

itself expects to lose money on 80 percent of the books it publishes; the problem occurs in recognizing which 80 percent.¹⁰ Finally, no one doubts that undergraduates don't read *Choice*. But as Evan Farber has

pointed out, perhaps it is our responsibility to further educate library users in the value of knowing "how to select books before reading them, not just how to use the card catalog."¹¹

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A Methodology for Estimating the Size of Subject Collections, Using African Studies as an Example

Joseph J. Lauer

This note provides a formula for estimating the number of Africana titles in large libraries using the Library of Congress classification schedule. The methods used to establish this formula could be used for other subjects, and an analysis of the completeness of LC class numbers for a given subject would seem to be an essential first step in developing a useful conspectus or in compiling a questionnaire on subject strengths.

Shelflist measurement has become a fairly common method of determining the number of titles held in broad subject cate-

gories. But most subjects are scattered to some extent, and this problem is especially severe with area studies. For example, books about Africa are found throughout the LC schedule, with a concentration in the DT section. Thus, before one can make an objective estimate of the total number of Africana titles, it is necessary to establish what percent of all cataloged Africana falls in the DT section (which is exclusively Africana).

There are at least two ways to determine the percentage of all Africana falling in the DT section: (1) describe and analyze the

distribution of titles in a library with a separate shelflist; or (2) do the same for a library with a "comprehensive" and detailed conspectus of holdings on a subject. The first method is used here because separate Africana shelflists do exist at Michigan State University (MSU) and at Indiana University-Bloomington (IU). Furthermore, the author does not know of any complete list of Africana call numbers, and he doubts that any conspectus for area studies would locate more than 95 percent of the classified titles.

The supplementary shelflists for Africana books in the MSU and IU libraries were measured in 1980 by the author (at MSU) and by Bill Rafferty under the supervision of David Easterbrook (at IU). All data was reported in percentages rather than inches or centimeters, and no attempt was made to convert titles into volumes. Both the distribution of multcard sets for single titles and measuring errors are assumed to be random. In addition to uncataloged titles, which are not represented in either shelflist (nor in these libraries' reports to the *Joint Acquisitions List of Africana*), the measurements also excluded microforms and government documents not classified according to the LC schedule.

Table 1 demonstrates that Africana titles appear in each of the large LC classes, in a distribution pattern that is surprisingly similar to that for all titles at the Library of Congress. But what is needed are percentages for the sections of the LC classification that are exclusively Africana. A comprehensive list would include hundreds of categories, but Boston University's African Studies Library did identify 20 sections which they now shelve separately in their African alcove. Using these 20 as a start, those covering less than one percent of the Africana at MSU and IU were dropped and others covering at least one

percent were added. * Table 2 presents the percentages for eleven core categories, which accounted for approximately 57 percent of the total in the separate shelflists.

In addition to the raw data for a formula, table 2 lists information on the comprehensiveness of the two specialized shelflists.† As expected, omissions were not randomly distributed. The DT section was generally more complete, while the MSU Africana shelflist was poor in its coverage of literature, and the IU African Studies shelflist lacked many of the materials purchased on Near East funds. After adding the extra titles from the main shelflist, and assuming that the Africana for categories not listed in table 2 are omitted at the same rate as the non-DT categories in table 2, one finds 34.5-36.5 percent of Africana falls in DT, 19.5-21.1 percent falls in the other 10 listed in table 2, and 42.4-46.0 percent falls outside these call numbers.

Therefore, one can multiply the titles in DT by 2.8 to estimate the number of classified Africana titles. Multiplying the results of the top eleven categories by 1.8 would give similar, but not necessarily more accurate, results. Figures for the non-DT categories are more useful as a test of particular Africana strengths or of the representativeness of the DT results.

A major problem with this formula is that the DT section includes Egyptology and other titles about Northern Africa which are usually excluded from the de facto (but not formal) definition of African Studies. Thus, if one measures only the DT section, libraries supporting strong Near East programs will register as strong in African Studies even if they were relatively weak for Sub-Saharan Africa. The absence of a separate shelflist for Africana without Northern Africa complicates the resolution of this problem.

Table 3 presents figures on the relative

*KT, which accounted for 2.1 percent of MSU's Africana shelflist, was dropped from the final list because it did not appear in the IU list and law materials are often not reported in the main shelflist. If one was serious about including materials about North Africa, the appropriate call numbers from PJ should be added. Other candidates for inclusion include BL2400-2490, GR350-360, HA1951-2227 (especially if volumes rather than titles were counted), and HD2117-2151.

†No attempt was made to estimate the number of relatively rare titles that really did not belong in an Africana shelflist.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF TITLES

LC Call Nos.	Africana Titles		All Titles LC Shelflist on Microfiche 1981 (%)
	MSU Africana Shelflist 1980 (%)	IU African Studies Shelflist 1980 (%)	
A	0.4	0.3	1
B	3.7	4.5	7
C	0.4	0.4	1
D	38.3	39.3	9
E-F	0.4	0.9	4
G	4.4	6.9	4
H	18.3	13.9	13
J	4.0	4.2	3
K	2.3	0.5	2
L	2.8	2.0	3
M	0.3	0.5	7
N	1.6	2.1	3
P	10.3	16.0	20
Q	3.9	2.0	7
R	1.0	0.6	3
S	3.6	1.0	2
T	1.1	0.7	7
U-V	0.2	0.2	1
Z	3.1	3.8	3

TABLE 2
CORE CATEGORIES OF AFRICANA

Call Nos.	Percentage of Africana/African Studies Shelflists		Main Shelflist as a Percent of Special Shelflist	
	MSU	IU	MSU	IU
BV3500-3630	1.6	1.4	104	104
DT	36.5	37.7	101	113
GN643-661	1.1	1.6	108	100
HC501-599	4.6	3.0	109	130
HN771-840	0.9	1.0	104	143
JQ1870-3981	1.9	1.7	104	163
LA1500-2090	1.0	0.9	108	121
PL8000-8844	3.8	5.9	106	106
PQ3980-9	1.2	1.7	126	115
PR9340-9408	1.3	1.7	150	126
Z3501-3975	1.5	1.8	107	104
Total	55.4	58.4		

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF TITLES ABOUT NORTHERN AFRICA

A Africana Call Nos.	B North Africana Call Nos.	B as a Percent of A			
		MSU Africana Shelflist	MSU Main Shelflist	IU African Studies Shelflist	IU Main Shelflist
BV3500-3630	BV3570-3605	0.1	0.1	0.7	2.1
DT	DT43-107, 137-154 & 160-346	12.5	13.7	17.1	24.6
GN643-661	GN649	2.8	2.6	1.2	2.0
HC501-599	HC531-540, 547.A4 & .T8, 567.L5 & 591.M8	4.3	5.4	8.3	17.3
HN771-840	HN782-6	1.6	3.0	0	19.3
JQ1870-3981	JQ3189, 3200-3339, 3590-9, 3800-99, 3940-9	3.5	4.8	7.8	34.6
LA1500-2090	LA1645-9, 1670-4, 1940-4	4.0	3.7	1.1	18.0
PL8000-8844		—	—	—	—
PQ3980-9		—	—	—	—
PR9340-9408		—	—	—	—
Z3501-3975	Z3651-9, 3681-5, 3836-40, 3933 & 3971	3.8	4.1	5.0	7.4

size of the subsections on Northern Africa.* Since the DT section contains a significantly greater proportion of titles on Northern Africa, the formula given above must be adjusted. An analysis of the numbers in tables 2 and 3 reveals that for Africa without Northern Africa, the DT section of the main shelflist contains 59-61 per-

cent of the total for the core eleven categories† or 32.4 percent of the total for all classifications at MSU, and 34.0 percent at IU. This is close enough to 33.3 percent to make 3.0 an accurate multiplier of DT without Northern Africa to estimate titles on Sub-Saharan Africa.

*The Sudan is considered part of Sub-Saharan Africa in this paper. Books about Africa as a whole are also included with Sub-Saharan Africa.

†Measuring the main shelflist at UCLA in 1983 revealed that DT was 66 percent of the total for the core eleven categories but 61 percent for the same categories after titles on Northern Africa were excluded.



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