

On Aesthetics, Zacatecas and Everything In-between: Utilizing Subject Headings from Special Collections Circulation Data to Assess and Inform

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Abstract: Within special collections and archives metric gathering and assessment activities have emerged as increasingly important areas of action. Historically lacking standardized usage metrics have been addressed broadly and minutely within these sites through a variety of efforts, but more can be done learn about and respond to our patrons by creatively examining data we already collect. As more of our functions and workflows are conducted online a vast well of data is manifest. This project suggests a beginning into exploring under-charted terrain within this already captured data.

In September 2010 Houghton Library implemented AEON, an online circulation system. Through it we have amassed a huge amount of standardized data about what collection materials researchers are using. While past efforts have sporadically ventured to learn from this data, the difficulty of gathering and acting on a comprehensive record has prevented formal analysis. Focusing on the now comparatively easily examined subject headings of circulated materials we've begun to explore and wonder: What could this data tell us about collection usage and research interests of patrons? In particular, could this data give insight into what parts of the collection are being used and what subject areas are being utilized in current research? In examining subjects of interest and fluctuations in usage, might there be insights on offer, or even predictive powers to be leveraged which could inform collection development, cataloging, public services, conservation, and digitization priorities?

This presentation will discuss the project to date: the successes and challenges encountered and describe next steps.

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