From Bones to Drones: The Challenge of Checking Out Unicorns

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From Bones to Drones: 
The Challenge of Checking Out Unicorns

Rodger Bishop, Fredda Owens, Suzanne Rook Schilf

Modern academic library shelves are no longer limited to books and media—collections today include “unicorns,” which we define as unique items such as DSLR cameras, VR headsets, puppets, modeling kits—even skeletons and drones. Supporting students’ ever-changing curricular and research needs requires constant creativity, problem solving, and technology expertise.

Partnerships across campus ensure close attention to the nuances of university curriculum. For Access Services, curating robust physical reserve collections involves purchasing considerations, special shelving and packaging, customized loan periods, reservation systems, and careful maintenance of high-use, delicate items.

Abstract

❏ Before purchasing, selectors should consult with access services staff to determine circulation feasibility and logistics
❏ To decide what to add to the collection, listen and observe: survey students, take faculty requests, match items to curriculum needs, examine check out statistics of current items
❏ Only spend 70% of budget on items; reserve 30% for taxes, shipping, labels and packaging, accessories, maintenance, and current inventory replacement
❏ Plan for ongoing and replacement costs—lost lens caps, worn bags, batteries, casing, lamination, labeling, tape, velcro, cord holders, zip ties, magnetic labels, cleaning supplies
❏ Campus partnerships can help fund, market, and grow collections; if an award or grant is received, be sure the library has input on items purchased

Purchasing

Care & Feeding

❏ Employees who manage technology and unicorn collections need to be organized, tech-savvy, and able to think outside the box
❏ Containers should be sturdy, stackable, and fit on adjustable shelves; consider custom-made packaging for fragile items
❏ Attach barcoded tags with item description, piece count, photos
❏ Conduct daily/weekly inventory and piece-count to keep track of items
❏ Cleaning supplies to have on hand: compressed air, microfiber cloths, cleaning solutions for electronics, pipe cleaners, q-tips, rubbing alcohol, blow-out bulb, air purifier, paper towels, disinfectant wipes, disinfectant, bug spray

Shelving & Packaging

Check Out & Returns

❏ First come—first served
❏ Paper forms at desk
❏ Online forms on website
❏ Point of need
❏ Ask if substitutions are ok—will a Nikon work if a Canon isn’t available?
❏ Encourage students to plan ahead

Reservations

❏ Supply & Demand
   higher demand = shorter loan period
❏ ILS workarounds may be necessary
❏ Rotate seasonal items
❏ Match curriculum needs and prepare for when items will be in high demand
❏ Renewals usually not a good idea

Loan Periods

Returns

❏ Include a patron agreement for late/lost/missing items on reservation form
❏ Replacement policies should take into account current market value
❏ Piece count unicorns when returned and be prepared to follow up on missing pieces
❏ Designate which employees can check in the extra special unicorns

Check Out Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan 2018 - Nov 2019</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check Out Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Circs 935.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unicorns 330</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books 698</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Circs 935.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICORN BREAKDOWN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photography 120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video 76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology 89</td>
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