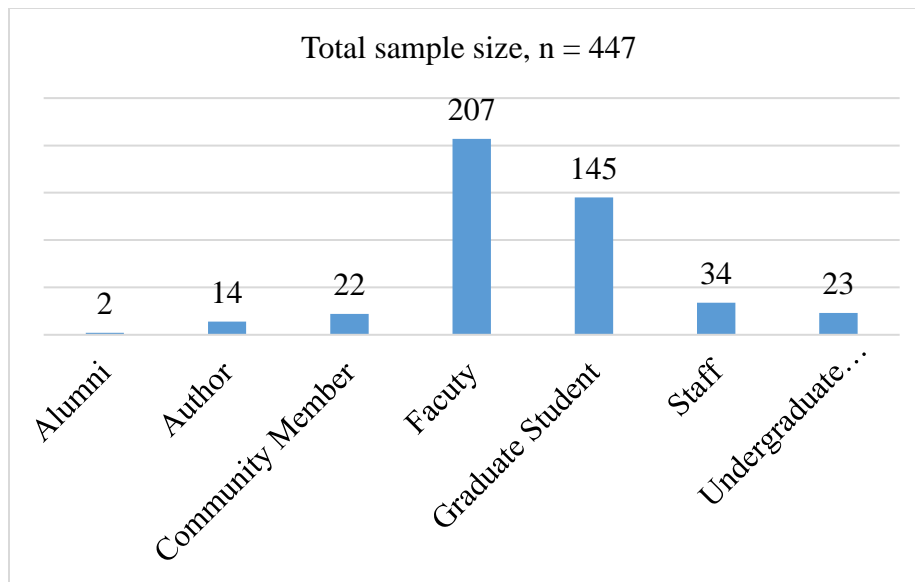Community Member: 22
Author: 14
Alumni: 2

Figure 2 shows that seven categories of requesters utilized the *Suggest a Library Purchase* program at UCB from July 2017 to December 2018. In total there were 447 requests, excluding the duplicates and the requests from the outlier. It also illustrates that a majority of the requests were from faculty (46.3%) and graduate students (32.4%). Only 5.1% of requesters were undergraduate students.

Figure 3. Department of Requesters

Total sample size, n = 400

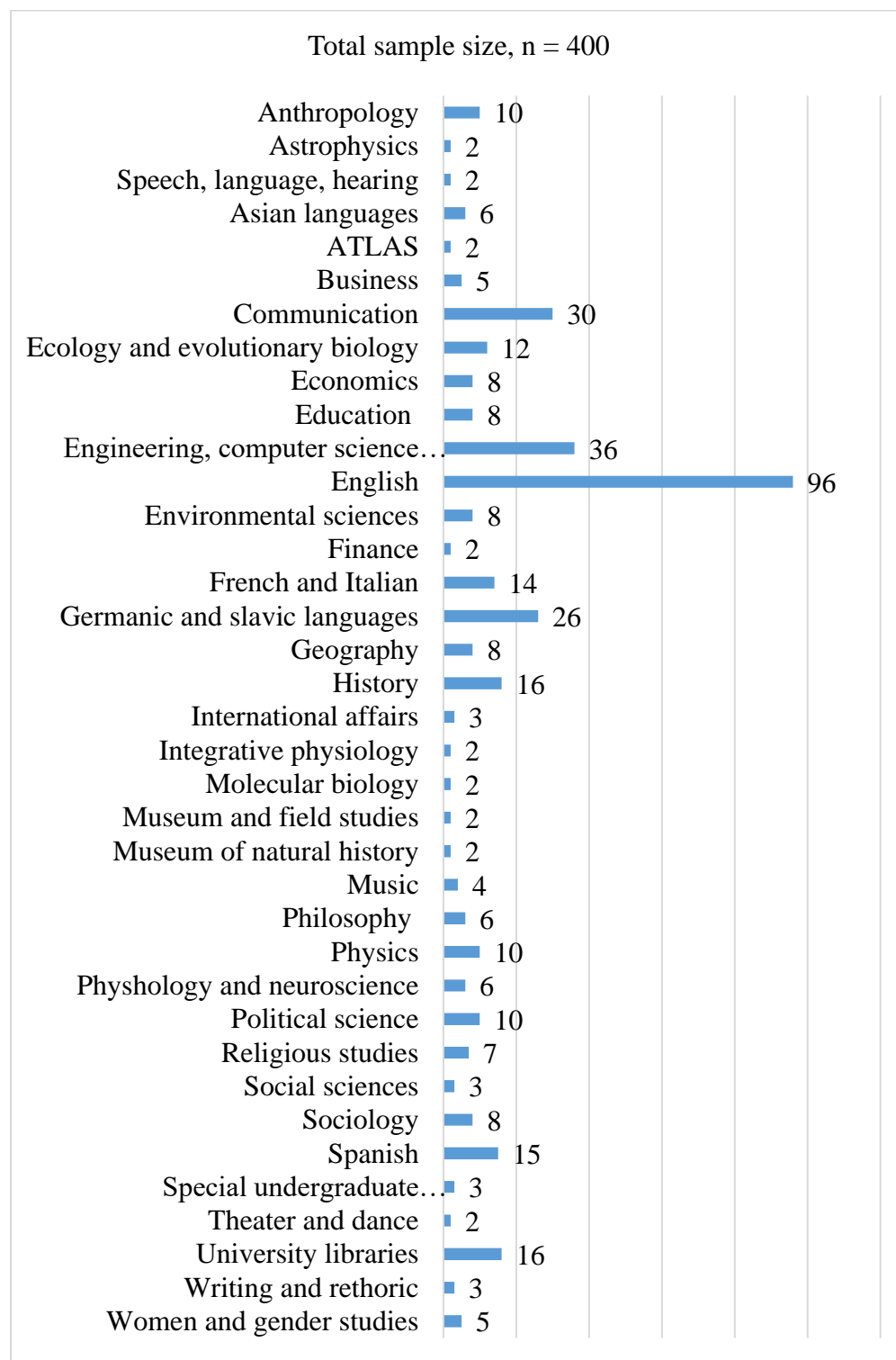| Department	Count
Anthropology	10
Astrophysics	2
Speech, language, hearing	2
Asian languages	6
ATLAS	2
Business	5
Communication	30
Ecology and evolutionary biology	12
Economics	8
Education	8
Engineering, computer science…	36
English	96
Environmental sciences	8
Finance	2
French and Italian	14
Germanic and slavic languages	26
Geography	8
History	16
International affairs	3
Integrative physiology	2
Molecular biology	2
Museum and field studies	2
Museum of natural history	2
Music	4
Philosophy	6
Physics	10
Physhology and neuroscience	6
Political science	10
Religious studies	7
Social sciences	3
Sociology	8
Spanish	15
Special undergraduate…	3
Theater and dance	2
University libraries	16
Writing and rethoric	3
Women and gender studies	5

Figure 3 shows total entries in the *department* field displaying departments that submitted two or more requests. Figure 3 does not show 47 entries by authors, community members, unidentified submitters, duplicates and departments that only submitted one entry. The

department of English rendered the most requests, followed by the department of Engineering and Applied Science.

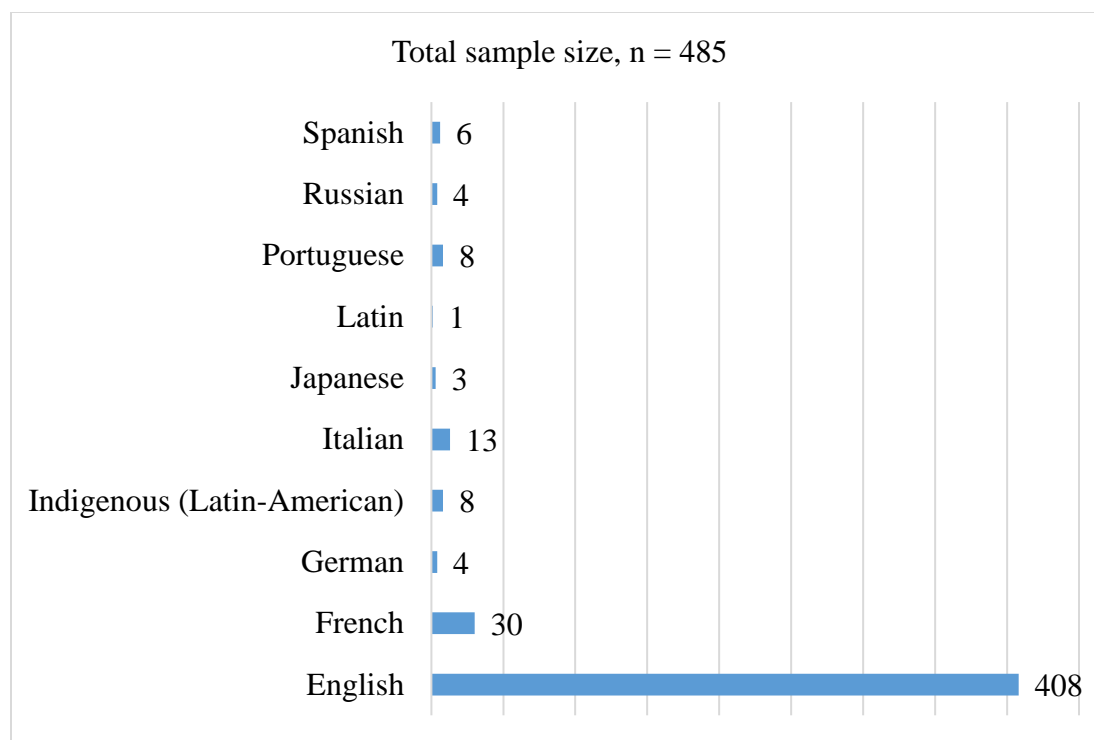**Figure 4. Language of Item Requested Through the Suggest a Library Purchase Form.**

Total sample size, n = 485

Language	Requests
Spanish	6
Russian	4
Portuguese	8
Latin	1
Japanese	3
Italian	13
Indigenous (Latin-American)	8
German	4
French	30
English	408

Figure 4 displays the languages of the titles requested with its corresponding number of requests. English titles constitute the most requests (84%). However, five European languages (12%), excluding Spanish, are represented as well. French (6.1%) and Italian (2.6%) were the most requested foreign languages.

DISCUSSION

How do subject specialists use the information contained in the *Suggest a Library Purchase* submissions to make collection development decisions?

A survey with the open-ended question: "How do you use the information contained in the *Suggest a Library Purchase* submissions to make collection development decisions?" was answered by eighteen subject specialists at UCB. Their responses show that the information contained in the requests has some utility. Over half of these librarians reported that they had used the information contained in the requests to identify missing titles and subject trends. For collection development, determining subject trends allows librarians to purchase books that may have a greater chance of usability and checkouts. Ascertaining subject trends also keeps collections up to date with the collection needs of patrons. Determining missing titles and subject trends concurs with standard criteria that collection development librarians normally follow for selection.

The survey also shows that the *Suggest a Library Purchase* program may help subject specialists to identify patron needs. This is especially relevant for fields like some sciences,

where faculty and students rely heavily on journals instead of books. For example, the Earth Sciences librarian noted that the submissions were helpful to determine what books could be added to the collection. In this sense, connecting with the specific requests allows some subject specialists to be informed of patrons' collection needs. This connection enhances customer service.

Ultimately, the survey results indicate that the *Suggest a Library Purchase* program has not had a material effect on collection development practices. The librarians stated that the low numbers of requests received do not prompt a change in the criteria these librarians use to make collection decisions. This is a pivotal aspect in this discussion as the librarians see the program as underutilized. In the future, should there be an increase in the number of submissions, then a conversation may originate targeting collection development questions addressed in the requests.

In addition, it appears helpful to consider that subject specialists are not in charge of purchase decisions in all requests received. The current procedure, where some books are ordered without the input of subject specialists, may affect how these librarians perceive the *Suggest a Library Purchase* program. Being notified of an approved request is not the same as being involved in the decision, which requires more analysis of the request in context. As it is now, a Collection Analyst Librarian makes a number of these purchase decisions, which results in expedited service, low bureaucracy, and exempts subject specialists from this task. However, one wonders whether there is something lost concerning collection development when subject specialist are not part of the whole process in this program.

Recommendations to improve the *Suggest a Library Purchase* would include the following: we could start by discussing the benefits seen by librarians in the program. Considering that the Collection Analyst Librarian informs subject specialists of all requests regardless of cost and language, the issue is not that librarians are unaware of requests. The matter could be that patrons are either not familiar with this program or not motivated to use it. Either way, publicizing this program by sending e-mails to constituents, in librarian instruction sessions, and in research consultations, for example, may bolster the number of requests for books in languages other than English, or for books that satisfy the research or curricular needs of constituents in a much wider array of departments.

If one contemplates the small percentage of undergraduate students using the *Suggest a Library Purchase* program at UCB, as shown in the *Affiliation* data, then it may make sense to promote this program to this target group, or explore the reason behind this small representation. It may also be pertinent to wonder why graduate students have a low representation of requests. Figure 2 shows that faculty was the group with the highest representation, contradicting the assumption that graduate students are usually the group ordering the most books.

Finally, Figure 3 for *Department* shows that even when there is ample representation of various departments, most of them generated 10 or less requests. Naturally, it is predictable that the English department holds the majority of requests. Figure 3 makes one wonder whether the constituents of the departments with low representation are aware of this program, and if they are not, then this could explain the low number of requests. On the contrary, a low number of requests could also be a reflection of balanced collections, where requesters feel there is nothing they need to request. However, the latter appears unlikely.

CONCLUSION

An examination of UCB's *Suggest a Library Purchase* program shows that it has the potential to be useful for collection development to subject specialists, though overall it remains underutilized by patrons. The majority of submissions come from faculty and graduate students, which is not unexpected, but shows a need for further promotion of the program across the wider university community. Since the majority of requests are approved automatically due to established criteria, without the need for subject specialist input or approval, subject specialists may not realize the full benefits that could be realized from analyzing submissions in the aggregate. As surveyed librarians noticed, the submissions provide knowledge on missing titles and subject trends, and thus the information gathered through this program could be a useful tool to facilitate building collections that serve patron needs and contributes to the making of informed collection development decisions.

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