

Greatest Hits of the Circulating Collection

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Abstract

Following Britten and Webster's work (1991, 1992) surveying frequently circulated items at our University from 1982-1990, I examine frequently circulated items over the past 20 years and over the past four. Focusing on what is circulating rather than the widespread decline in print use illustrates broad trends and changes in our community's use of monographs.

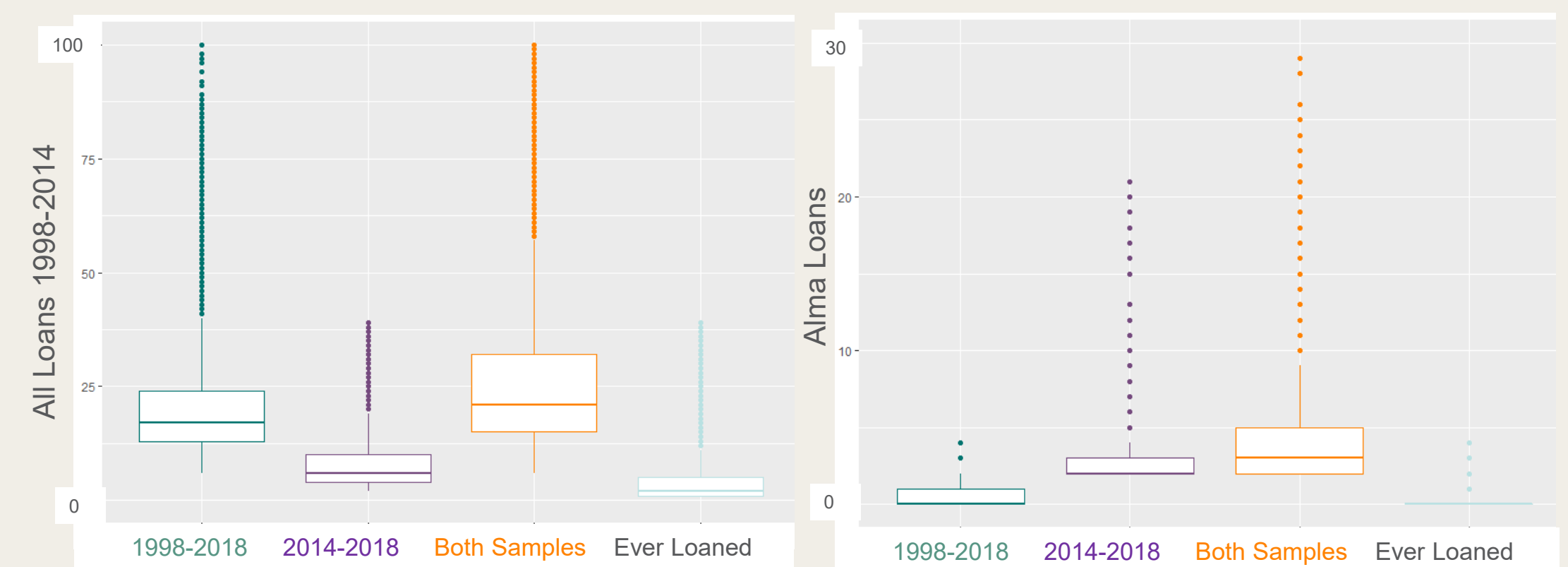
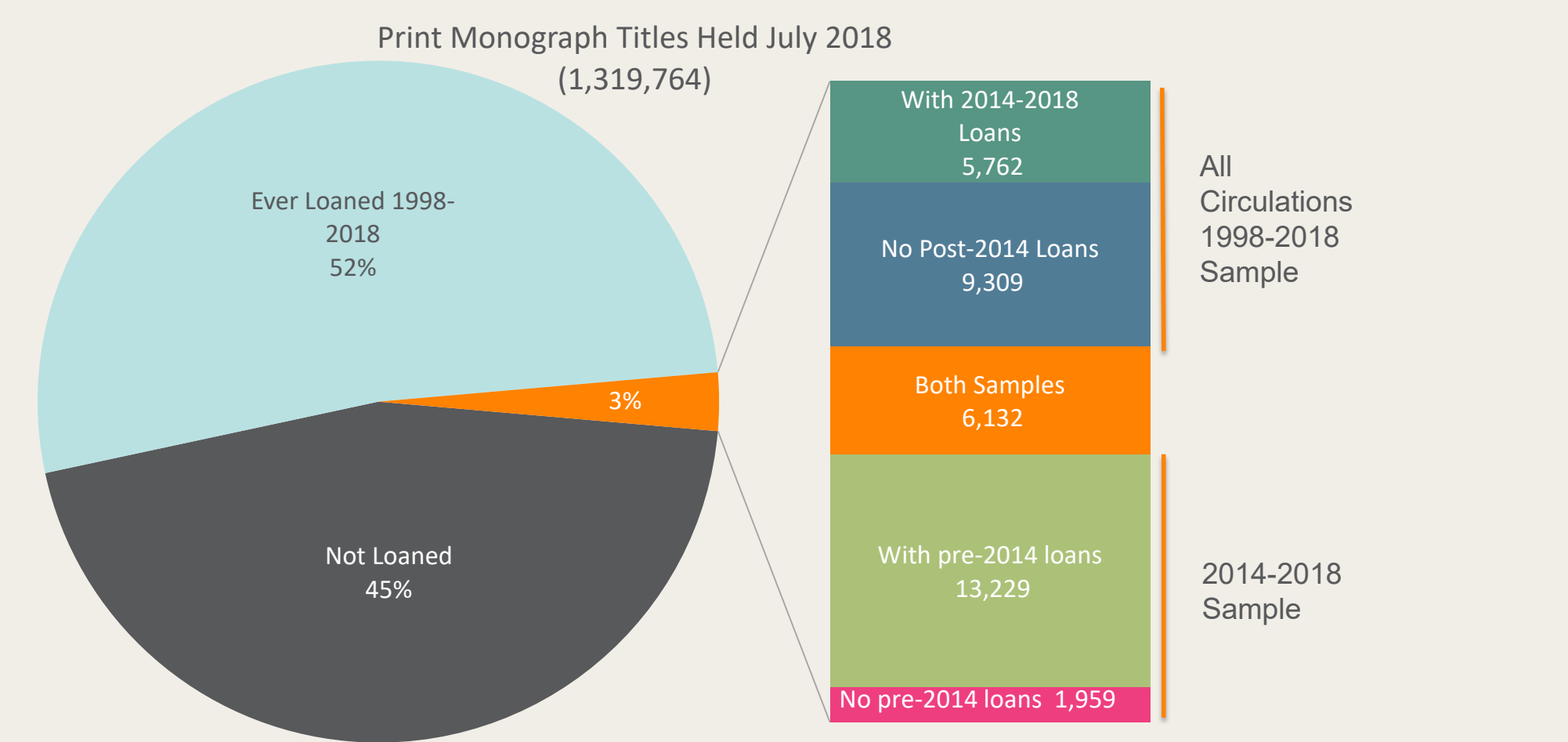
Sampling of specific titles allows investigation of patron interest beyond and across traditional subject classifications. Frequently occurring subject headings in these titles are distributed across classes, indicating broad interest areas to consider for retention or development. Subjects of interest have changed significantly since the original study and continue to change – Even in an academic library, the issues of the day drive circulation. Nevertheless, popular titles retain their popularity, and a comparison of frequently-circulated titles with recent frequent searches in our discovery service suggests that known-item or known-author needs drive a great deal of the demand for highly-used works. Future directions for this work may include further analysis of titles that remained highly-circulating across both short- and long-term samples, and expansion of the method into e-book collections to compare monograph usage trends across media.

High-Circulation Sampling

Bibliographic data for all monographs with loans was extracted from our ILS, Ex Libris Alma. Circulation data exists in two buckets:

- All Loans Since 1998
- Loans since Alma deployment in December 2014.

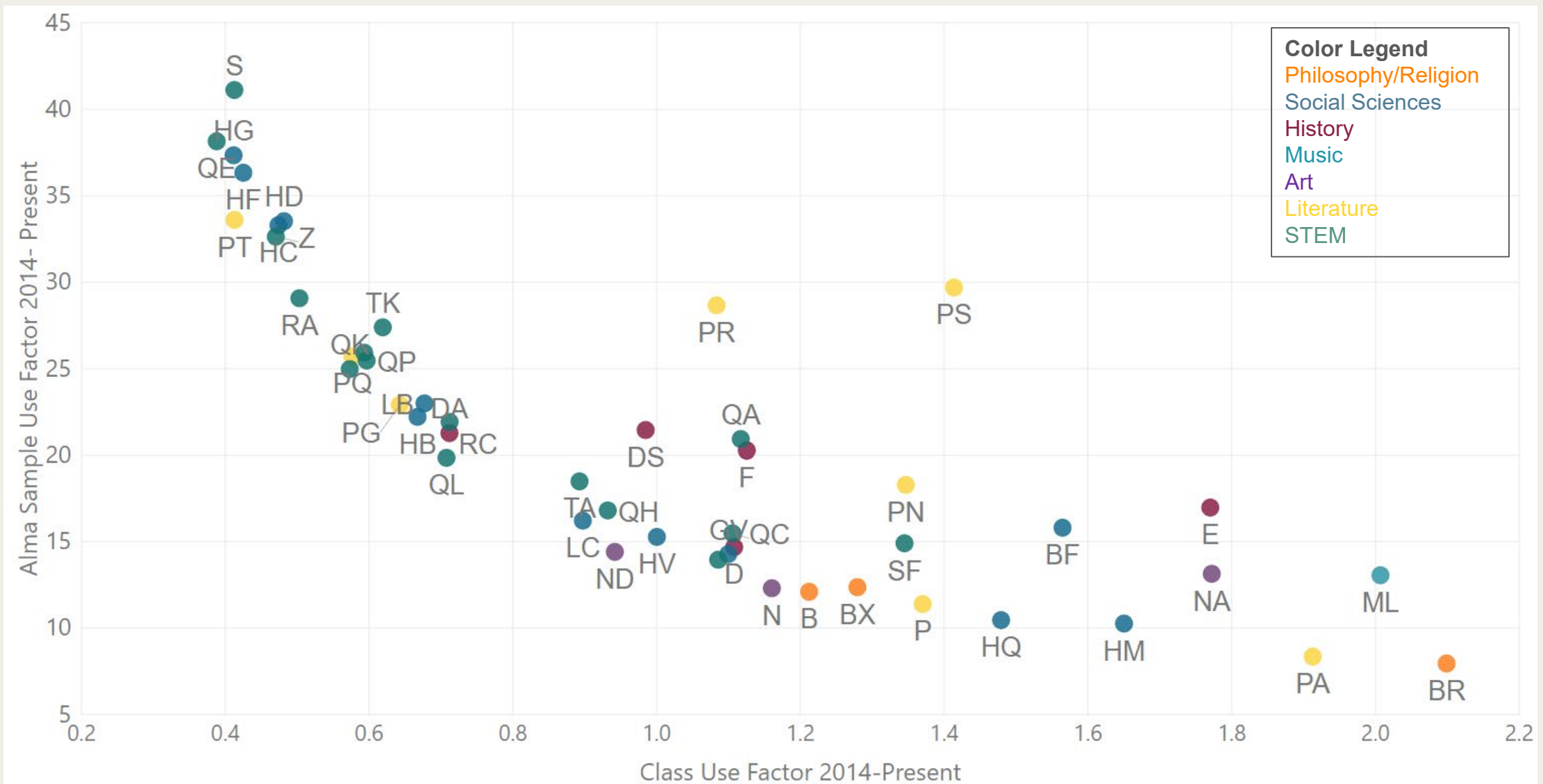
We created samples based on total circulations from each of these buckets for each LC class with more than 10,000 monograph items. The sample crossed 48 classes which account for 73% of our titles and 73% of overall loans. Each class's sample consisted of the 400 most-loaned items in the class, plus any items with as many loans as the 400th most-loaned item. Items with only one loan were removed from the 2014-present (Alma) sample.



Note that titles that appear in both samples have more loans over both time periods than those which appear in only one sample. The substantial number of titles in the 1998-2018 sample with no loans since 2014 is also noteworthy.

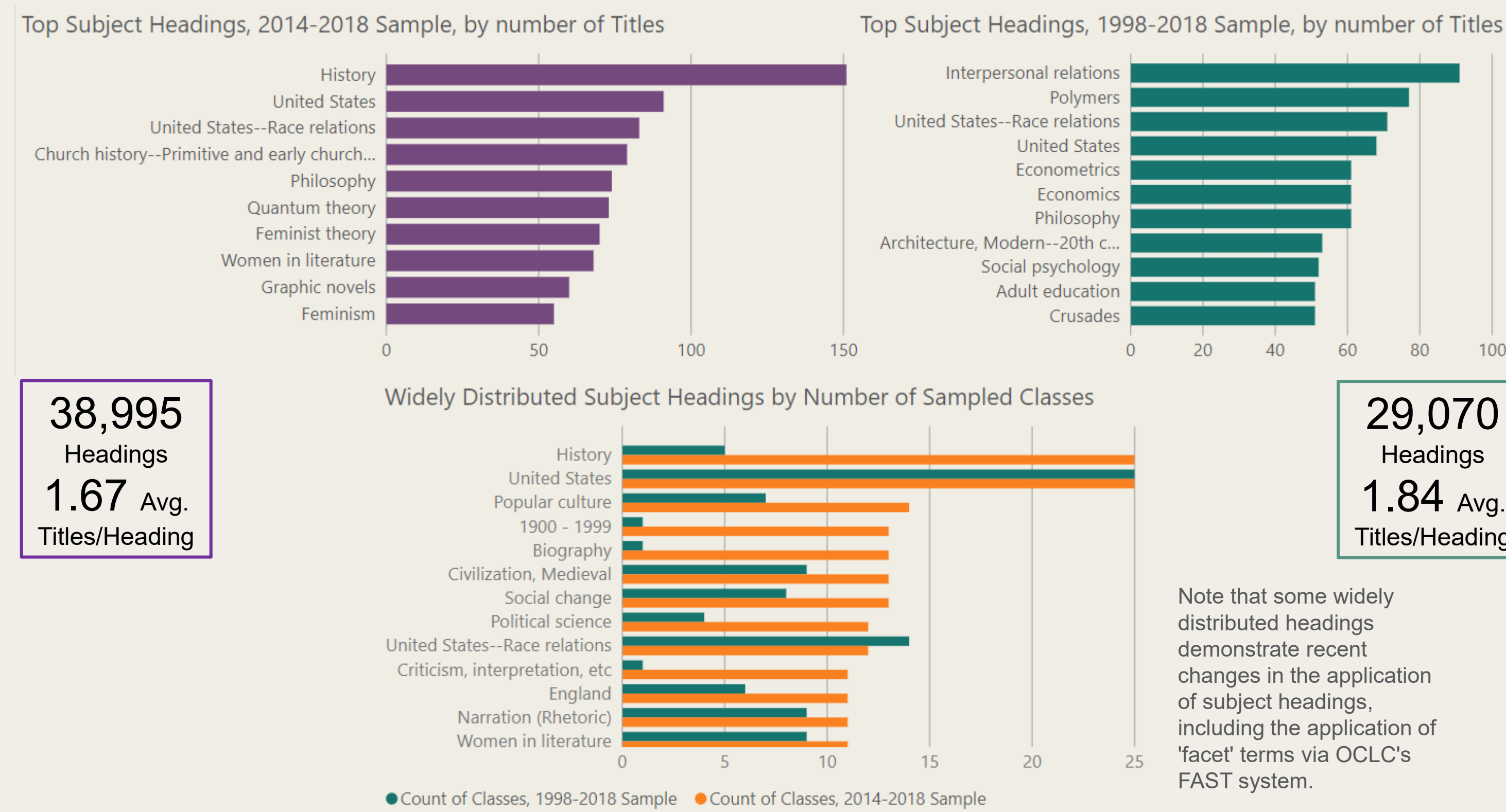
Sampling the Outliers

Bonn's Use Factor, or Percentage of Expected Circulation (Aguilar, 1986) was calculated for each class and sample. For loans since 2014, the use factor of the class as a whole is negatively correlated with the use factor of the sample (Pearson's correlation = -0.79, p<0.001). Where interest in the class is high, the sample is less of an outlier from the collection as a whole. Note the relative positions of class S, in which usage is concentrated in a few items, and class BR, which is broadly in demand. Literature classes PR and PS are outliers; the samples contain a lower percentage of the circulated collection for these classes.



Subject Headings

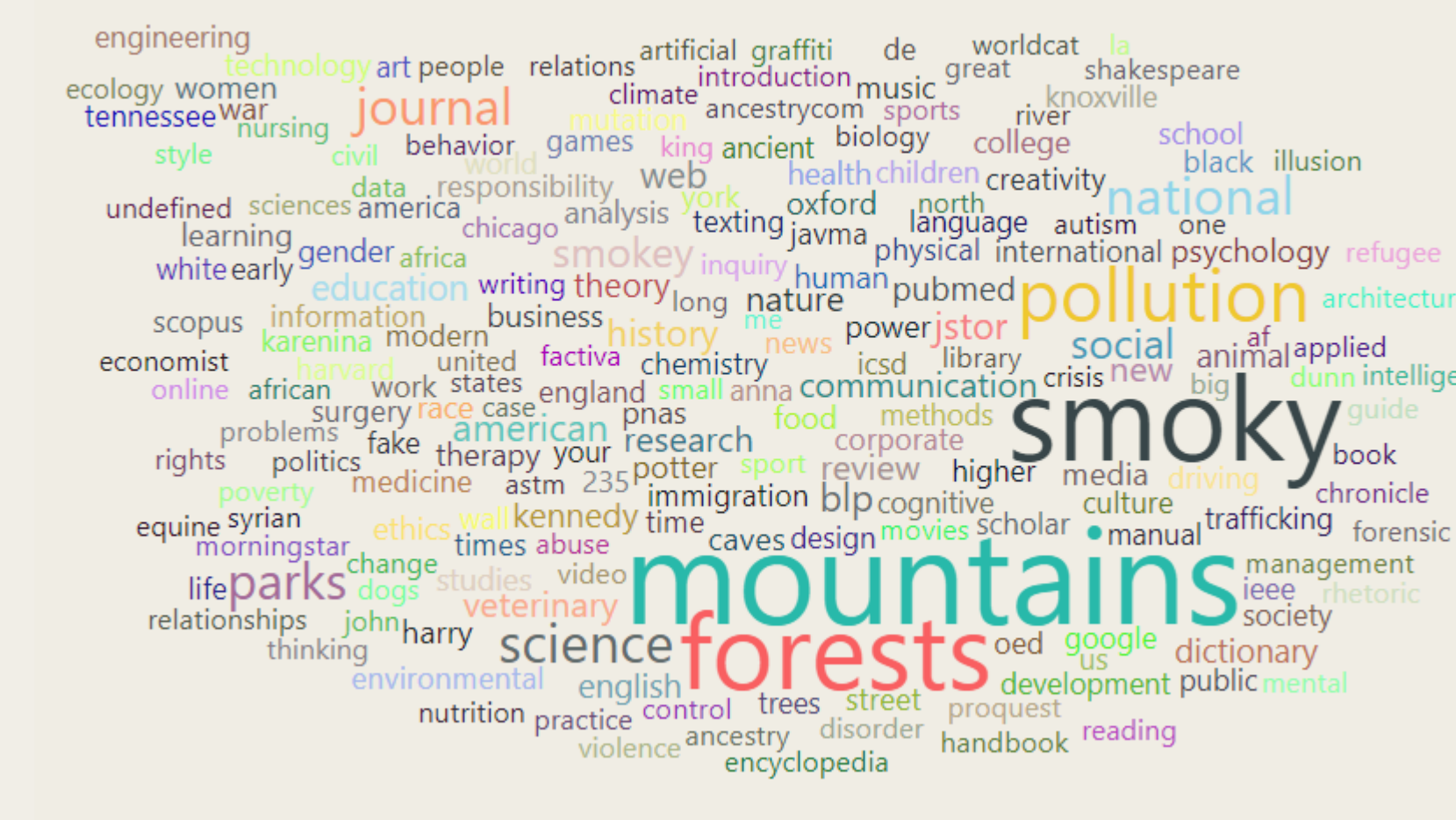
Exploring frequently used subject headings among our two samples yield some interesting indications of shifting reader interest over the years and point to some larger trends in the use of print monographs. Historical studies are a major driver of print usage – note that "History" occurs as a subject heading across 25 of 48 sampled LC classes in the 2014-2018 sample – but the exact focus of that subject changes over time. Britten and Webster (1992:239) found that books on the Vietnam War were "among the most sought after", but that conflict is represented by a small number of titles in our samples, while "United States – Race relations" has risen and remained popular – perhaps in line with recent scholarly interest and present public concern. Quantum theory, on the other hand, continues to be notably popular – in line with Britten and Murphy's observations.



Subject Heading Words in the 2014-Present Sample



Words from Popular Search Strings 3/2015-8/2018



Searches

Frequent Search & Frequent Circulation → Frequently Known Items

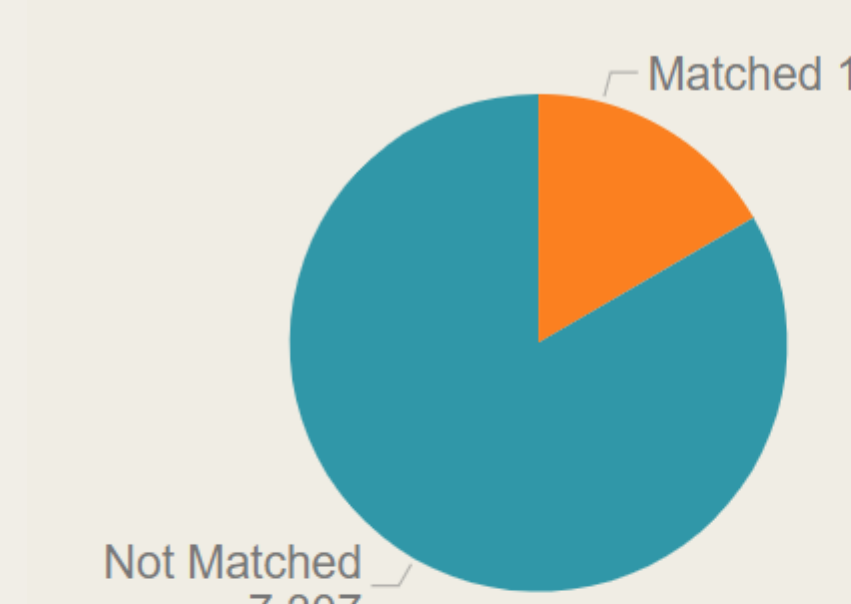
A monthly sample of the top 200-500 searches in our Primo discovery service has been collected from March 2015 to the present. This set of 8,762 search strings were normalized to remove punctuation, Boolean operators, and stop words. The list used by NLM's PubMed (2005-) was used as generally appropriate for modern Discovery service searching.

Authors, Titles, and Subjects from the 2014-2018 sample were treated similarly. Strings were broken into words for matching.

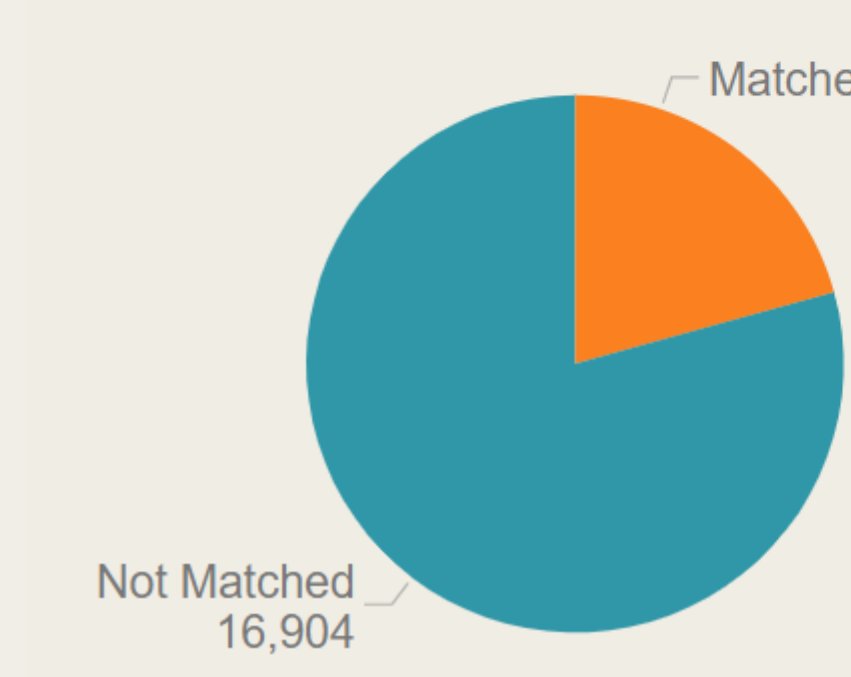
To accommodate differences in formatting, matches were scored by the percentage of matching words in the author, title, or subject and by the percentage of matching words in the subject string. This fuzzy matching allowed pairing searches with possible results without insisting on perfect matches for complex strings. "Successful" scores were determined after a scan of least successful matches for each category of bibliographic entry.

- For author matches, a search string of any length had to contain at least half of the words in the author entry.
- For title matches, the combined percentage of words in the title and words in the search string had to be 150% or higher.
- For subject matches, all of the words in the subject string needed to be present in the search string. Matches where the subject string represented more than half of the search string were considered a strong match.

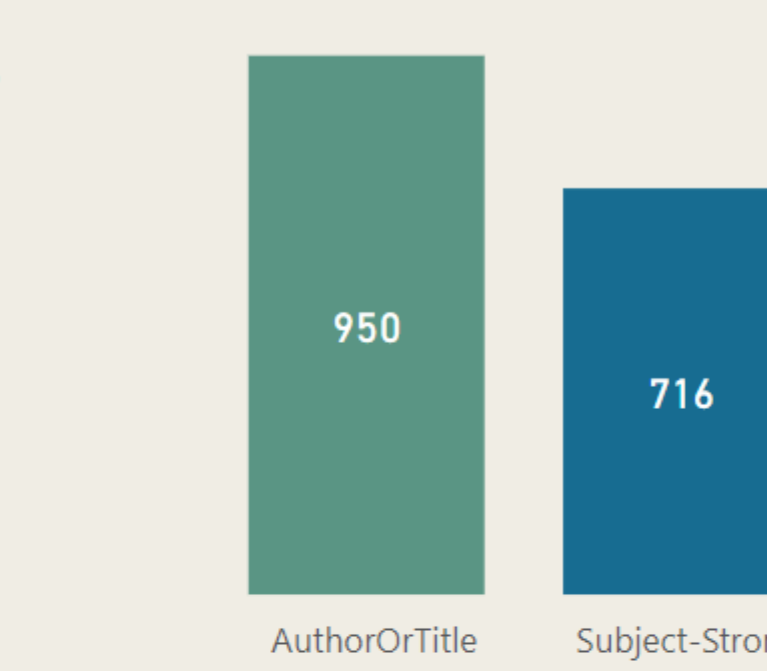
Search Strings



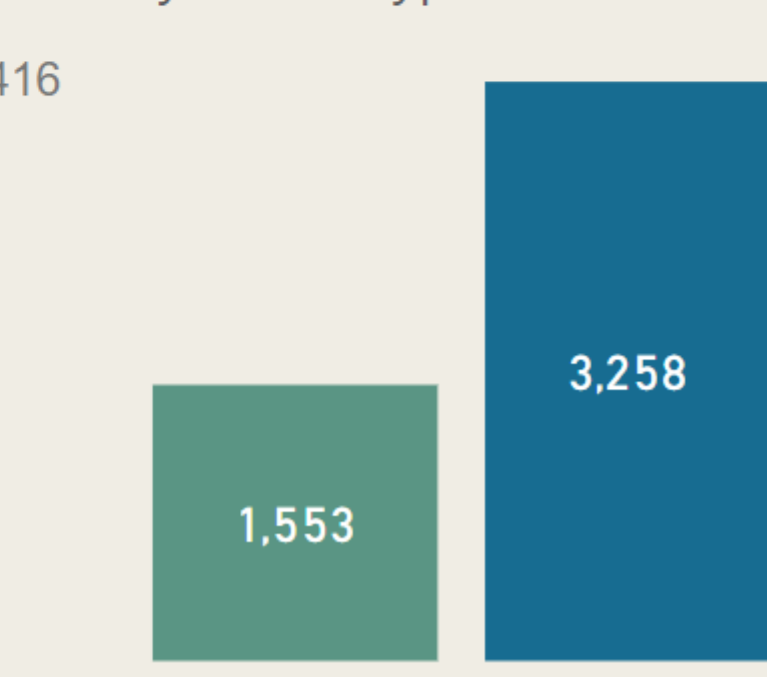
Titles



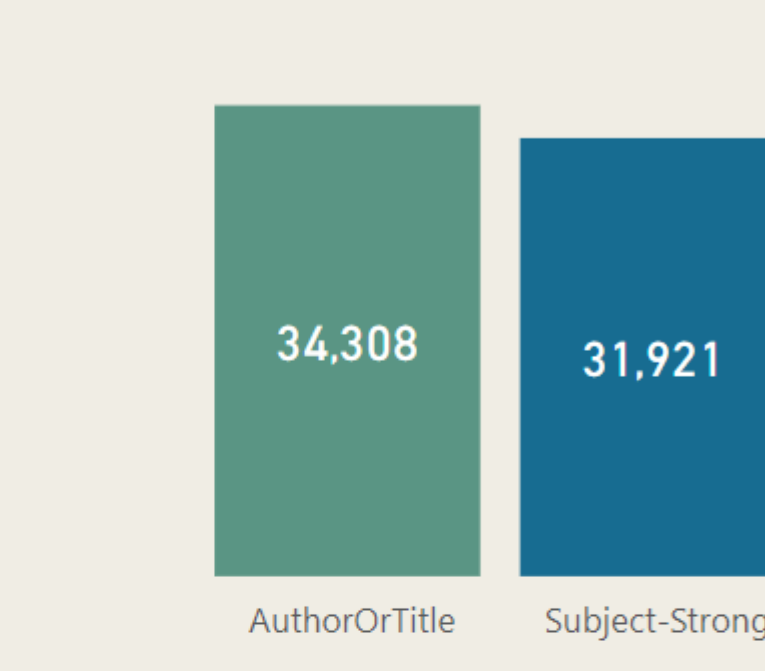
Search Strings by Match Type



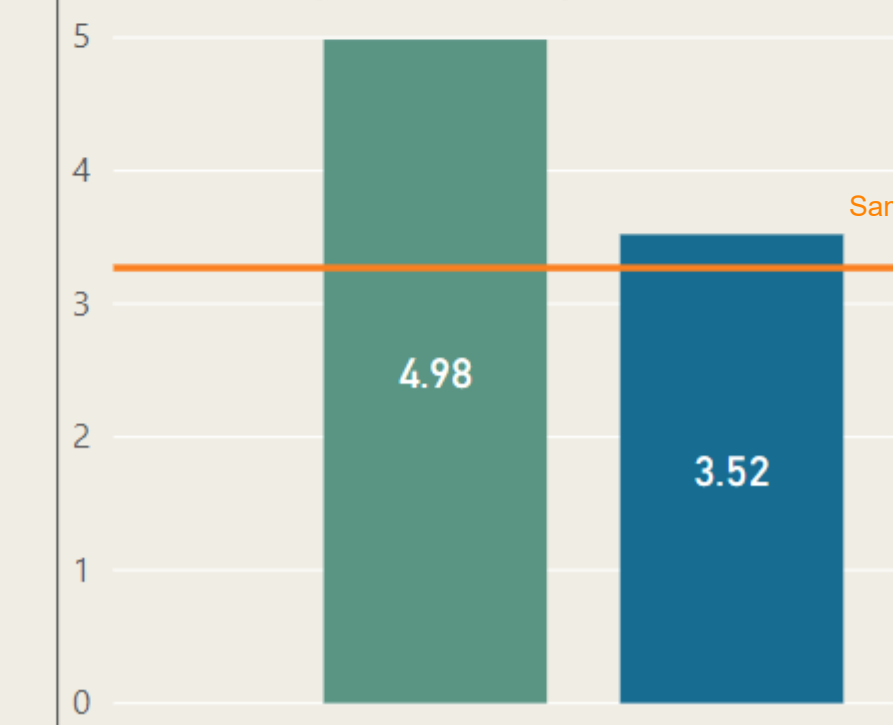
Titles by Match Type



Searches by Match Type



Alma Sample Loans per Title



A Wilcoxon Rank Test was performed on the Author-Or-Title matches and the strong Subject matches. Books that matched by author or title had more circulations since December 2014 than books that matched subject strings (p-value <0.001). This suggests that most-frequently circulated titles are 'known items' that are specifically sought after.

Top Subjects in American Literature by number of sampled titles

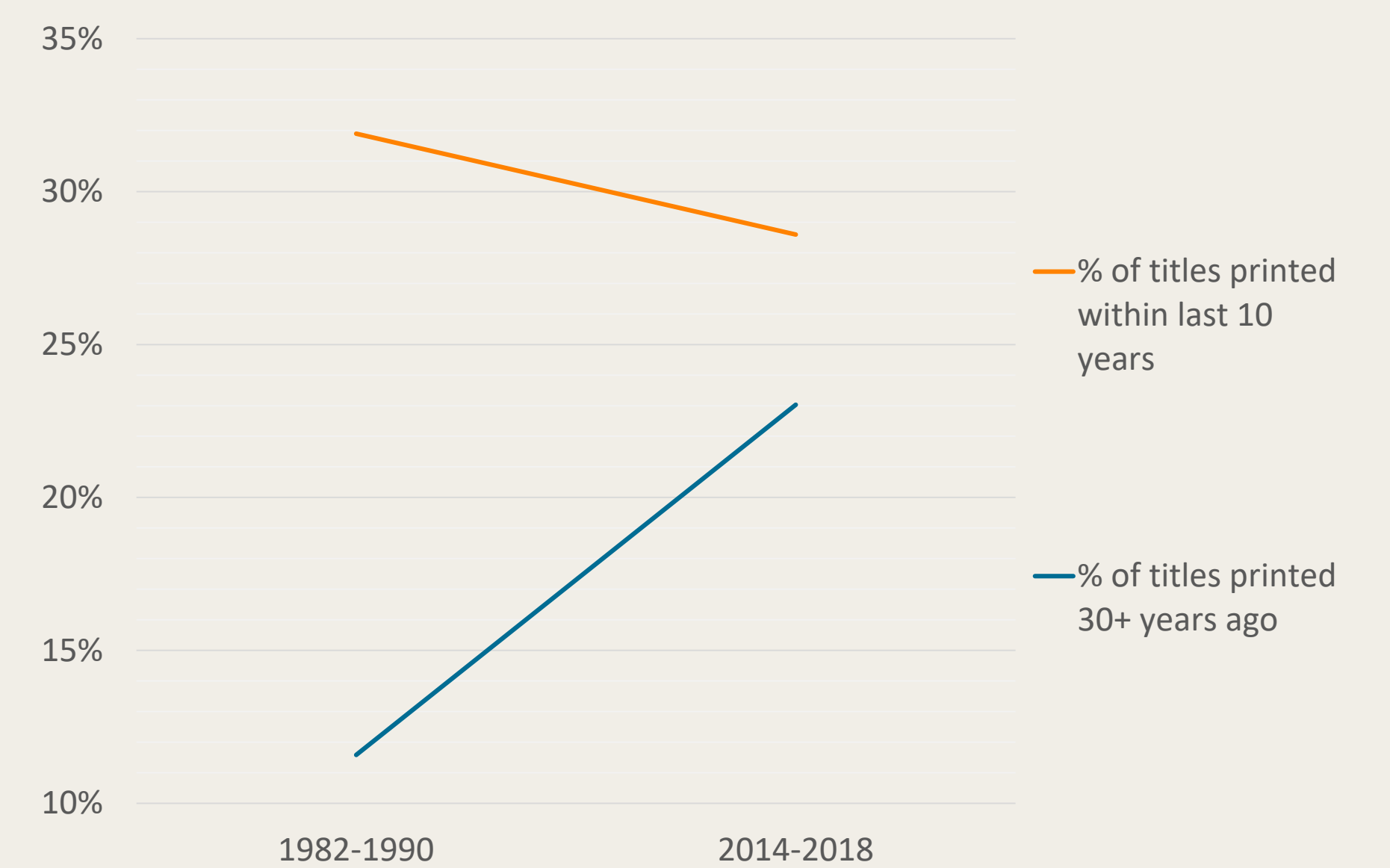
1982-1990	1998-2018	2014-2018
Dickinson, Emily	Chopin, Kate	African American women – Fiction
Hemingway, Ernest	African Americans in literature	Domestic fiction
Hawthorne, Nathaniel	African women in literature	Historical fiction
Hughes, Langston	Women and literature -- United States -- History -- 20th century	Psychological fiction
O'Connor, Flannery	Agee, James	African Americans in literature
Frost, Robert	Hurston, Zora Neale	Science fiction
Poe, Edgar Allan	African American women -- Fiction	Chopin, Kate
Plath, Sylvia	Domestic fiction	Love stories
Morrison, Toni	Poe, Edgar Allan	African Americans -- Fiction
Agee, James	Morrison, Toni	Fitzgerald, F. Scott

While literature by well-known authors continues to circulate well, critical literature has moved away from studies of major authors and toward new figures and surveys. Increased subject access to fiction can also be seen here.

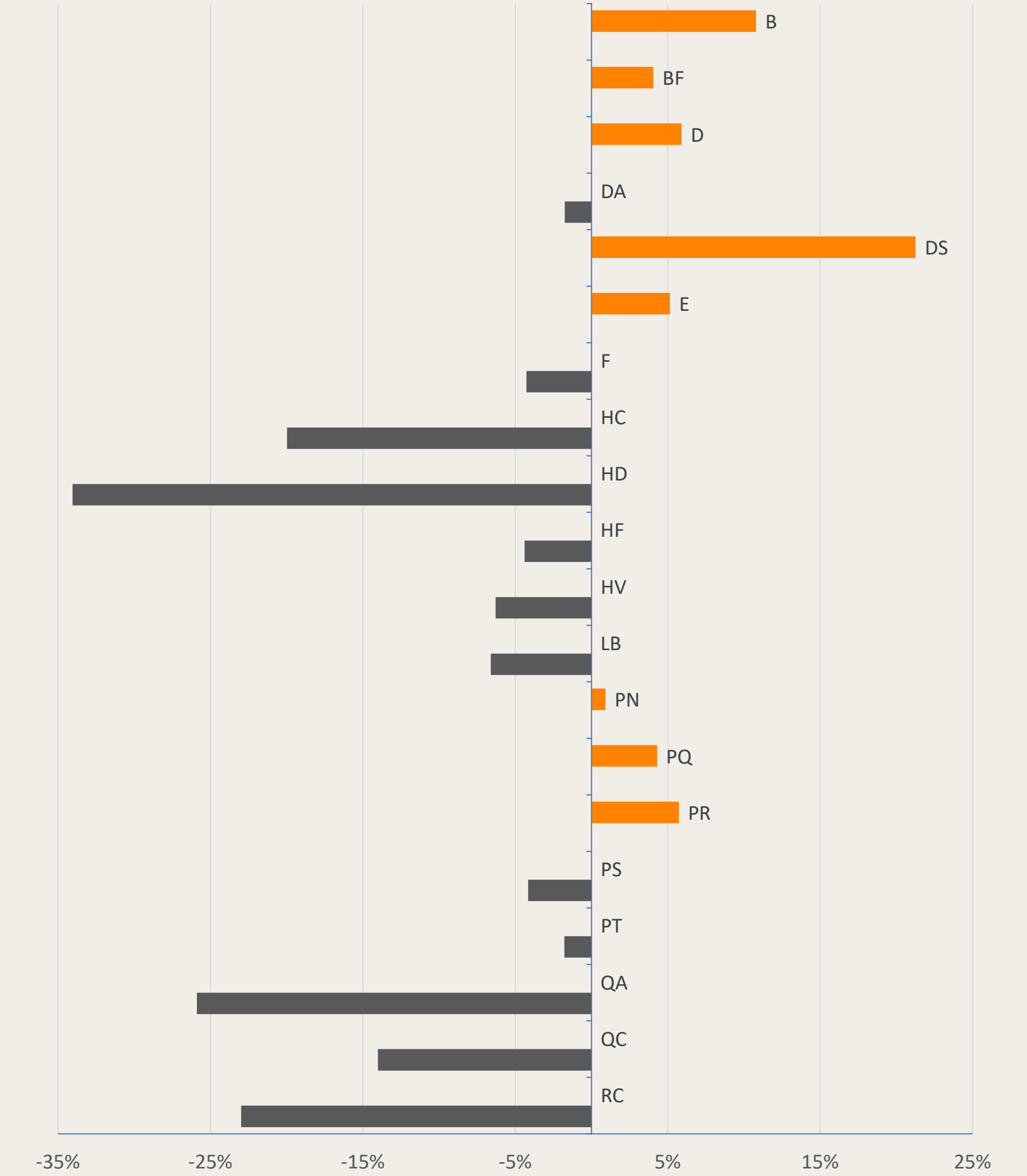
Shifting Demand for Current Books 1990-2018

Britten and Webster (1992) noted the continuing relevance of older material, even for science and medical subject classes where heavy demand for current material was also found. In replicating their analysis (adapting age brackets relative to 2018), we note an overall decline in the occurrence of "current" books (published within the last ten years) in the 2014-2018 sample. Classes in which "current" books made up a smaller share of the sample than previously are areas which depend on journals and electronic resources for current material, while print titles function as historical references. The share of "current" books actually increased slightly in several Humanities classes. The decline of print circulation generally is seen in the 1998-2018 sample. Only 3% of leading titles over the past twenty years were printed after 2007.

Highly Circulated Titles are More Classic, Less Current



Change in % of Most Circulated Titles printed in the Last 10 Years from 1982-1990 to 2014-2018



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