

# **Reference Materials on Terrorism: An Evaluation of the Collection at the University of Maryland Library at College Park**

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## **Introduction**

Libraries choose to evaluate their collections for a variety of reasons. An evaluation of the library's collection can provide evidence to external reviewers or creditors that a university is capable of supporting its degree programs. Libraries may also want to see how well their collection in a subject area supports a particular campus department or discipline. Evaluating a collection by comparing it to another library's holdings can be useful in many instances. A small, private university specializing in political science may boast a collection of relevant materials comparable to that of larger, well-funded state schools. Collections can be compared among material types, subjects, or disciplines, and can occur within or across campuses.

Reference collections are an essential component of most libraries and due to their high frequency of use, it is important to evaluate them periodically to ensure the most relevant, comprehensive materials are available to patrons. Libraries belonging to institutions with departments or researchers specializing in specific subjects are wise to evaluate their reference materials on those subject areas. This is even more true when the subject of interest has contemporary and historical merit, as well as appeal to a large population.

The collection evaluated here belongs to the University of Maryland Library at College Park (UMCP). This library was chosen based on its proximity to and affiliation with the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror (START). START is an interdisciplinary consortium of researchers dedicated to improving our understandings of the origin, dynamics, and impacts of terrorism. It is located on the UMCP campus and its researchers and employees have access to this campus library. To determine if the reference collection at the UMCP library can support the diverse needs of these researchers, an evaluation of the reference materials on the topic of terrorism was performed.

## **Checklist Method**

There are several ways to evaluate a library's collection. A review of interlibrary loan requests can identify materials frequently requested by patrons. Internal or external subject specialists can be hired to review journal, database, and monograph holdings. User-centered surveys, interviews, or focus groups provide an evaluation of a collection from the patrons' perspectives. Citation analyses provide an assessment of a library's periodicals holdings. In-house studies of shelf availability provide information about patrons' abilities to access the materials already held by a library. Circulation statistics provide quantitative information about the materials patrons take home from the library. The most comprehensive evaluations combine results from collection-centered and user-centered studies.

Another way to evaluate library holdings is the checklist method. Checklists are lists of materials to which a library's collection can be compared. Small libraries may use checklists to evaluate their entire holdings; medium and large libraries use checklists to evaluate specific subject areas or smaller collections within the library, such as a reference collection, audiovisual collection or periodical holdings. By comparing its holdings to those of the checklist, a library can easily determine the strengths and weaknesses of its own collection.

As an evaluation tool, the checklist method has advantages and disadvantages. Depending on the length of the list, evaluating a collection using the checklist can be time consuming (Lundin 1989). For some topics, it can be easy to locate previous published lists; other collections require that such a list be developed before an evaluation can take place. The results of a checklist evaluation are quantitative and readily understood, making it easy for librarians to use the data to further collection development (Dennison 2000). Alternatively, when a library discovers it holds a certain percentage of materials on the list, it does not actually learn if those items are of use to its specific user population. Some critique the checklist method as mechanical and the listed items obsolete. Reference collections, however, contain specific and seminal works which remain relevant over longer periods of time. Thus, the checklist method is an appropriate and straight-forward approach to evaluating the reference collection described here.

## **Methods**

I searched for previously published checklists, pathfinders, and bibliographies on terrorism reference materials in three library and information science databases: Library and Information Science Abstracts; Library Literature and Information Science; and Web of

Science. The lists identified did not address reference collections on terrorism. Instead, they provided lists of general, non-reference books on terrorism (O'Brien 1995); books discussing September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Carlson 2003; Hooper 2002); books on specific terrorist groups (Olson 2006); K-12 resources (Lukehart 2002); and internet resources to help students cope in the event of a terrorist attack (Green and Ramirez 2002).

Because these sources were not applicable to the library collection in question, I generated a relevant and appropriate checklist by combining recommendations from several sources. All suggestions from *Walford's Guide to Reference Material* (2000), *Guide to Reference Books* (1996), and *American Reference Books Annual* (2006) on terrorism were included. The items listed as "General Reference Works" in the bibliography of the *Historical Dictionary of Terrorism* (2002) were included (pp. 525-527). In addition, *WorldCat* the *Public Library Catalog*, and *Google Scholar* were queried to produce results what included items with both the word terrorism and any one of the following keywords: encyclopedia, dictionary, atlas, almanac, yearbook, bibliography (in titles only), directory, or guide.

When combined, these sources recommended a total of 95 titles, 34 of which were recommended at least twice. These are also known as the Total Holdings and Core Holdings, respectively. (See Appendix A for list of titles.) All 95 titles were searched for in the UMCP library using the University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions (USMAI) online public access catalog. A title was considered held by UMCP if it was identified in USMAI as belonging to the College Park campus, regardless of the item's edition or location within that library.

## Results & Discussion

It was determined that the UMCP library holds 20 of the 34 core titles, and only 5 of the remaining 61 total titles (see Table 1). This means that only 26% of all listed titles are available to patrons on the College Park campus. These titles are considered reference materials which typically do not circulate; thus, individuals on the College Park campus in need of reference materials on terrorism are limited to these 25 titles.

**Table 1. Holdings of UMCP and the USMAI consortium.**

<u>Library</u>	<u>Core Holdings of 34 titles</u>		<u>Total holdings of 95 titles</u>	
UMCP	20	59 %	25	26 %
USMAI	31	91 %	79	83 %

The UMCP library is one of several within the USMAI library consortium (see Table 2 for list of participating institutions). To determine if the UMCP library was the most capable among the consortium to serve the needs of the researchers at START, the entire system

was queried as to the holdings of all of the participating libraries. When all libraries are taken into consideration, the USMAI libraries carry almost all (91%) of the suggested core titles and an impressive 83% of all titles suggested by the combined 7 sources consulted here.

The total holdings include the 34 core holdings, and an additional 61 titles recommended only once by the 7 sources used to create this checklist. These 61 titles do not necessarily lack merit – they could be relevant but are either too rare, too specific, or too new for more than one of the 7 sources to recommend. If any library would need a collection representing the best, most diverse, and most specific reference material on

**Table 2. Libraries in the USMAI Consortium**

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Bowie State University
Center for Environmental Science
Coppin State University
Frostburg State University
Morgan State University
Salisbury University
St. Mary's College of Maryland
Towson University
University of Baltimore
University of Baltimore Law Library
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
University of Maryland, College Park
University of Maryland, Eastern Shore
University of Maryland Health Sciences & Human Services Library
University of Maryland Law Library
University of Maryland University College

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terrorism, it would have to be a library supporting a consortium of interdisciplinary researchers exploring terrorism from a variety of angles. Why, then, are so many of these rare reference materials held in collections AWAY from the UMCP campus which, due to their non-circulation status, are unavailable to researchers at START?

The implications of an evaluation like this are multiple. First, the UMCP library can use these data to request a review of its budget, holdings, and collection development strategies. These data could be used to support a proposal to relocate these rarer materials to the UMCP campus, perhaps in exchange for materials the donating library can use to support a subject-specific collection of its own. Prospectively, a new institution considering multiple geographic locations could evaluate the holdings of nearby libraries before selecting a location for headquarters.

This study evaluates the reference holdings of a specific subject based on the library's proximity to researchers with potential use of its reference materials. This type of analysis could be conducted in multiple locations across multiple disciplines. For example, what are the biomedical reference holdings of University of California San Francisco library adjacent to the San Francisco research hospitals? How about the reference holdings on Hmong culture at the Twin Cities public library? (Minnesota has the largest population of Hmong outside of Laos.) How do libraries located to their own nations' capital fare in terms of their reference holdings on nation-specific or cultural-specific topics? There are unlimited subject-specific/geographic comparisons that could be studied.

In regards to the UMCP collection, additional analyses should be conducted before any changes to the collection or the library's collection development policy are made. The checklist generated here should be used to evaluate the specific holdings of individual USMAI libraries. The information needs of START and its researchers should be assessed to determine if the UMCP collection does indeed meet its needs at present.

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