



## ARTICLE

**Randyn A.  
Heisserer-Miller**

Colorado State  
University, Fort Collins

**Leah R. McAlister**

Southeast Missouri State  
University

# New Horizons for Academic Library Collection Development: Creating a Community-Curated Collection Through Student Empowerment

## ABSTRACT

As the role of the academic library in university life changes, libraries are seeking ways to better engage their communities—university students, faculty, and staff. Student success and engagement have come to the forefront of these efforts. In 2019, Kent Library at Southeast Missouri State University implemented two programs to engage students in collection development. The first program enriched subject areas within Kent Library's collection that were selected by the student body. The second program awarded student groups grants for purchasing library materials that supported their focus. This case study shares details of the two programs, their implementation, and the results, including the impact of student engagement in collections and the creation of a community-curated library collection.

## KEYWORDS

academic library, collection development, student engagement, student success, community curation

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Over the past few decades, universities have faced declining enrollments with stiffer competition for the ever-shrinking pool of high school graduates. This reality, coupled with a welcomed focus on the needs of first-generation and underserved student populations, has prompted universities to renew or begin efforts toward student success. As academic librarians focus their attention on student-success measures, they question many preconceived or more traditional professional services and modes of engagement.

Academic librarians typically respond to matters related to student success by using their limited resources to develop or enhance user services (Tran and Higgins 2020). In many cases, developing or enhancing user services leads to a de-prioritization of collection development (Appleton 2020). Increased need for collaborative spaces, technology, and seating has caused physical library collections to be dramatically consolidated, sent to storage, and/or weeded to free up square footage. Library resources are left out of the student services equation exposing a limited understanding of the library's collection as a service tool for student success. Collection budgets have been reallocated to

shore up funding for creating these physical spaces while simultaneously being cut or kept stagnant due to funding constraints.

Southeast Missouri State University (Southeast) was experiencing some of these dynamics in 2019 when the student engagement programs detailed in this paper were implemented.

## **Southeast Missouri State University**

Southeast Missouri State University is a small regional university located on the Mississippi River in Cape Girardeau, in the “Bootheel” of Missouri. The university’s 2021 full-time equivalent enrollment was 7,239 (Southeast Missouri State University 2022c), down from just over 11,000 in the fall of 2017. Southeast was founded in 1873 as a normal school training elementary and high school teachers (Southeast Missouri State University 2022b). During its existence, the university has grown into a thriving Carnegie Classified “master’s colleges and universities: larger programs” institution (American Council on Education 2015).

In 2017, the Missouri State Legislature, under a new governor, began making major cuts to the state’s funding for higher education (Rosenbaum 2017). This exacerbated an already difficult situation brought on by the increasing costs of declining enrollment and state laws capping annual tuition and fee increases. In the spring of 2019, under a mandate from the president of the university, all unused departmental budgets were swept to secure funding for Southeast’s budgetary shortfall due to funds withholding by the Governor of Missouri. This eliminated approximately \$100,000 from Southeast’s Kent Library’s collection budget of \$1.7 million, constituting an approximately 6 percent reduction. These swept funds represented intentional savings the library had accumulated over several years to cover inflation costs. While the effects were not felt that fiscal year, the consequences in the coming fiscal year were apparent.

The urgent situation with Kent Library’s collection budget was further compounded by a new directive in the spring of 2020 from Southeast’s administration for Academic Affairs, the university division the library fell under, to cut 12 percent of its overall budget for the coming fiscal year. The library was not spared. This cut and the previous cut represented an 18 percent reduction in library funding, adding to a total revenue reduction for the library, since 2015, of 25 percent—20 percent directly from collections. Given this financial reality, an emergency review of all collection spending was launched in the fall of 2020 to balance the reduced budget and try to ensure a revenue surplus to cover the next fiscal year’s inflation costs. With this financial backdrop in mind and a dire need to use the remaining collection’s funds as strategically as possible while supporting students, faculty, and staff, ways were sought to create new opportunities and paradigms for collection development at Kent Library.

## **Kent Library**

Established in 1939, Kent Library is a lean operation with little more than five staff members per 1,000 students—thirteen librarians and eight professional staff members (National Center for Education Statistics n.d.). In 2021, the library held over 500,000 physical monographs and journal volumes, over 11,000 e-books, and over one million other items such as microforms and DVDs (National Center for Education Statistics n.d.).

Southeast operates under the decades-old, faculty-driven collection development model, meaning academic department faculty select materials for the library’s collection rather than librarians. Kent Library’s Acquisitions Unit allocates library materials funds each year to individual academic departments.

These departments autonomously create lists of materials they feel build the collection for their department's needs. The Acquisitions Unit collects these lists of monographs, e-books, films, and kits and then orders them. Since 2009, Kent Library has had the good fortune to be able to offer individual grants to faculty through the Carrie Woodburn Johnson Endowment (Southeast Missouri State University 2022a). These grants are used to purchase research and teaching materials based on individual faculty requests. All one-time purchases for the library are handled through these processes.

With the endowment and a faculty-driven collection development model, librarians at Southeast are virtually uninvolved in collection development. The librarians only maintain collection responsibilities over resources that require ongoing commitments, such as journal and database subscriptions, as well as some special collections like juvenile and reference materials. This equates to a great deal of academic faculty involvement in the library but also creates problems when topics of deselection or budgetary reductions are discussed.

To increase librarian-student collaboration and library visibility, methods to strategically engage Southeast's students and enhance the collection through a more holistic community curation were investigated. After hearing about limited efforts to engage students in collection development from Missouri Southern State University at the Eighteenth Annual Brick and Click Libraries Conference (Reed and Carr 2018), two initiatives that strove to answer the needs at Kent Library were developed. The "What Would You Like to Read About?" program allowed the student body to choose a subject area for collection enhancement and the Johnson Endowment Grants for Student Groups allowed student organizations to request materials that would support their groups' focus (Southeast Missouri State University 2022a and 2022d).

## **Literature Review**

"Student engagement in higher education is complex, can mean different things to different people, and is underpinned by a range of different, and at times, competing ideologies" (Freeman 2013, 146). Yet it is generally accepted in universities today that student engagement directly correlates to student success. A Clemson University study concluded that "students with at least some level of engagement were seven times more likely to graduate with a baccalaureate degree within six years than those with no engagement" (Trogden, Kennedy, and Biyani 2022, 154). This echoes a 2018 University of British Columbia study of psychology students, which found that students who engaged in events performed better academically and participated in further engagement opportunities (Whillans et al. 2018). Holmes' 2018 Sheffield Hallam University study further supports the understanding that student engagement aids in student success by comparing students in online courses containing continuous assessments [engagement] to previous years' online students in courses without assessments. Students who were assessed regularly were more actively engaged and more successful (Holmes 2018).

Despite this correlation to student success, engagement is inconsistent. Trogden, Kennedy, and Biyani (2022) state that, "Some students may seek out repeated opportunities [to engage] while others engage very little or not at all..." (145). Tualualelei et al. (2022), found that there were limited opportunities for social, collaborative, and emotional engagement in online courses and that "...students' engagement with touchpoints was highly variable" (196). This variability can be attributed to a scattered ideology of student engagement. Several articles referred to specific tools to increase engagement, such as self-generated exams and quizzes, and reflective journal writing (Muñoz-Escalona et al. 2018; Lin, Sun, and Zhang 2021; Ahmed and Zaky 2021). One

study defines these mechanisms as high-impact educational practices such as “first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, student-faculty research, study abroad and diversity/global learning, service-learning, internships, senior experiences/capstones, common intellectual experiences, writing-intensive course, and collaborative assignments and projects” (Trogden, Kennedy, and Biyani 2022, 146–47). Howell, Hamilton, and Jordan (2023) describe a tertiary model of engagement developed at Middle Georgia State University focused on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement strategies. The literature does not offer a consensus on student engagement best practices.

With the same complexities and inconsistencies, academic libraries are also seeking ways to increase student engagement to help support student success. Appleton’s review on the subject from 2020 divides the literature into three areas of possible engagement: “partnerships between students and librarians, seeking student voices and opinions; and library instruction” (189). Appleton (2020) explains, “A lot of the literature about student engagement in academic libraries naturally focuses on methods and techniques practiced and required for effective engagement with library instruction...” (204). When considering tools for seeking out student voices, Appleton (2020) found only instruction-focused tools stating, “Surveys, interviews, and focus groups are all common methods of eliciting student feedback, but they have not always been regarded as forms of ‘student engagement.’” (200).

Due to the thoroughness of Appleton’s literature review, the authors focused their review on more recent contributions—2021 to the present. A review of this literature demonstrated a broader effort and definition of student engagement in academic libraries beyond instruction and orientation (Farry 2022; Helbing et al. 2022). These broadened engagement efforts ranged from library social media (Ihejirika, Goulding, and Calvert 2021) to library space planning (Keisling and Fox Jr. 2021) to how students were involved in collection development through various acquisition models. The authors chose to focus on student engagement through collection development practices to provide context for their work.

Jansen (2021) provides background on traditional academic library collection patterns by stating that at Pennsylvania State University, faculty are the predominant users of the collection, including their popular titles collection. As the predominant users, they hold the greatest influence over the collection’s composition. Traditionally, the role of the academic library collection is to support the needs of the faculty in teaching and research. Very little room is left for student input and needs. Yet from the literature, we can see this paradigm shifting to focus on active student engagement and success through collection development (Ayton and Capraro 2021; Pavenick and Martinez 2022).

One of the first, though passive, engagement mechanisms for students in collection development is interlibrary loan (Roll 2015; Shen et al. 2011; Waller 2013). By allowing students, faculty, and staff to request materials not currently in their academic library’s collection, libraries formed a mechanism to initiate requests based on need. Many libraries have developed specific criteria to trigger a purchase of the interlibrary loan request. This system creates a patron-driven acquisitions model and passively engages students in collection development. Another passive student engagement model is the patron-driven and demand-driven acquisition models offered by publishers and aggregator library vendors. These models of acquisitions are thoroughly represented in the literature though not as student engagement tools. Veeder (2021) states that these models are active forms of collection development “...even if the patrons may not know that they are contributing to the collection development process” (318).

An example of this comes from Geisel Library at Saint Anselm College (Waller 2013). Anselm College, like Southeast Missouri State University, operates under a faculty-driven collection development model, allocating funds to academic departments for the purchasing of items for the library's collection. Geisel Library decided to start purchasing items requested through interlibrary loans rather than borrowing them, utilizing collection development guidelines that had already been established. This patron-driven collection activity was limited to undergraduate students and utilized them as selectors which is unique to the literature. Waller's (2013) findings show that, on average, items purchased using this method circulated more than items purchased via other methods. The library did not directly engage or communicate with students or student groups in the collection development process as was typical of the reviewed literature.

Two articles stand out in the literature because of their focus on active student-driven acquisitions as engagement tools and move us toward the idea of active student engagement in collection development to foster student success.

Ayton and Capraro (2021) at Rhode Island College detail a program that engaged a small group of students to actively collaborate with librarians and faculty to enhance a specific collection. The authors engaged six education students in reviewing the current Curriculum Resource Center collections through project-based learning. The collection included children's materials as well as curriculum materials and ranged in format from visual aids to books. The six students reviewed every item in the collection, with guidance from their faculty and the librarians, determining whether to remove, replace, or keep items. The students then made recommendations for purchases to update the collection to increase diversity.

Efforts at California State University by Pavenick and Martinez (2022) engaged students in the development of a special collection. The authors were charged with building and sustaining the Arnold T. Schwab Endowed Collection which contains LGBTQIA+-related materials. Acknowledging the limits to their expertise, the authors developed strategies to gain input from faculty and students. Three of the employed strategies directly engaged students in developing the collection. The authors visited LGBTQIA+ tables at Club Week at the University, set up tables at campus events to encourage suggestions, and organized a library pop-up at the LGBTQIA+ House on campus. These efforts were successful in building a relationship with students and receiving student suggestions for items to be included in the collection. Students also had suggestions for vetting materials. Material types added included e-books, books, DVDs, streaming media, and one new database. A study of circulation statistics showed that circulation of this collection increased after the new items were added. The program has become part of the collection development process every two years.

Though a review of the literature demonstrates the history of patron-driven acquisitions in its various forms, there is little regarding the engagement of students—or faculty—in collection development with intentionality. Academic libraries, through necessity, have moved toward automated acquisition models, but few have engaged their communities directly to form relationships and bolster strategic collections. The articles referenced above, though similar to the programs initiated by the Acquisitions Unit at Kent Library in 2019, lack the breadth of engagement and the focus of purpose.

Student Engagement In Collection Development

Subject Area Nomination Program

In the spring of 2019, the Kent Library Dean approved a proposal planned for implementation in the fall, which included the creation of a subject-area nomination program called “What Would You Like to Read About?” Initially, \$3,000 was budgeted to be spent on a subject area nominated and voted on by the student body at Southeast. After the nomination and voting process was completed between September and November, a librarian volunteer would select materials in the chosen subject area.

As seen in figure 1, the first year of the program saw ten subject areas nominated. All ten areas were put onto an electronic ballot with young adult bestselling novels winning the most votes (17). This eclectic group of subject areas included sports history (12 votes), mythology and fables (10 votes), acquiring foreign languages (7 votes), and the history of transgendered and non-binary people (6 votes).

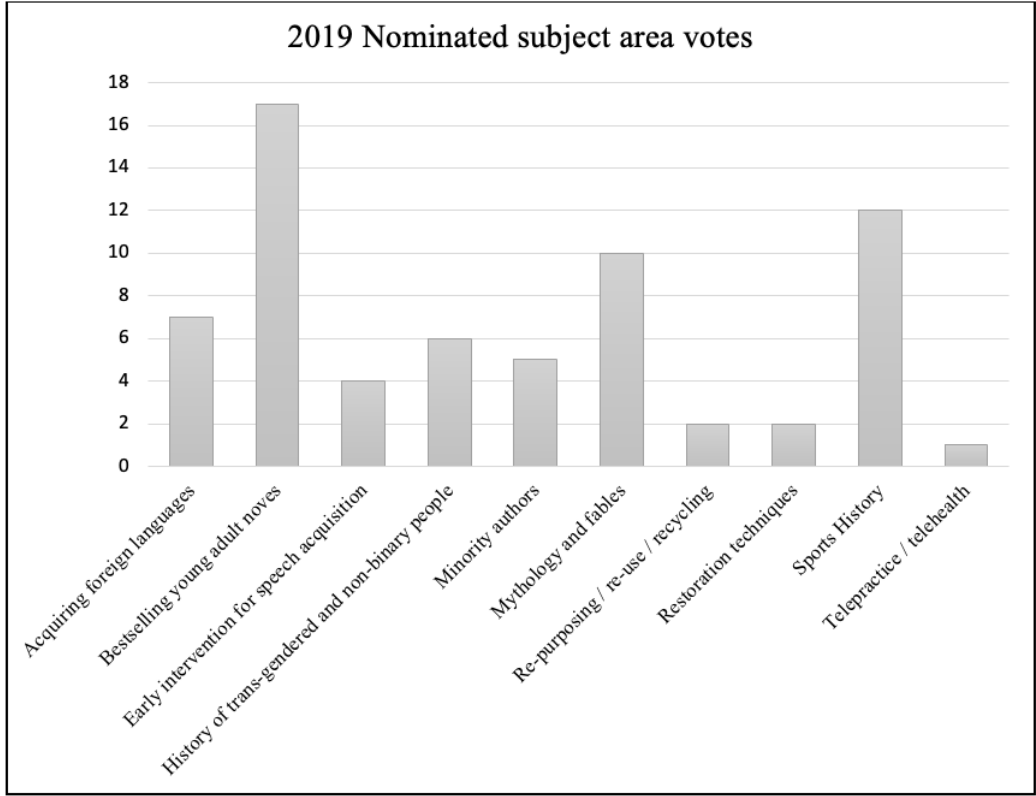


Figure 1. Year one subject area voting results

In the second year of the program, four nominations were received with foreign language instruction winning against subjects like illustration and Marxism. The second year saw a reduction in the overall budgeted amount from \$3,000 to \$1,000 due to funding constraints. As well, the second year of the program coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which created extra challenges in getting student engagement and campus-wide information about the program in front of students.

Student Group Grant Program

The second program that started in the fall of 2019 was the student group grant program. Kent Library initially budgeted \$3,000 for the first year with the intent of awarding two grants of \$1,500 each. In the second year, that budget

was cut to \$2,000, or two \$1,000 grants; however, due to the applicant pool composition, the committee chose to award an additional \$1,000 grant. In 2021, only one grant was awarded for \$1,000. This program mirrored the faculty endowment grant program mentioned above, which had been established for decades.

An electronic application was created, which the student groups had to fill out. They were asked to justify their request by answering the following prompts:

- reason for the request
- how materials would aid in the purpose of the group
- how the materials would improve the library's collection
- how the requested items were identified

They were also asked to create a list of materials they wanted with pricing. Most importantly, applicants were asked to collaborate with a librarian from Kent Library. This incentivized more collaboration with students using librarians as a resource and created more engagement in collection development. Ultimately, to ensure proper oversight, the group's sponsor and a librarian had to approve the application.

Materials requested were limited to one-time purchases like monographs, films, or kits. Any resource requiring a continuing commitment of funds such as databases or journals was excluded. Requests were limited by not allowing anything that would require additional spending for things like software, hardware, or facilities work orders. This helped to ensure the budget allocated for this program would not be overspent or that a request would not incur unexpected costs.

Student groups that were awarded grants included the National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association in 2019 and 2021; Student Dietetic Association in 2019; Finance and Economics Club and Law, Politics, and Society in 2020; and Black Student Union in 2020. Examples of groups that applied but were not awarded grants were God's Ensemble—an a cappella group on campus asking for music stands and folders—and Greek Life, who asked for leadership monographs and films found to already be within the collection.

For the second year of this program, the application was edited, eliminating the question "How were these materials identified?" to help ease barriers for applicants based on applicant feedback from 2019. Some respondents felt this question implied a need to do extra work and created a hardship. Since the overall point of both student engagement programs was to build relationships with students, not overburdening the student groups was important while still asking for adequate justification.

The grid in table 1 from 2020 was used by the Collection Development and Management Committee of Kent Library, which evaluated the student organization grant applications each year. The committee comprised six librarians who based their evaluation on three criteria:

- evidence of a need
- consistency with department and university teaching-learning goal objectives
- the availability of resources

These criteria were reviewed as they were depicted in the answer to the application questions.

Two requests broadened the library's understanding of what academic libraries should be purchasing: (1) The Dietetics Student Association application requested food kits to use for demonstration purposes when teaching about

Student group grant application scoring grid										
		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total
Student group name	Amount requested	y n	y n	y n	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	25
Black Student Union	\$ 1,000.00	y	n	y	4.7	4.1	4.8	4.4	3.3	21.3
Finance & Economics Club	\$ 912.49	y	y	y	4.6	4.6	4.2	4.6	4.6	22.6
God's Ensemble	\$ 1,000.00	y	y	y	2.3	2.3	1.5	1.8	2.3	10.2
Greek Life	\$ 500.00	n	n	y	4.2	4.2	4.6	3.5	3.3	19.8
Law, Politics, & Society	\$ 905.00	y	y	y	3.8	4.8	4.4	4.8	4.6	22.4

C2: Kent Librarian Signature

C3: University-recognized student group

C4: Reason for request

C5: How will the materials aid in the purpose of the group?

C6: How will these materials improve the Kent Library collection?

C7: Quality of materials requested

C8: Application quality – grammar and mechanics

Table 1. Student group grant application scoring grid

nutrition and portion size; and (2) the Student Kinesiology and Recreation Group requested course survey kits to use in setting up physical training courses. It is fair to say both were items that never would have been considered under traditional selection practices. These requests highlighted how direct student engagement in collection development can be used to strategically meet student needs and support student success.

## Timeline

The timeline for both programs fell within the fall semester of each academic year as seen in figure 2. Though fall semesters are busy, this timeline would allow the materials to be available for students before they graduated the following May, thereby providing more immediate and tangible, positive reinforcement of their participation.

Throughout the preceding summer, the Acquisitions Unit, comprising five staff members, prepared for and coordinated the programs. This included working to ensure the coming cycle's promotional materials were edited and updated as needed, submitting graphic design requests for new materials to the library's graphic design staff, updating email lists, editing press releases, and updating the subject area nomination form and student group grant application.

In September, after Labor Day, the programs kicked off based on a publicity schedule, including emails and social media posts. This schedule was different for each program so they would not be confused with each other and so they would stay refreshed in the university promotional ether. Messaging on a college campus is difficult, and collaboration with other units on campus helped ensure multiple and varied points of communication with students.

For the subject area program, nominations were due by the first week of October. By the second week in October, the Acquisitions Unit had had time to create the subject area ballot from the nominations so voting could start. This also gave the graphic design staff enough time to input new links and refresh any library website advertisements. This required a new push of emails and announcements to the campus at large with the electronic ballot link.



The first week of November saw two major deadlines: subject area voting and applications for the student group grants. Once the voting results were finalized, the volunteer librarian began creating a list of material in the winning subject area using that year's allocated funds amount. Simultaneously, the student group application pool and scoring grid were opened to the Collection Development and Management Committee following some processing to ensure group and signature validation.

Subject area material lists were due to the Acquisitions Unit by the end of the first week of December. This was also when the committee met to finalize student group grant awards. All material lists were submitted to the Acquisitions Unit and ordered "on rush" before the holiday break at the end of December. If all went well, the new materials were processed and put on display, ready for checkout, by the start of the spring semester.

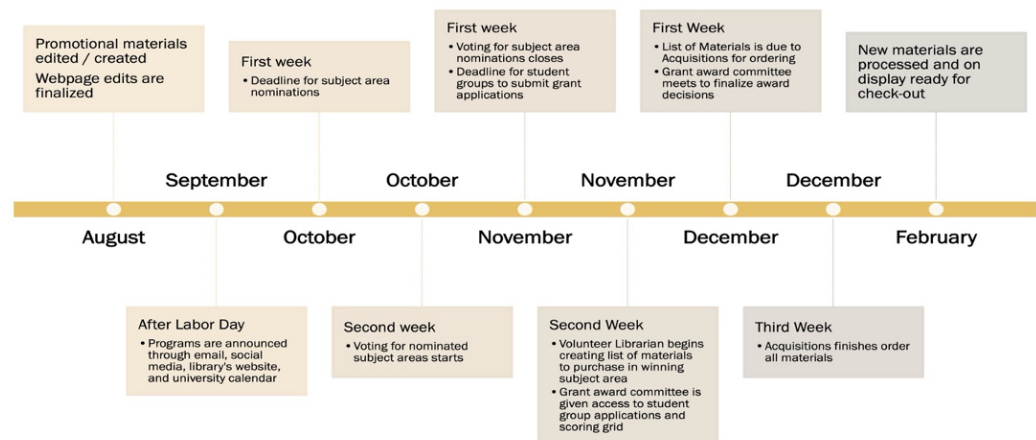


Figure 2. Timeline.

## Promotion

As mentioned, messaging is difficult on a university campus because students are overwhelmed with announcements, deadlines, and programs vying for their engagement. A consistent and multi-pronged approach was needed, and all means were used to promote both programs. Partnerships with Campus Life and the Dean of Students offices were formed to help send out bi-weekly emails and social media announcements, as well as student activity calendar entries for the deadlines.

At the suggestion of a library staff member, an A-frame whiteboard was placed in a heavily trafficked area of Kent Library that asked anyone passing by to write down a nominated subject area. The whiteboard included a tiny URL and QR code for the nomination form. On the opposite side of the whiteboard, a tiny URL for the student group application directed them to the nearby Reference or Circulation Desk for further help. Those working at both access points were directed to send students to the Acquisitions Unit if they were unable to answer any inquiry.

To make these programs' materials more visible to students, a temporary location was created on the main floor of the library. Materials purchased through both programs were placed there until the next year's program cycles were completed. The previous year's materials were then integrated into the main collection and the newly selected materials replaced them. Bookplates

were added to the materials to further designate their reason for being added to the collection.

Signage was created, as seen in figure 3, to place on the temporary display that not only designated where these materials came from and why they were there but also created the message, “You spoke, we listened.” It was important for the students to see that the library was engaging them in a real way and their participation brought on real results. Particularly on a college campus, it can be difficult to see the effects of one’s actions. Students being able to see a tangible result of their efforts—books that they chose were purchased—seemed like an obvious way to promote.



Figure 3. Temporary display signage.

The library’s graphic design staff created and placed sliders, as seen in figure 4, on the library’s main webpage announcing the program and linking to the various forms and program webpages. The sliders’ designs matched the signage used in the temporary location to create a cohesive image and to help visually delineate the two programs. As part of our publicity schedule, the graphic design staff posted regular social media announcements for each stage of the program to help raise awareness. In the first year, the Acquisitions Unit also placed posters throughout campus to help raise awareness.



Figure 4. Kent Library webpage sliders.

When it came to voting on the nominated subject areas the first year, the information literacy librarians who were teaching sessions that fall incentivized participation through free candy and gift cards for coffee at the library's in-house coffee shop. During the week of Halloween, the vote count tripled because of their work. Of all that was done to promote the program, the in-person engagement of students was the most effective promotional tool. Due to COVID and virtual instruction, that same level of engagement was not possible during the second year of the program.

In a promotional boon for us, the Southeast student-led newspaper, *The Arrow*, covered these programs not once, but twice. As part of the initial push in year one, a student reporter helped us announce these new programs in an August 2019 article, titled "New Kent Library Programs Make Student Choice a Priority" (Wagner 2019). A different reporter came back to us in the spring to write a follow-up and complementary article about new materials added to the collection called "New Kent Library Pilot Project Offers Students Opportunity to Build Library Collection" (Lawson 2020).

## Analysis

The main reason for these programs was to connect students to the collection of Kent Library; those connections are not always quantifiable. Particularly given the timing of these programs' implementations—the pilot year being the fall before the COVID-19 pandemic and the second year being very much in the middle of the response—the data are not definitive and should be reviewed with this reality in mind. With any program in an academic setting, a commitment of at least three to five years must be the plan. Any opportunity to engage and build relationships takes time and consistent effort. This is true for normal academic years, not addressing global pandemics.

The data shows that over the two years, the subject area program added 209 items to the collection. These items were selected by Kent Library librarians based on subject expertise and professional standards to expand the selections in that subject area or to fill collection gaps. Concurrently, the student group grant program added eighty-six items over three years. These additions represent a wide range of materials from typical monographs to kits. Together, through these programs, students added 295 items to the collection.

Table 2 shows that the subject area program cost Kent Library roughly \$3,139 over two years through the purchasing of young adult bestselling novels and foreign language instruction titles. The student group grant program cost \$5,660 to fulfill the request of six student groups ranging in areas from dietetics to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Overall, Kent Library spent \$8,799 to support these two programs over three years.

<b>Student engagement programs: Purchases and costs</b>				
	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Items Added to the Collection</b>				
Subject Area	157	52	0	209
Grants	24	51	11	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>Amount Spent on Student Selected Items</b>				
Subject Area	\$ 2,114	\$ 1,024	\$ -	\$ 3,139
Grants	\$ 1,947	\$ 2,695	\$ 1,017	\$ 5,660
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 4,061</b>	<b>\$ 3,720</b>	<b>\$ 1,017</b>	<b>\$ 8,799</b>

Table 2. Student engagement programs: Purchases and costs.

In terms of tangible student engagement, we saw a definite pattern of increased participation as depicted in nominations, votes, and applications to the two programs. Table 3 presents the engagements we were able to count. While the numbers may seem low, it is worth noting that these numbers do not take into consideration students that were passively engaged through the promotion and associated effects of these programs. While that number is impossible to estimate, it is fair to say that far more students were engaged than those represented by the numbers in table 3.

Student engagement programs: Engagement				
	2019	2020	2021	Total
Student engagement: Subject area				
Nominations	10	4	0	14
Votes	66	24	0	90
Student engagement: Grants				
Applications	2	5	1	8
Awards	2	3	1	6

Table 3. Student engagement programs: Engagement.

To give context to the concrete engagement of these programs—checkouts and cost per use—table 4 lays out statistics for titles available between 2020 through 2022. For accuracy in comparing usage, we present only data for all other titles purchased at Kent Library during the same period. It was important, given the historically higher usage of the juvenile and kit collections, that the usage statistics be divided in this way as well.

At Kent Library, the juvenile and kit collections see unique usage patterns and consistency. Both collections are highly utilized by education students. Southeast Missouri State University's history as a normal school is reflected in high institutional engagement with the juvenile collection. Pulling out usage statistics for the collection of the kit separately was important since the kits are not in open stacks, thus limiting the ability to advertise their content and unobstructed access.

The data presented here show that the materials purchased using these student engagement programs generally have slightly lower-than-average usage compared to titles purchased at the same time—having the same period of availability—at Kent Library. The only exception to this trend is materials purchased and placed in the juvenile collection where usage is almost double that of other items in that collection. Particularly materials purchased in 2020 for both programs show this increased usage because of the content. In 2019, the students selected bestselling young adult novels for the subject area in which they wanted increased investment. This directly correlates to the more than double average usage of those materials—.93 vs .49.

Generally, the subject area program usage is lower in 2021 due to the subject area selected by the student body—foreign language instruction. When compared to the previous year's selected subject—bestselling young adult novels—the decrease in usage makes sense. Foreign language instruction, while an important topic to the students, serves a smaller subset of the library user population. This translates to a more strategic purchase for the collection. While it meets a need, overall usage is not going to reflect its importance when compared to the rest of the collection.

Lower-than-average usage for items purchased through the student group grants program is predictable given the specific nature of those purchases and selectors—similar to the second year of the subject area program in 2021. While the hope is that materials in a library are widely used, items selected by a group



of students specific to their work would naturally assume a lower-than-average usage when compared to materials added to the collection through other selection tools. Strategic collection development, like that presented through these programs, does not always equal greater overall usage.

Student Engagement Programs: Usage and Cost-per-use Comparison					
Year added	Collection	Program	Average cost per checkout	Average check-out per title	Kent Library average checkout per title***
2020	Main	SGG*	\$32.97	0.33	0.83
2020	Main	SAN**	\$5.00	0.6	0.83
2020	Juvenile	SGG	\$53.18	0.88	0.49
2020	Juvenile	SAN	\$2.00	0.93	0.49
2020	Kits	SGG	\$325.20	0.75	1.5
2020	Year averages		\$83.67	0.70	0.83
2021	Main	SGG	\$74.58	0.62	0.76
2021	Main	SAN	\$1.65	0.6	0.76
2021	Juvenile	SGG	-	-	0.25
2021	Juvenile	SAN	\$3.33	0.3	0.25
2021	Year averages		\$26.52	0.51	0.67
2022	Juvenile	SGG	\$67.57	0.18	0.12
2022	Kits	SGG	\$110.00	0.6	0.73
2022	Year Averages		\$88.79	0.39	0.43
Cumulative			\$66.33	0.53	0.64

\*Student Group Grants program

\*\*Subject Area Nomination program

\*\*\*Titles used in this average were purchased in the same time period.

Table 4. Student engagement programs: Usage and cost-per-use comparison.

The cost-per-use data provided in table 4 give important context to the strategic nature of these programs. Kits represented in the student group grant purchases for 2020 reflect dietetic kits selected by the Dietetics Student Association. Both kits were well over \$500 each. Kits are generally more expensive than monographs and represent tools used by faculty and students to provide a wide range of unique materials. The kits selected here are key to aiding in the success of Southeast dietetics students.

The data presented here should not discount the secondary engagement of offering students direct participation in the collection development of a library; rather, the outcomes should bolster the conclusion that strategic engagement with students is beneficial, though not necessarily quantifiable within standard metrics. These programs were designed to increase the relevancy of the library's materials, but more importantly to create relationships between the library and students by engaging with librarians directly—searching the library's catalog for materials, and having a need met by the library as a tool for ensuring student success.

## Takeaways

First, students welcomed the opportunity to contribute. Given Kent Library's pre-existing level of engagement with students, these programs were a success. Before these programs were started, the library only engaged

students passively. These programs provided an avenue for consistent engagement with students by giving their voices real consideration. With time and further promotion, these programs can help bolster student buy-in and overall library engagement.

Second, responsiveness, consistency, and commitment are key to success. Parts of the original application process were found to be too cumbersome for some applicants. Each year the application and process were re-evaluated to see where barriers could be eliminated for students and show responsiveness to their feedback. This helped ensure connection and formed relationships. This required balancing participation requirements with the ease of applying.

Third, some university faculty will not approve of the library purchasing materials students have requested. After the library spent \$3,000 on bestselling young adult novels in the first year of the subject area program, some faculty expressed concern with the quality of the purchases. There must be a balance between purchasing materials that support traditional research and teaching dynamics and, if students are to be engaged where they are, supporting both their academic and non-academic needs.

Fourth, student engagement is critical for academic library vitality. There is a distinct trend when looking back on three years of these programs, particularly regarding what was requested by the students and what was ultimately added to the collection. Students requested academic materials that were outside the scope of what the academic faculty or librarians were traditionally collecting. This fact illustrates the need for libraries to engage students in what they need to succeed; often, trained academics do not adjust to those modern needs. Whether it is books to help first-time English speakers, objects to teach hearing-impaired children, or food models for teaching nutrition, these items fall outside the radar of our current selection systems. By empowering students, not only are they engaged in collection development but are also making current systems more responsive, useful, and diverse.

Lastly, these programs provided new avenues for diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice outreach and partnerships. The Black Student Union was awarded the additional student group grant in 2020. Despite the funding having been reduced that year and awards cut, when the committee reviewed their application, they saw it as an opportunity to dig in and support the group's work while also making our collection more inclusive. The committee agreed to award the Black Student Union's grant and asked a librarian on the committee to volunteer to do some outreach. This served to be a valuable collaboration and opportunity for the library to perform outreach to and for an underserved population. This work by our Special Collections and Archives Librarian eventually led to the realization of an archives collection detailing the history of African American sororities and fraternities at Southeast. This collection is still under development, but the relationships built due to this level of engagement directly led to this exciting opportunity.

## **Conclusion**

As libraries on university campuses work to address their institutions' evolving priorities and needs, active student engagement in collection development can help foster collaboration and bolster student success, particularly for marginalized groups. Building more strategic, community-curated collections through student engagement is a tool academic libraries can use to ensure more accessible, well-rounded, and useful collections. This is reflected in both the data presented here and the literature. This case study from Kent Library at Southeast Missouri State University can provide the genesis for strategic, innovative thinking and out-of-the-box approaches to student

engagement in areas not always considered when discussing student success. Through this type of approach, academic libraries can ensure their continued place at the heart of academic life and learning while expanding their influence and services.

## Acknowledgements

Southeast Missouri State University is located on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Chickasaw, Quapaw, and Illini Nations and peoples and at a historically significant point in the Trail of Tears—one of the darkest periods in United States history—where the Cherokee peoples were forced to cross the Mississippi River mid-winter.

Colorado State University acknowledges, with respect, that the land it inhabits today is on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations and peoples.

Both Universities have directly benefited from the forced removal of indigenous peoples from their ancestral and traditional homelands.

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