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Are E-books Ready for Academic Libraries?

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Are e-books ready for academic libraries?

E-books are becoming increasingly popular in academic libraries. All CUNY libraries subscribe to or purchase individual e-books and e-book collections. York College has various e-book collections from Springer, Ebrary, NetLibrary, and Gale among others. Most of these e-books are available through the links for *Electronic Books* and *Books and More* on the library's website. The practice of acquiring e-books by academic libraries is very new. Currently, publishers and aggregators of e-books are creating models that mimic the acquisition and use of printed books in a way that also generates revenues for authors, publishers, and aggregators.

Some of the challenges in using e-books are related to the issue of limited accessibility by multiple users at the same time, unavailability of e-books in a standard format, and unavailability of features to print and to download on all platforms. When librarians demonstrate how to access e-books through Netlibrary in information literacy classes, they cannot

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provide a hands-on teaching session because NetLibrary only allows a certain number of simultaneous users. Students lose interest in using e-books when they find format inconsistencies among the various aggregators and publishers. (For instance, Springer displays its e-books in a format different from Ebrary

and NetLibrary.) Students become frustrated when they cannot download or print e-books from every platform. As a result, they are more inclined to borrow a physical book and photocopy required pages. Furthermore, many students are unsure of whether their professors consider e-books as books or online materials for assignments that require them to refrain from using online resources. E-books are not yet



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Tokunbo Adeshina, Jr.

Best of luck in the future!

conducive to inter-library loan; students at York College cannot borrow e-books from other CUNY colleges or from non-CUNY colleges.

So why do libraries bother to develop an e-book collection? E-books provide portability and remote accessibility. Some of the e-book platforms allow users to download books on their iPads, PCs, and e-readers. At York College, students can access e-books remotely using their York College ID number or VPN. For libraries, it is more cost-effective and a space saver to buy e-books that multiple people can access 24/7 than to purchase multiple copies of a printed book.

It is important that members of the York community embrace e-books as a new format for their research. It is expected that over time, as has happened with electronic journals, e-books will acquire some uniformity in terms of format and advanced features such as note-taking and highlighting. It is my hope that students will be able to borrow e-books through inter-library loan in the near future.

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