Academic health sciences librarians' use of the Brandon-Hill selected list in book selection activities: results of a preliminary descriptive study*

By Sharon C. Murphy, M.L.S.
Senior Assistant Librarian

State University of New York at Buffalo
Health Sciences Library
Abbott Hall
Buffalo, New York 14214-3002

Karen Buchinger, M.L.S.
Medical Information Consultant

1183 Colvin Boulevard
Buffalo, New York 14223-1906

The first Brandon-Hill list was published in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* (*BMLA*) in 1965. Since then, the "Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library" has become a widely used collection development tool for health sciences librarians. Although intended as a selection guide for small or medium-size libraries in hospitals or comparable medical facilities, and compiled with hospital librarians in mind, Brandon and Hill have noted that "previous versions of the list have been used extensively by other health sciences librarians, academic librarians, public librarians, physicians, and teaching programs" [1]. Brandon and Hill indicate in the preface to the 1995 list their belief that cooperative resource-sharing is fast becoming the primary application for the list [2].

Since 1994, the list has been cited specifically by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in the *Accreditation Manual for Hospitals* as an example of an authoritative resource for identifying "up-to-date scientific, clinical, and managerial knowledge" [3–4]. This was the first time that the Brandon-Hill list and "A Library for Internists: Recommendations from the American College of Physicians" [5] have been mentioned by name as examples of authoritative publications for such use by the JCAHO, although the lists have been used for many years by librarians as collection development guides [6].

The literature contains only a very few references to specific core lists, authority lists, or selected book lists used as collection development tools. These references are found most frequently in articles related to journal acquisition in hospital libraries or book collection development activities in undergraduate college libraries [7–9]. Other published materials related to the subject consist primarily of lists of selected books for reference use in hospital libraries or for use in specific disciplines [10–12].

The Brandon-Hill book list has been used by librarians beyond the intended audience, and the literature related to the use of book lists as collection development tools contains no descriptive review that explicitly examines core list use in book selection activities overall by any specific group of health sciences librarians. Actual use of the Brandon-Hill book list was addressed briefly in an analysis of replies to the survey question "How do you update your reference collection?" Sixteen percent (twenty-nine) of the respondents indicated that they used the Brandon-Hill list to update their reference collection [13].

The preliminary study reported in this article was undertaken to examine the extent of use of the book portion of the Brandon-Hill list in general collection development practice by academic health sciences librarians in the United States and Canada.

THE SURVEY

To gather data, a survey was conducted by questionnaire during the fall of 1993. The study included 149 regular member libraries listed in the *Annual Statistics of Medical School Libraries in the United States and Canada, 1990*. Directors on the *1993 Association of Academic Health Sciences Library Directors* e-mail list were contacted electronically and asked to supply the name or names of staff responsible for book selection in their institution who should receive a questionnaire. Directors without e-mail addresses were contacted by letter. A questionnaire was then mailed directly to the persons identified by each director. In a few cases, more than one name was supplied by the responding director and multiple copies of the questionnaire were sent. When there was no reply to the request for names, a questionnaire was sent directly to the director with a request to forward it to the appropriate staff.

Of the 160 copies of the questionnaire mailed, 119 completed copies were returned, for a response rate of 74%. Data were entered into SPSS/PC+ for statistical analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents highlights of the available survey data. In response to the initial survey question asking whether they had read or examined the Brandon-Hill list published in April 1993, 94.2% (113) of the 119 respondents answered yes. Of these, 84.2% (101) indicated that they had obtained the list through

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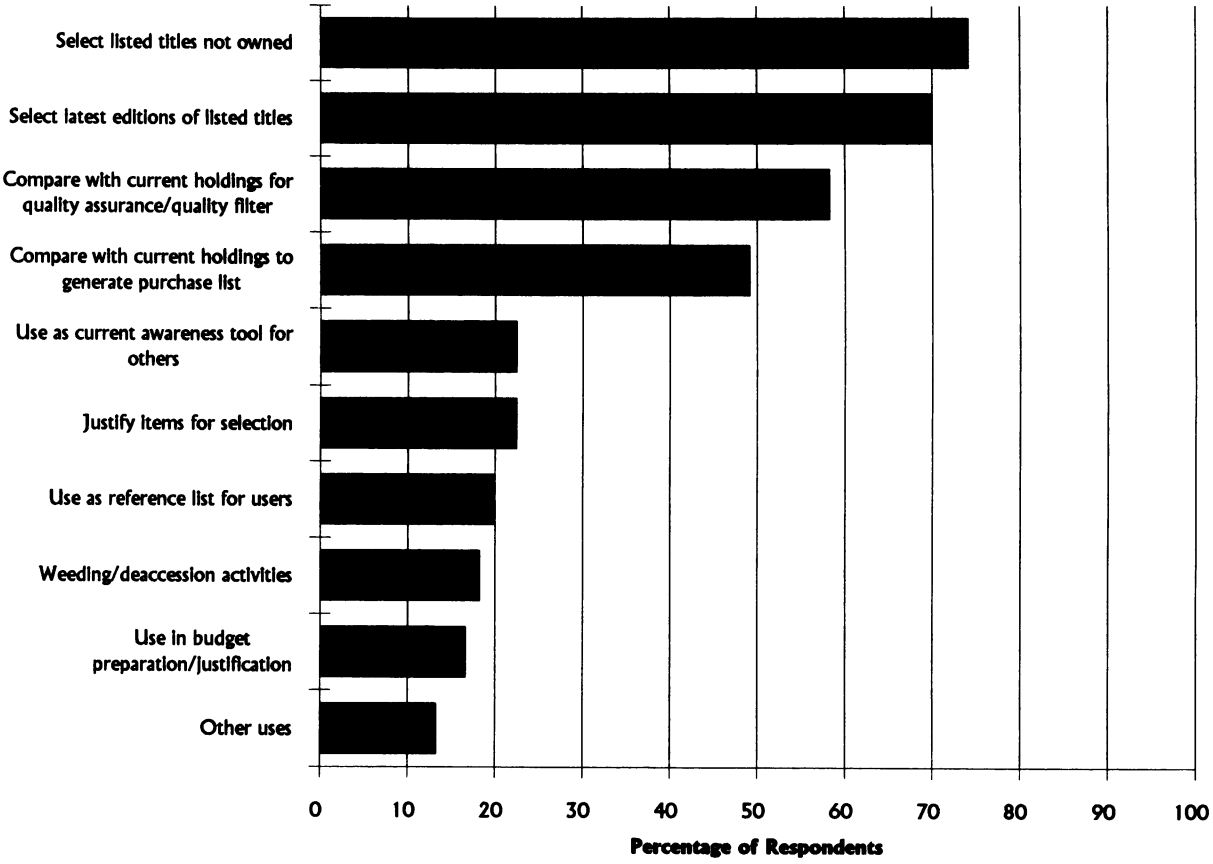
Figure 1
Academic health sciences librarians' use of the Brandon-Hill book list



a personal or institutional copy of the BMLA, while 80% (96) had obtained a reprint through a book vendor or book distributor, either in addition to the BMLA copy or as a primary source of a copy.

How the book list is used

Regarding the purposes for which respondents used the book portion of the list, respondents gave a variety of answers, as depicted in Figure 1. They were allowed to indicate more than one response to this question and often did so. In the category "Other uses," respondents identified the following: using the list as a guide for determining which textbooks to place on reserve; obtaining two copies of all "initial purchase" titles (denoted with asterisks in the book list) of which one copy is to be located in the noncirculating core collection and the other copy in the circulating collection; and having the list available for other libraries and departmental collections that ask for it.

Usefulness of the book list

When asked to rate the overall usefulness of the book list in collection development on a five-point Likert scale, 26.7% (thirty-two) of respondents rated the book list as essential, 50% (sixty) rated it as very useful, 15% (eighteen) were neutral, 0.8% (one) rated it as not very useful, 0.8% (one) rated the list as useless, and 6.7% (seven) did not respond to the question.

Influence of the book list on selection decisions

Regarding the influence of the list on selection decisions, 54.2% (sixty-five) of respondents indicated that the book portion of the list significantly influenced their selection decisions, while 25% (thirty) felt it moderately influenced their selection decisions, 11.7% (fourteen) indicated minimal influence, 2.4% (three) indicated that the book list did not influence selection decisions, and 6.7% (seven) did not respond to the question.

Initial purchase and minimal core list recommendations and selection decisions

An asterisk placed next to a title on the book list denotes a suggestion for initial purchase. As to whether this affected selection decisions, 45% (fifty-four) of respondents indicated that the asterisk significantly influenced their book selection decisions, 23.3% (twenty-eight) indicated that it was a moderate influence, 12.5% (fifteen) found it a minimal influence, 12.5% (fifteen) replied that it did not influence book selection decisions, and 6.7% (seven) did not answer the question.

Beginning with the 1993 list, a dagger placed next to a title denotes "minimal core list" recommendations. Asked whether the dagger influenced selection decisions, 30% (thirty-six) of respondents indicated that the dagger significantly influenced their book selection decisions, 21.7% (twenty-six) indicated that it minimally influenced them, 16.7% (twenty) indicated that it was a moderate influence, 20% (twenty-four) replied that it did not influence them, 5% (six) indicated that this symbol was introduced too recently for them to form an opinion, and 6.7% (seven) did not respond to the question.

The book list and the budget

Regarding book budgets, 40% (forty-eight) of respondents indicated that their library's book budget had decreased over the previous two to three years, 35% (forty-two) indicated that their budgets had remained the same, 20% (twenty-four) indicated that their book budget had increased, and 5% (five) did not answer the question. While 69.2% (eighty-three) of respondents indicated that their book budget status made no change in their reliance on the Brandon-Hill list for book selection decisions, 23.3% (twenty-eight) indicated that their reliance on the list had increased, 2.5% (three) indicated that their reliance on the list decreased, and 5% (five) of respondents did not answer the question. One respondent, a book selector for nineteen years, offered this comment: "MONEY drives our purchases. Examples: FY 1993–94 $35,000.00 [book budget]; FY 1992–93 $90,000.00 [book budget]."

Uses for the preface to the list

More than three-quarters (75.8%) of respondents indicated that they read the preface preceding the list. Most respondents reported using the information in the preface for multiple purposes and included more than one response. Of those who read the preface, 65% (seventy-eight) of respondents used it to track trends in book and journal acquisition costs; 52.5% (sixty-three) used it to track trends in health care information needs; 25% (thirty) used it for budget preparation or budget justification; and 23.3% (twenty-eight) used it as a current awareness tool for library advisory committees, academic department heads, or professional peers. Additional uses for the preface, supplied by 7.5% (nine) of respondents, were to "better understand criteria for selection," to "update personal knowledge," and to "increase general professional awareness of recommended book titles."

Written collection development policies

Asked if their library had a written collection development policy, 75.8% (ninety-one) of respondents answered yes. Of those, 19.2% (twenty-three) indicated that their policy referred to an authority or core list. Specific authority or core lists most frequently cited by respondents were the Brandon-Hill list and "A Library for Internists: Recommendations from the American College of Physicians." Respondents also identified other lists or resources that are consulted for health sciences book selection and purchase decisions, including

- American Dental Association List of new acquisitions;
- *American Journal of Nursing* "Books of the Year";
- Brandon-Hill "Selected List of Books and Journals in Allied Health";
- Brandon-Hill "Selected List of Nursing Books and Journals";
- *Current Contents;*
- Majors lists;
- Majors and Rittenhouse newsletters;
- Morton's *Medical Bibliography;*
- National Library of Medicine Proof Sheets for selection, until cessation in 1992;
- regular review of *Choice,* and book reviews in *JAMA, New England Journal of Medicine,* and American Medical Association book review titles; and
- vendor notification slips of titles recently published.

Factors affecting librarian book selection choices

In selecting a book for purchase, their budget permitting and the item being within the scope of their collection, respondents indicated that multiple factors were important in making selection choices (see Table 1). Respondents were asked to select the factors from this group that influenced them most in selecting a book for purchase, but were not asked to place them in rank order. The top choices were recommendation from primary clientele, inclusion of the title on the Brandon-Hill book list, librarian colleague's recommendation, and circulation history of previous edition (if applicable).

One respondent, a book selector for some two years and an academic health sciences librarian for more than thirty years, commented, "Unfortunately we can no longer strive to build a research collection that builds for possible future use. The present focus must

Table 1
Academic health sciences librarians' rating of importance of multiple non-exclusive factors on book selection decisions

Factors	Importance by percentage of respondents					
	Of great importance	Of some importance	Neutral	Of little importance	Of no importance	Did not answer question
Recommendation from primary clientele	90.80	7.60	0.80	0.00	0.00	0.80
Circulation history of previous edition (if applicable)	62.20	29.40	4.20	0.80	1.70	1.70
Requested through Interlibrary Loan frequently	62.20	25.20	5.90	1.70	4.20	0.80
Title on Brandon-Hill list	58.00	30.30	8.40	1.70	0.80	0.80
Librarian colleague's recommendation	47.90	43.70	5.90	1.70	0.00	0.80
Title listed on "A Library for Internists"	34.50	35.30	17.60	0.80	6.70	5.00
Examination of book on approved plan (if applicable)	34.50	18.50	3.40	1.70	12.60	29.40
Author or editor's reputation	31.10	57.10	8.40	2.50	0.00	0.80
Recommended in book review	17.60	59.70	14.30	5.90	1.70	0.80
Publisher's flyer or promotional material	1.70	23.50	42.90	23.50	6.70	1.70

be on meeting our users' current needs—so we are driven to select for a 'use' collection."

Information about respondents

Of the 119 respondents, 50.4% had been academic health sciences librarians for fourteen years or more, with experience ranging from less than one year to thirty-five years (mean=14.1 years). More than half (52.9%) of respondents had served eight years or more as a book selector (mean=10.0 years). Slightly more than half (50.4%) of respondents had been employed twelve years or more at their current institution, with experience ranging from less than one year to thirty-nine years (mean=12.3 years).

CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Nineteen ninety-five marked the thirtieth year of publication of the Brandon-Hill "Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library." The survey reported here, conducted in the fall of 1993, documents the use of the book list portion of the Brandon-Hill list in collection development practices by academic health sciences librarians. The high overall response rate (74%) and a number of written comments by the librarians participating in the survey indicated a growing interest in the use of core lists as collection development tools. Especially notable was the frequent request by respondents for selection criteria used to evaluate materials included in core lists.

Data from the study confirm what has been suspected by many academic health sciences librarians but was previously undocumented: Although intended primarily for another audience (medical librarians in a hospital setting), the list serves a valued and useful purpose in book selection by academic medical librarians, even though very little has been written formally about core lists as selection tools. The majority of respondents used the well-known list to select book titles not already in their collections. More than half of the respondents rated the list as essential or very useful, indicated that the list significantly influenced selection decisions, and reported that the appearance of a book title on the list was of great importance in selecting a book for purchase.

Three-quarters of the respondents read the preface, most often to track trends in book and journal acquisition costs, and secondly to track trends in health care information needs. Regarding the overall impact of core list use and shrinking book budgets, a majority of respondents indicated that their book budgets had declining purchasing power. Book budgets had either declined (40%) or remained the same (35%). Almost a quarter of the respondents reported that during recent years they had relied increasingly on the Brandon-Hill list in making selection decisions.

As health sciences librarians increasingly explore resource sharing as one way of making up for declining book budgets, reliance on tools such as core lists and other selection guidelines seems to be on the rise. A number of additional resources that academic health sciences librarians found useful in collection development decisions were identified in the survey. The use of these resources and the Brandon-Hill list in cooperative resource-sharing could be a fruitful area for further study.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

We are interested in studying the use, in academic health sciences libraries, of the BOOK LIST portion of the "Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library." (The list known informally as the Brandon-Hill list). As part of our research, would you please complete this short questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped pre-addressed envelope by November 17, 1993?

The questionnaire contains seventeen questions and should take about ten minutes to complete. Your response is a crucial part of our research in collection development and all individual responses will be kept confidential. Thank you.

Sharon Murphy, M.L.S.
Health Sciences Library
State University of NY
at Buffalo

Karen Buchinger, M.L.S.
Medical Library Consultant
Buffalo, New York

Please check one answer for each question unless otherwise specified.

1. Have you read or examined the "Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library" (Brandon-Hill list) published in April 1993?
   ___ Yes (please go to question 2 and continue to end of questionnaire)
   ___ No (please go to question 11A and continue to end of questionnaire)

2. How do you obtain a copy of the Brandon-Hill list for your use? Check all that apply.
   ___ personal or institutional copy of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*
   ___ journal article photocopy through interlibrary loan
   ___ reprint through a book vendor or book distributor
   ___ other (please specify)

3. For what purposes do you use the BOOK LIST contained in the Brandon-Hill list? Check all that apply.
   ___ Current awareness tool for library advisory committee, or academic department heads, or professional peers
   ___ Selection of a listed title if not owned by institution (budget permitting)
   ___ Selection of latest edition of titles on list (budget permitting)
   ___ Comparison of library's holdings with titles on list to generate an acquisition list for purchase
   ___ Use in weeding/deaccession activities
   ___ Budget preparation or budget justification
   ___ Reference list for directing library users to current titles by subject area
   ___ Justification to institution or administration for selection of a title
   ___ Comparison of library's holdings with titles on list as a quality assurance or quality filter measurement tool
   ___ Other (please specify)

4. Please rate how useful you find the BOOK LIST portion of the Brandon-Hill list in your collection development activities:
   1—Essential 2—Very useful 3—Neutral
   4—Not very useful 5—Useless

5A. Do you read the introductory preface which precedes the lists?
   ___ Yes (please go to question 5B)
   ___ No (please go to question 6)

5B. For what purposes do you use the introductory preface? Check all that apply.
   ___ Current awareness tool for library advisory committee, or academic department heads, or professional peers
   ___ Budget preparation or budget justification
   ___ Tracking trends in health care information needs
   ___ Tracking trends in book and journal acquisition costs
   ___ Other (please specify)

6. In your opinion, the BOOK LIST portion of the Brandon-Hill list:
   ___ Significantly influences your selection decisions
   ___ Moderately influences your selection decisions
   ___ Minimally influences your selection decisions
   ___ Does not influence your selection decisions

7A. How does the *(asterisk) next to a title on the BOOK LIST, indicating a suggestion for initial purchase, affect your selection decisions?
   ___ Significantly influences your book selection decisions
   ___ Moderately influences your selection decisions
   ___ Minimally influences your book selection decisions
   ___ Does not influence your book selection decisions

Comments:

7B. A † (dagger) was placed next to some titles on the BOOK LIST published in April 1993 to indicate "minimal core list" selections. How does the † affect your selection decisions?
   ___ Significantly influences your book selection decisions
   ___ Moderately influences your selection decisions
   ___ Minimally influences your book selection decisions
   ___ Does not influence your book selection decisions
   ___ Too recent to form an opinion

8A. What has been the general trend over the last 2-3 years in your library's book budget?
   ___ Book budget increased
   ___ Book budget remained the same
   ___ Book budget decreased

8B. In reference to the book budget trend you selected in question 8A, do you believe that you have:
   ___ Increased reliance on the Brandon-Hill list for book selection decisions
   ___ Made no change in reliance on the Brandon-Hill list for book selection decisions
   ___ Decreased reliance on the Brandon-Hill list for book selection decisions

9. Please estimate the percentage of books owned by your institution which are included on the April 1993 Brandon-Hill list:
   ___ 0-24 ___ 25-49% ___ 50-74%
   ___ 75-99% ___ 100%

10A. Does your library participate in a book approval plan with a book distributor or book vendor?
   ___ Yes (please go to question 10B)
   ___ No (please go to question 11)

10B. Are Brandon-Hill list book selections automatically sent to your institution as part of your book approval profile?
   ___ Yes ___ No Comments:

11A. How important are each of the following items to you in selecting a book for purchase (budget permitting and item being within the scope of your collection) Please indicate number after each item from scale.
   Great importance—1 Some importance—2 Neutral—3 Little importance—4 No importance—5
   a. Recommendation from primary clientele ___
   b. Librarian colleague's recommendation ___
   c. Inclusion of title on Brandon-Hill list ___
   d. Inclusion of title on "A Library for Internists: Recommendations of the American College of Physicians" list ___
   e. Recommendation in book review ___
   f. Author or editor's reputation ___
   g. Publisher's flyer or promotional material ___
   h. Circulation history of previous edition (if applicable) ___
   i. Requested through Interlibrary Loan frequently enough to warrant purchase ___
   j. Examination of book on approval plan (if applicable) ___

11B. Reviewing the categories listed in question 11A, please select the top three that influence you the most in selecting a book for purchase: Use the letters supplied in question 11A.
   #1 ___ #2 ___ #3 ___ Comments:

12. Please list any core or authority lists, other than the Brandon-Hill list, that you consult for medical book selection and purchase decisions:

13A. Does your library have a written collection development policy?
   ___ Yes (please go to question 13B)
   ___ No (please go to question 14)

13B. Does the policy make reference to any kind of authority or core lists?
   ___ Yes (please provide wording from policy or attach a copy)
   ___ No

Could We Have The Following Information About You?

14. How many years have you been an academic health sciences librarian?
15. How many years have you been a book selector?
16. What is your position or title?
17. How long have you been employed in the institution where you are presently located?

Comments? Please elaborate on any of your responses. We welcome your feedback!

Thank you again for your participation in this research study.