Mobile Apps in Collection Development: Supporting a Mobile Learning Environment

Stefanie Havelka  
*CUNY Lehman College*

Rebecca Arzola  
*CUNY Lehman College*

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By Rebecca Arzola (Lehman College, City University of New York) <rebecca.arzola@lehman.cuny.edu>
Stefanie Havelka (Lehman College, City University of New York) <stefanie.havelka@lehman.cuny.edu>

Abstract
We will discuss our rationale and thoughts on why we believe mobile apps should be part of a library’s collection development policy. An updated policy with apps encourages a mobile learning environment that is technologically diverse while being holistically supportive of its users and research.

The Mobile World and Libraries
Mobile devices (tablets, smartphones), mobile Web sites, and mobile applications (apps) have a significant impact on how we access, retrieve, disseminate, and apply information. Apps have become part of our daily life. In January 2014 for the first time ever “Americans used smartphone and tablet apps more than PCs to access the Internet” (O’Toole, 2014). This year’s Educause Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) Study of Undergraduate Students and Technology (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014) confirms the importance of mobile technologies in higher education considering that “noticeably more students used their smartphones, tablets, and e-readers in academia in 2014 than in previous years.”

Why is This Relevant for Us?
Although libraries and librarians are actively embracing this new mobile reality, there is still the need, according to Henning (2014), “to become ‘app-literate.’” Our own library, the Leonard Lief Library, Lehman College, City University of New York (CUNY), has actively embraced mobile technologies. Since 2011 we have been loaning iPads with pre-installed apps <http://libguides.lehman.edu/iPad> and have loaned out Mini iPads since 2013. The iPads have been loaned 6,188 times and the iPad Minis 7,063. We currently offer a mobile Web site, mobile catalog, mobile library tour <http://wp.lehman.edu/library/tour>, as well as mobile apps and mobile Web sites for research <http://libguides.lehman.edu/apps>. The iPads have been used to conduct roving references since 2013. Further, as part of our information literacy program, we have offered mobile information literacy classes, where students are encouraged to use their own devices or the Library’s iPads in class. How do our Library’s mobile services relate to collection development policies and apps? A few years ago, we decided mobile apps would be a good addition to our collection. As a result, we resolved to include subscription-based vendor apps, such as the EBSCO app, and free apps on our LibGuide and iPads. In 2013, the mobile planning group received a modest allocation for purchasing apps. We now have 80 apps installed on our 45 iPads. To include students in our planning, a three-question survey was placed in each iPad case. The survey asked: “What apps did you appreciate most? What apps do you feel we should add? Any other suggestions?” As a result of the survey, eight apps requested by students and evaluated by the mobile planning group were installed: Blackboard, Dictionary, Facebook, Kindle, Pinterest, Skype, Quickoffice, and Tumblr.

To help guide acquisition of apps, we first examined our institution’s collection development policy objective “to build a balanced and comprehensive collection of quality, authoritative and current research, reflecting a multiplicity of viewpoints and perspectives” (Leonard Lief Library, 2010). Even though the collection development policy includes both print and electronic resources, the issue of apps was still ambiguous. Procurement of electronic resources is reviewed by a library committee, but they had little guidance on how to select apps and which guidelines to follow. Should apps be considered part of electronic resources? Should they be included in our collection development policy? Should we draft a separate policy for apps?

Embracing Apps
Is it important to develop a collection development framework for apps? This is a complex question involving the institution’s target audience, responsibility to these stakeholders, budget, as well as the Library and librarians’ evolving roles. Information in a mobile environment provides immediate access to scholarly material for students’ information needs. It is part of a larger academic picture to attract and retain students. Disciplined faculty adopt mobile apps that contribute to their research. By adapting to this diverse technology environment, librarians can thereby create new roles to support students and faculty with research.

Fabbri, Bressler, and Earp (2007) present elements of a conceptual framework to form a well-rounded policy including library mission, objectives, institutional context, and supporting documents. A library’s collection development policy should encompass the institution’s target audience, responsibility to these stakeholders, budget, as well as the Library and librarians’ evolving roles. Information in a mobile environment provides immediate access to scholarly material for students’ information needs. It is part of a larger academic picture to attract and retain students. Disciplined faculty adopt mobile apps that contribute to their research. By adapting to this diverse technology environment, librarians can thereby create new roles to support students and faculty with research.

Fabbri, Bressler, and Earp (2007) present elements of a conceptual framework to form a well-rounded policy including library mission, objectives, institutional context, and supporting documents. A library’s collection development policy should encompass the mission, objectives, institutional context, and supporting documents. A library’s collection development policy should encompass the mission and technological vision of the organization in order to strategically align with the Library’s objectives. An institution’s current policy should be adapted to include emerging e-resources, or it can draft a new mobile policy. Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members such as Boston University, University of Connecticut, and Northwestern University have established specific collection development guidelines (policies) for electronic resources, which can be found in SPEC Kit 316: Evaluating E-resources (2010). Other supporting documents with policies on electronic resources that can be expanded to include apps are IFLA’s “Guidelines for a Collection Development Policy Using the Conspectus Model” (2001) or Douglas’ “Revising a Collection Development Policy in a Rapidly Changing Environment” (2011).

According to Johnson, “Nearly all aspects of collection development and management in all types of libraries are being reshaped
by technology and the ubiquity of the Internet” (2014, ix). Torres, et al. (2013) implies that many libraries include electronic resources in their overall collection development policy. Including policies for electronic resource selection in collection development is one way to address this, but specific collection development policies for apps are not yet prevalent in the literature. LibGuides may reveal that some institutions are already developing collection development policies for apps, such as the Memorial-Sloan Kettering Cancer Center Library, which has a Mobile Resources Collection Development Policy Lib-Guide <http://libguides.mskcc.org/policy/mobile>.

**Team Approach**

Collection development efforts for apps cannot occur in a vacuum. Responsibility for mobile apps in collection development involves library faculty from various units (electronic resources, collection development, acquisitions, access services, and instructional technologies), information technology, and discipline faculty. Stakeholders should contribute to providing the academic institution with an innovative, comprehensive collection of authoritative, current mobile resources. Take the example from our music department: only after a faculty member from music approached the liaison librarian and asked about the possibility of purchasing some music apps, did we actually become aware of these apps. As a result we acquired several music apps to support her student’s learning.

**Apps in Academics**

Mobile Apps are part of the evolution of instructional technology in education. Blackhurst (2002) recaps the resolution of the 1970 Congressional Commission on Instructional Technology that “in addition to the use of devices and equipment, instructional technology also involves a systematic way of designing and delivering instruction” (2002). As an educational productivity tool, mobile apps help deliver information that is part of the current information literacy landscape design. Mobile apps can assist with educational technology/e-learning, assistive technology (which includes technology services and devices that help people with disabilities), medical technology (which assists patients in the healthcare system as well as medical personnel), and information technology (databases, government information, educational Web sites). Mobile devices with accessibility features and apps also improve and enable learning experiences for all users including those with special needs. Mobile devices and apps also help break down digital barriers due to expense of computers. Hennig (2014) states, “Compared to the cost of desktop and laptop computers, mobile devices are generally less expensive.”

The popularity of apps and their use is also seen in various forums. The Chronicle of Higher Education has 1,100 search results with “apps” as of December 10, 2014. MIT Technology Review editors chose ‘Mobile Collaboration’ as one of the Top Ten 2014 Breakthrough Technologies, which included the collaboration apps Box, CloudOn, Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft’s OneDrive, and Quip. TED was The Webby Award’s Mobile Sites and Apps winner in the category of Education and Reference. As Ally (2014) states, “In the future, mobile devices will look completely different from today’s; hence, higher education must plan to deliver education to meet the demands of new generations of students.”

**Conclusions**

As new technologies, applications, and software are introduced for student use, our collection development policies should remain flexible to respond to changing e-information needs of Lehman College faculty and students. In the face of flat or declining budgets, it is necessary to develop guidelines to justify purchase of mobile resources. James, et al. (2012) advocates transforming traditional collection policies to innovative collection philosophies that holistically respond to the changing nature of research practices and users. This will lead to constructive and productive educational experiences in higher education.

**More to Come**

In our next two columns, we will examine collection evaluation and criteria for apps and mobile strategies. If you have questions about what your library needs to improve support for mobile users, please contact us: rebecca.arzola@lehman.cuny.edu>, <stefanie.havelka@lehman.cuny.edu>.

**Authors’ References**


About the Authors
Rebecca Arzola, Assistant Professor, Government Documents-Collection Development Librarian at Leonard Lief Library, Lehman College, City University of New York, obtained her MSEd in Special Education from Lehman in 2003. She received her MSLS Advanced Certificate in Archives from Pratt Institute in 2009. She is a member of American Library Association, ALA’s Government Documents Round Table (GODORT), and METRO’s Government Documents Special Interest Group.

Stefanie Havelka, Assistant Professor, Electronic Resources-Web Service Librarian at Leonard Lief Library, Lehman College, City University of New York, obtained her MCIS from Rutgers University in 2002. In 2009 she earned her MLSIS from Syracuse University. Stefanie has been teaching Mobile Information Literacy classes since 2011. Her research interests include mobile learning and instruction, mobile privacy and security, and Web and mobile usability.