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This study evaluates the quality of the graphic novel holdings of academic members of the Association of Research Libraries in the U.S. A core list of 77 graphic novels that have won awards or are otherwise prominent was developed, and this list was compared with the libraries' collections as represented in their online catalogs. This was done in order to assess whether academic library collections have kept up with the incredible growth in popularity that the format has experienced in recent years. The study's findings suggest that ARL members do not have especially strong graphic novel holdings. In addition, the study examined the types of graphic novels these libraries tend to collect. It was determined that they tend to collect works published by mainstream publishers and also those relating to genres they already collect.

Headings:

      Graphic novels

      College and university libraries

      Association of Research Libraries

GRAPHIC NOVELS HOLDINGS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: AN ANALYSIS OF
THE COLLECTIONS OF ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES MEMBERS

by
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Introduction

Comic books have become increasingly popular in the past several years, both on university and college campuses and in the wider world. They are read for pleasure by people across the social spectrum, and they are also studied by college students in their classes and used by faculty in their research. In particular, graphic novels – comics that are produced in a more durable, book-like format – have seen a tremendous growth in both status and sales in recent year. However, this growth has been tremendously swift, and some academic librarians still retain biases against the format. In addition, even those who see it as worth collecting may lack the knowledge to do so effectively. Because of these factors, it is unclear if the graphic novel collections of academic libraries have grown to become substantial enough to support the various needs of their faculty and students.

In American, despite their widespread popularity, comic books have been perceived, since their beginnings in the 1930s, as being, at best, sub-literary dross meant for children and the uneducated, and, at worst, as a threat to public morality. This last view was embodied by Dr. Frederic Wertham, whose crusade against comics reached its pinnacle with the 1954 publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham felt that the sex and violence filling the comic books of his day were having a negative psychological effect on the nation's children. His work led to Senate Hearings on the matter, as well as to the creation of the Comics Code Authority. The seal of this

organization, which could only be used if the work followed strict guidelines, was ubiquitous on the covers of comic books for several decades. Also, from the late 1950s on, superhero stories were by far the dominant genre of the medium, and this re-enforced the idea that comic books were suitable only for children. The result of all this was that, for most of the last half-century, "comic books were greeted with disdain and outright hostility by many of the (largely self-appointed) arbiters of American cultural tastes and values. Numbered among these anti-comic book cultural elitists were many members of the library community" (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000, p. 39). This elitism spread to the academic world as well, where, "comics may have been almost invisible in university curricula for the past 100 years, but in most of the non-communist world they have invisible only because they are everywhere" (Scott, 1993, p. 84). It would take a significant amount of effort for comics to be thought worthy of serious consideration, especially in academia.

A re-evaluation of the role of comic art began to take place among the cultural changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s. A community of "underground comics" creators that was connected to the burgeoning counterculture began to grow in places like San Francisco and New York City. Robert Crumb is by far the most famous of these creators, but there were dozens of others. The work they produced was filled with sexuality and drug use, and was thus aimed squarely at an adult audience. These artists were followed in the next two decades by other creators of "alternative comics," such as Harvey Pekar, Will Eisner, Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, and Art Spiegelman. The sophistication and adult themes of these artists' works spread the idea that comic books were capable of much more than simple stories for children. Titles such as *Maus*, a

Holocaust memoir, and *Fax from Sarajevo*, an account of the 1990s Bosnian War dealt with subjects of such immense seriousness that it was difficult not to view them with some respect. In addition, these works displayed all types of stories, from autobiography to magical realism to war stories, thus making extremely clear that "comics" are a medium, not a genre. In the late 1980s, even the superhero comic was brought to a new level of maturity with the publication of such dark, postmodern landmarks as *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.

The new respectability of the comics medium was aided by a new form with which could be presented to audiences, the graphic novel. Will Eisner's *A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories*, published in 1978, is often considered to be the first graphic novel, and it is certainly the one that made the term fairly well-known in the comics world and beyond. Eisner, who had been working in the comics industry for decades, used the term because he was trying to create something more substantial than his previous work, something of more lasting value. As he said in the preface to this work, he was trying to prove that, "that the medium, the arrangement of words and pictures in a sequence – was an art form in itself. Unique, with a structure and gestalt all its own, this medium could deal with meaningful themes" (Eisner, 2000). And in its early years, this is how the term graphic novel was generally used – to refer to comics that had some literary value and that often had adult themes. It was also often used to refer to an "original graphic novel," i.e. a book that was not a collection of work that had been first published in comic book form. However, today the term graphic novel is used much more loosely, generally to refer to any work of comic art that is bound as a book. This can include both work that had been previously published in comic book

form and work published for the first time as a graphic novel. This new format did add an additional air of refinement and permanence to the medium. Its physical similarity to "real" books and its durability made it seem like more acceptable reading material. These same reasons also made graphic novels a considerably more attractive format to collect, as opposed to comic books

These advances in comic art were rewarded with more widespread recognition for the form, and graphic novels began to win mainstream awards and to be reviewed in mainstream publications. For instance, Art Speigelman's holocaust memoir *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992[1], and *Watchmen* was chosen for *Time* magazine's list of the "100 best English-language novels from 1923 to present" in 2005[2]. In addition, reviews of graphic novels now appear regularly in such esteemed publications as the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* (as well as in library publications like *Booklist* and *Library Journal*). And, while graphic novels in the past were mostly released by specialized publishers, today, many of the most visible comics are published by mainstream companies (Pantheon, in particular, seems to be embracing graphic novels as a viable format). In 2007, Houghton-Mifflin even added a *Best American Comics* to its annual line of *Best American* anthologies. In a similar manner, there is now generally a substantial selection of graphic novels available at most bookstores, as well as many public and school libraries, while in the past one had to turn to specialized comic books shops. This attention has paid off – graphic novels are slowly replacing comic books as the most popular expression of the medium and sales of graphic novels hit $375 million

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[1] See "The Pulitzer Prizes for 1992" at http://www.pulitzer.org/cgi-bin/year.pl?year=1992 for a full list of winners from that year.
[2] Watchmen's entry is available at http://www.time.com/time/2005/100books/0,24459,watchmen,00.html.

in 2007, a 12% increase from the year before[3]. In 2008, comics have made significant

progress towards the goal of being accepted as legitimate by mainstream society.

Graphic novels and comics have also, in recent years, found a greater

prominence on college and university campuses. This prominence was partly due to a

new attitude towards popular culture materials that began in the 1950s, an attitude

where even the most lowly examples of popular culture are seen as acceptable subjects

of artistic expression and of academic inquiry. This collapsing of the dichotomy

between high and low culture became was perhaps most apparent in the visual art

movement of Pop Art. Of particular relevancy here is the work of Roy Lichtenstein,

whose famous paintings such as *Whaam!* and *Drowning Girl* adapted comic book art to

the concerns of high art. These new attitudes quickly spread into academia; today

various forms of popular culture are studied at academic institutions across the county

and Bowling Green State University in Ohio even has a Department of Popular Culture.

This new paradigm has allowed the study of comics to thrive, as they

> have benefited from the enhanced status being afforded popular culture
> materials in general. Popular culture did not begin to receive serious scholarly
> attention on a consistent basis until the 1960s, most notably with the debut of the
> *Journal of Popular Culture*. Both in the pages of the *Journal* and elsewhere,
> scholars in the field have marshaled an imposing array of arguments in favor of
> the serious study of popular culture materials -- and, by extension, the
> importance of such materials to library collections. (Ellis & Highsmith, 2000, p.
> 39)

This movement was not necessarily interested in popular culture materials as art, but

more as evidence of the workings of our society. As the *Journal of Popular Culture*'s

website says, "the popular culture movement was founded on the principle that the

perspectives and experiences of common folk offer compelling insights into the social

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[3] Figures from "ICv2 Confab Reports 2007 Graphic Novel Sales Rise 12%" at
http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6552534.html?nid=2286&source=link&rid=&.

world.[4]" The proponents of popular culture studies view all products of a given culture

as valid subjects for academic study.

There are also many within academia who recognize that comics are capable of

making their own unique contribution to art, narrative art in particular. This type of

thought has meant that graphic novels have worked their way into all types of academic

endeavors, from required undergraduate classes to research done by professors.

Because of the unique nature, both socially and aesthetically, of comic art, graphic

novels are used in a wide variety of disciplines, from comparative literature to graphic

design, and from education to library science. As Bussert (2005) writes, "Many in the

fields of history, sociology, and arts and literature realize the unique and valuable

insight inherent in studying comic books and graphic novels." Due to this, there are now

two scholarly journals entirely devoted to comics – the *International Journal of Comic*

Art[5] based at Temple University and *ImageTexT*[6] based at the University of Florida. In

addition, there are several academic conferences on comics held annually, including the

International Comic Arts Forum[7] and the University of Florida's Conference on

Comics[8]. However, while all this is impressive, it is still certainly true that the place of

comics in academia is still rather tenuous. As Bart Beaty (2004) writes, "the scholarly

study of comic books and comic strips (collectively, comics) is, to provide the generous

reading of the situation, in a state of infancy." In addition, there are many in higher

education who still view comics with disdain. In 2008, Ithaca College chose the

graphic novel *Persepolis* for its First Year Reading Initiative program. This means the

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[4] From http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/aims.asp?ref=0022-3840&site=1.
[5] More information available at http://www.ijoca.com/.
[6] InterText is an open access journal; all content is available at http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/.
[7] The Forum's website is at http://www.internationalcomicartsforum.org/.
[8] See http://www.english.ufl.edu/comics/conference.shtml for more information.

book is to be read by all incoming freshmen, a fact that the staff at the college's newspaper, *The Ithacan*, decried in an editorial. They wrote, "Graphic novels are little more than advanced comic books. The thematic material of this book is worth broaching but its literary value…falls short" ("Taking Initiative"). Nonetheless, while graphic novels have obviously not reached the same level of prestige as painting, prose or cinema, they are still becoming increasingly prominent in scholarly life.

It is still not entirely certain how well the academic library community has responded to these changes in the status of graphic novels. It is the mandate of these libraries to serve the institutions of which they are a part, but there has long been a certain amount of prejudice among academic librarians against comic books and graphic novels. Writing about comic books and librarians in 1984, Randall W. Scott lamented that, 'the profession's stance has been seen as blanket disapproval for so many years'" (p. 25). This attitude has obviously affected the quality of academic graphic novel collections. Lavin (1998) notes that, "aside from a few dozen specialized, non-circulating research collections, retrospective comic book holdings remain virtually unknown as a library resource. Browsing collections of current comic books are equally rare in public, school, and college libraries" (p. 31). A different factor that may, perhaps, have a more positive effect on the quantity of graphic novels in academic libraries is the relatively recent trend of collecting more popular materials and of creating leisure reading collections in academic libraries.

It is the aim of this study to provide a general picture of the current quantity and quality of graphic novel holdings in academic library general collections. As of now, there has not been a study attempting to gauge graphic novel resources in these types of

institutions. Such data will be extremely valuable if libraries wish to build successful

collections in this area, and if they wish to understand where their weaknesses might be

found. Because of the recent, swift rise to prominence of this form, as well as because

of lingering prejudices against it in the library community, it is expected that many of

the libraries' collections will be weak. In addition, this paper will provide some

analysis regarding the types of graphic novels collected by academic libraries and the

types of institutions that have strong or weak collections.

Literature Review

Given the marginalization that comic books and graphic novels have long

suffered in academia, it is perhaps not surprising that the literature focusing on these

forms in academic libraries is not particularly broad or deep. While there is a fairly

significant body of literature dealing with graphic novels in school and public libraries,

very little of this relates directly to the concerns of this study. This is especially true

because school and, to a slightly lesser extent, public librarians seem to largely conceive

of graphic novels as children's literature. Still, there have been several excellent

articles dealing with different facets comics in academic libraries and these will be

covered here. However, none of these articles present any quantitative data regarding

graphic novels in academic libraries.

Comic Books and Special Collections

Most of the earliest articles on this subject focused on non-circulating special

collections of comic books (as opposed to graphic novels). Randal W. Scott is the

Comic Art Bibliographer at Michigan State University, which has the biggest and best

known comics special collection in the country. Scott's article "The Comics

Alternative" (1984) was written just as comics were beginning to gain some acceptance

among the academic community. Here he details the neglect that librarians have shown

to comics, noting that "the Library of Congress has never provided cataloging for comic

books, which may have discouraged librarians from keeping what they had acquired"

(p. 23). However, he details the reasons why "comic books are maturing as a medium"

(p. 24), and proposes that librarians therefore begin to take it more seriously. In

"Comics and Libraries and the Scholarly World" (1993), he advocates building

collections such as the one at MSU, even in the face of opposition or indifference from

administrators or faculty members. He sees librarians as both scholars and leaders, and

he believes that "the library profession is in a unique position to contribute to the future

of scholarship by preserving 20th century popular communication artifacts, and making

roadmaps through them (p. 84). Scott's 1998 article "A Practicing Comic-Book

Librarian Surveys His Collections and His Craft" is an in-depth profile and history of

the MSU Comics Art Collection. Particular attention is paid to the cataloging and

indexing of the collection, though he also discusses preservation and storage.

Highsmith (1992) discusses collection development tools and tactics for an

academic librarian building a comic book collection. Particular emphasis is placed on

developing relatively narrow criteria for the collection, since there are far too many

comic books out there for all but the largest libraries to attempt to collect

comprehensively. This could mean collecting work from a specific time period, by a

specific artist, or related to a specific theme. These criteria should be in some way

connected to the overall collection development plan of the university's libraries.

Savage (2003) is mostly concerned with the describing the various tools of the comics

researcher's trade, but he also makes several salient points regarding comic research

collections. He laments the "paucity of research collections available to investigators"

which "suggests the low esteem in which most libraries have held comic books" (p. 85).

He does list two high quality research collections, those at Michigan State University

and Bowling Green State University. Serchay (1998) profiles fourteen special

collections with focuses that relate to comic books, including several academic libraries.

Among these are MSU and BGSU, as well as Ohio State University's Cartoon, Graphic,

and Photographic Arts Research Library, the University of Pittsburgh's Archive of

Popular Culture, Iowa State University's Underground Comix Collection, and the

University of California-Riverside's J. Lloyd Eaton Collection of Science Fiction,

Fantasy, Horror, and Utopia. Serchay also includes a directory of more than 50 notable

comic research libraries in an appendix.

Graphic Novels and Academic Libraries

It is only within the last few years that a literature relating specifically to

graphic novels in the general collections of academic libraries has emerged. This has

dovetailed with emergence of graphic novels as a common and prestigious from for

presenting comic art. While the library literature relating to this still-emerging field

consists of only a few works, it nonetheless gives a good picture of the problems and

opportunities that graphic novels can create for academic libraries. Chris Matz,

Collection Development Librarian at the University of Memphis, shares his experiences

with the medium in "Collecting Comic Books for an Academic Library" (2004) (though

he uses the term "comic book," he is explicitly referring to graphic novels). His library

was asked by this university's Department of English to attempt to improve its graphic

novel resources in order to support doctoral level research in the area. A donation of

funds from the university's Friends of the Library allowed them to amass a significant

collection in a short time. While this source of money was temporary, Matz predicts

demand for graphic novels among faculty and students will only increase and will spur the further growth of the collection. He also discusses selection tools and provides a list of "ten important creators" whose work academic libraries should consider collecting (all of whom are represented on this study's list of core titles). Matz follows up this article with another in 2006. Here, he delineates the reason why the rosy future of his previous article did not come true (mostly, as would be expected, budgetary concerns). He also includes the University of Memphis' Collection Development Policy Statement on comic books, which he wrote.

Behler (2006) also offers a survey of important titles and collection development tools. Though the article is about libraries in general, Behler is an academic librarian (at Pennsylvania State University) and therefore particular emphasis is placed upon titles that would be useful in an academic setting. Similarly, Bussert (2005) offers selection resources – bibliographies, journals, databases – and, also similarly, the article is intended for all librarians but the author, an academic librarian, tends to focus on resources that would fit well with academic pursuits.

One of the most recent, and best, articles relating to graphic novels is by O'English, Matthews & Lindsay (2006), all librarians at Washington State University. These authors discuss the myriad ways in which graphic novels are used in academic libraries, ways both connected to the scholarly endeavors of the institution and to the recreational needs of students. They go into great detail about the history of the form and the types of graphic novels available. They also examine some of the reasons graphic novels may not be as prevalent in academic library collections as one might think, including difficulties with cataloging and classification. In addition, they

advocate for increased internal and external promotion of graphic novel collections, since "library staff may need to be convinced of the appropriateness of a graphic novel collection, while faculty, students and non-academic campus units may need to be made aware of the scholarly, creative, entertainment and marketing opportunities that can arise" (p. 178).

Collection Analyses

There are not a large number of studies in the library literature examining the presence of marginalized materials in library collections. Rothbauer and McKenchie (1999) attempt to discern the extent to which Canadian public libraries are collecting young adult novels with homosexual themes. They examined the holdings of 40 such libraries, and noted what percentage of a random sample of 40 relevant novels were owned by each. They found that the average number of titles held was 16.2 or 40.4%. This included three libraries that held more than 75% of the titles and ten libraries that held less than 25%. They conclude that, "access to gay and lesbian fiction for young adults…is somewhat limited and certainly inconsistent even when one accounts for size of library" (p. 36).

Mulcahy (2006) performs a similar study on science fiction novels in Association of Research Libraries academic libraries. It is his study that the current one is largely patterned after. He attempts to find "evidence for either the canonization of continued marginalization of science fiction," and, he says, "the support given science fiction scholars by academic libraries – in the form of collections of primary and secondary works – is an indicator of just how accepted science fiction is by the broader

scholarly community" (p. 16). He develops a core list of science fiction novels from titles that have won major awards or have been cited in "best-of" lists. He then looks at what percentages of these books are in the collections of individual academic ARL libraries. He finds the mean percentage of novels owned by the libraries is 50%, with a range from 9% to 97%. Mulcahy finds this result disappointing, and he concludes by saying, "if science fiction continues to be studied in colleges and universities…ARL libraries will need to consider their collection practices, committing a larger amount of their budgets and perhaps more aggressively pursuing gift collections" (p. 33). He also wonders "how do collections of science fiction compare with collections of other genre fictions…or with formats such as comic books or graphic novels? (p. 33).

Methodology

In order to gauge the quality of graphic novel collections in academic libraries, it was decided to examine the holdings of all academic members of the Association of Research Libraries in the U.S.[9] Of the 123 current members of the ARL, 114 are academic libraries and 99 of these are in the U.S. (the rest being in Canada). ARL libraries were chosen because they are large, prestigious libraries whose resources are theoretically deep enough to have potentially constructed significant graphic novel collections in the relatively small amount of time that the form has been considered appropriate for academic libraries. Also, these institutions' focus on research means that they have even greater cause to collect graphic novels, in addition to the curricular and recreational needs present at all academic institutions.

The quality of these libraries graphic novel collections was judged by comparing their holdings with a core list of titles. This core list of graphic novels was constructed largely from titles that had won the two major awards in the comics field, the Eisner Awards[10] and the Harvey Awards[11]. Both awards were begun in 1988, and the core list incorporates winners from that year until 2007. This is a relatively brief time span, but it also roughly parallels the period in which graphic novels started to receive increased attention from mainstream and academic sources. An attempt was made to include all winning titles from the most relevant categories. An exception was made for *Acme*

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[9] A full list of ARL member libraries is available at http://www.arl.org/arl/membership/members.shtml.
[10] The Eisner Awards' website is available at http://www.comic-con.org/cci/cci_eisners_main.shtml.
[11] The Harvey Awards' website is available at http://www.harveyawards.org/.

Novelty Library #13, which won a Harvey Award in 2000. This was left off the list, since it is included *in Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid* on Earth, which won both Eisner and Harvey awards the following year. The author, while constructing this list, used the most common, current definition of a graphic novel as simply a work of comic art that is bound as a book.

For the Eisner Awards, the winners of the category "Best Graphic Album" was included for the years 1988 and 1989. After these years, this category was split into "Best Graphic Album: New" (denoting a graphic novel of newly published material) and "Best Graphic Album: Reprint" (denoting a collection of material previously published in comic book format). The winners of both of these categories from 1990-2007 were included. Similarly, for the Harvey Awards, the category "Best Graphic Album" was used for 1988-1990, while "Best Graphic Album of Original Work" and "Best Graphic Album of Previously Published Work" were used thereafter. In addition, numerous titles that won mainstream awards (e.g. *Maus*) were also included. Finally, the list was supplemented with several works that, while they have not won any significant awards, are generally considered to be classics of the form. The final list contained 77 titles. It is hoped that the method used to create the list will result in a varied group of titles that embody the most important and critically acclaimed graphic novels of the last several decades. The full list can be seen in Appendix A.

While the list as developed certainly has its idiosyncrasies, it does, at the least, include representatives from most of the different genres and artists that have dominated graphic novels in America during the time period under discussion. Among these idiosyncrasies is the presence of nine Batman titles on the list. This does make the list

somewhat unbalanced; however, these titles are good representatives for the "superhero" genre – the medium's dominant type of story, which is otherwise rather sparse on the list. In addition, there are several creators who have multiple titles on the list. The writer Alan Moore, for instance, has five titles listed, as does the writer and artist Frank Miller. This is entirely fitting, however, since both men are extremely important figures in the comics industry. This is largely true of the other creators who appear on the list several times as well.
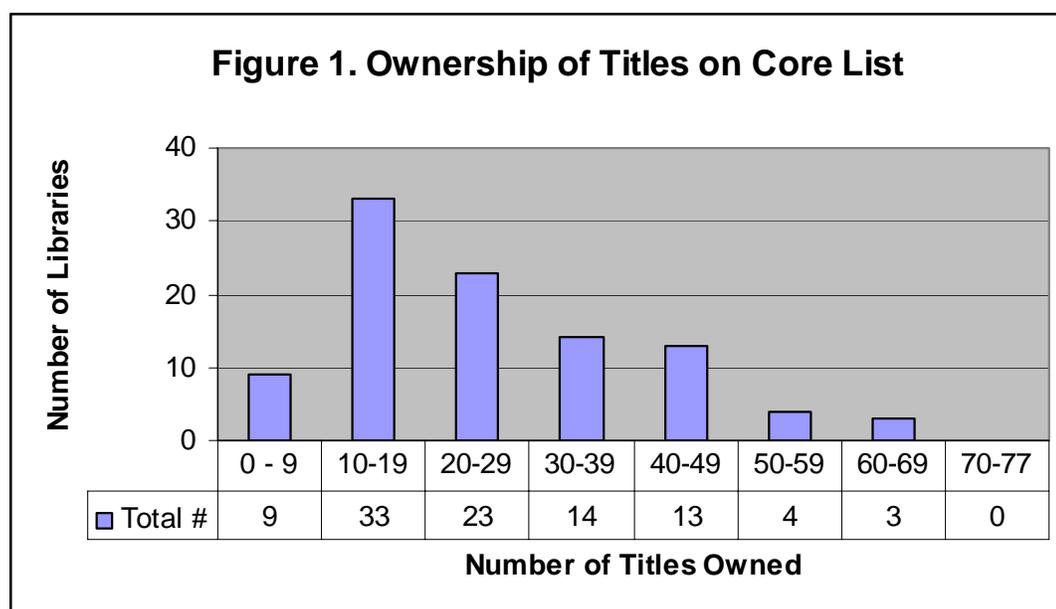
The collections of the libraries were surveyed to see how many of the titles on the core list they own. This data was primarily collected through the libraries' online public access catalogs, though WorldCat was also occasionally used to supplement them. The catalogs were consulted from March to June 2008. An attempt was made to ensure that a title was counted "owned" as long as any edition or printing of it was found to be present in a library's catalog. Though the focus of this study is libraries' general collections, titles in special collections were counted as owned if they were found in an institution's online catalog.

Certain peculiarities of the comic book publishing industry created some challenges in discovering which titles were owned. Many of the works that won awards have been repackaged in different forms several times, often with different names. For example, 1989's *Blood of Palomar* by Gilbert Hernandez is a collection of material originally published in various issues of the quarterly *Love & Rockets* comic book series. The material in *Blood of Palomar* was later collected both in 2003's *Palomar* and 2007's *Human Diastrophism*. In instances such as this, a title was counted as "owned" regardless of the format the work was in or the title it was under. Other titles
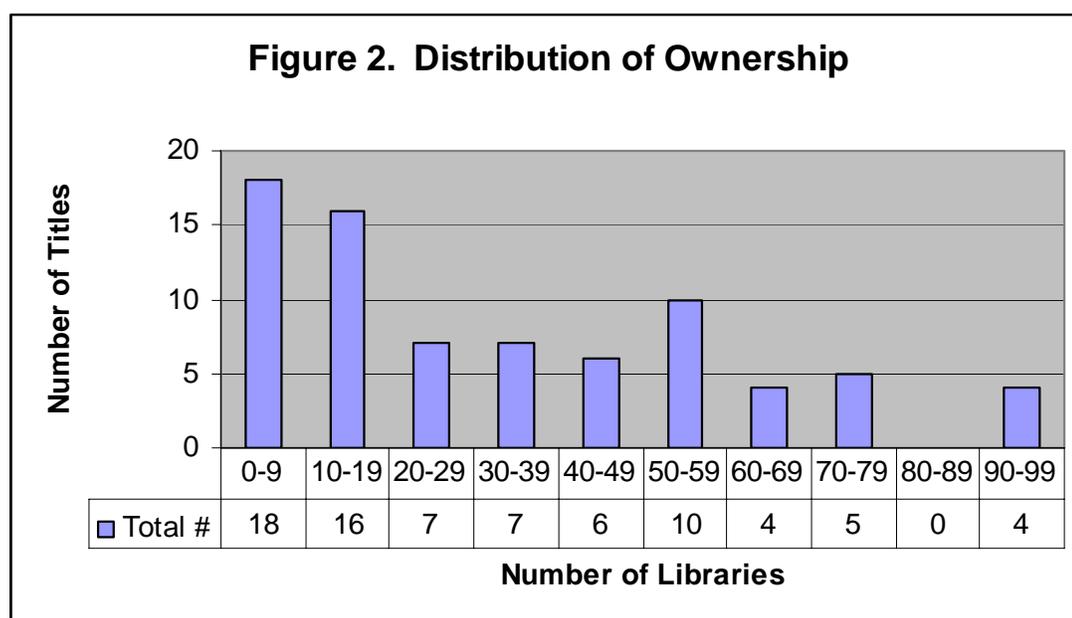
on the list, such as *The New American Splendor Anthology,* basically function as a "best

of" for a certain artist, and the work therein has often been anthologized several times.

In these instances, the presence of any comparable book in the catalog meant that the

title was counted as "owned."

Results

The aim of this study was to determine the quality of the holdings of graphic novels in the collections of members of the Association of Research Libraries. In general, the results indicated that these holdings were not particularly strong. The full results are available in Appendix B and Appendix C. The mean number of titles from the core list held by the libraries examined was 25.93, which is 34% of the total number of titles. The median was 23, or 30%. There was a wide range in the numbers of titles held, with the top institution (Michigan State University) owning 69 (90%) and the bottom institution (Howard University) owning none. Only five institutions owned more that 70% of the list, while four owned less than 10%. Figure 1 shows the general distribution of titles among the libraries. As can be seen, the libraries' holdings do not follow a normal distribution, but they instead skew heavily to the left.

Figure 1. Ownership of Titles on Core List

	0 - 9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-77
Total #	9	33	23	14	13	4	3	0

Number of Libraries

Number of Titles Owned

In terms of the ownership numbers for graphic novels, the mean was 33.34 (34%). The median was 25 (25%). There was wide range here as well, with the two titles tied at the top (*Maus* and *Maus* II) held in 98 libraries (or 99% of the total), and the bottom title (*Batman and Superman Adventures: World's Finest*) held in only 1 library (1% of the total.). However, it is worth nothing that there was a particularly steep drop off after the top four titles, all of which were held in more than 90% of libraries. After this, the two titles tied for number five fall to 76%. Figure 2 displays the general distribution of the titles at the libraries. Most of the titles are in the bottom half of the chart. In fact, over 44% of titles were found in nineteen or less libraries (approximately the bottom fifth of the data set).

Figure 2. Distribution of Ownership

	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99
Total #	18	16	7	7	6	10	4	5	0	4

Number of Titles / Number of Libraries

Institutional Characteristics

Certain characteristics of institutions with higher quality graphic collections become apparent upon examination of the data collected for this study. In general, it

seems that, as might be expected, the libraries with the highest number of graphic novels in their holdings are generally those with the largest collections according to ARL statistics.[12] Of the top 10 libraries in these results, six of them (Illinois, Harvard, Columbia, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Yale) are among the top ten libraries studied in terms of volumes held. The top 2 libraries, Michigan State and Ohio State, are only medium-sized in terms of holdings, but, as previously noted, they both have extremely large special collections related to comics. Presumably this has led them to invest heavily in graphic novels in their general collections in order to support these special collections (and some of the titles held in the special collections may have turned up in the catalog searches as well). In addition, the other four largest libraries by total volumes held (California-Berkeley, Texas, California-Los Angeles, and Cornell) all had graphic novel holdings that were well above the median in this study.

At the same time, collection size cannot entirely explain the quality of an institution's graphic novel holdings. The libraries with the five smallest total collections according to the ARL statistics (Colorado State, Louisville, SUNY-Albany, George Washington, and Houston) all, with the exception of SUNY-Albany, had graphic novel holdings well above the median, with the University of Houston notably so. It would seem that those institutions that came out on the bottom of this study did so for reasons not entirely related to collection size or resources available (e.g. an institutional focus on science and technology, or faculty indifference to the medium).

The researcher thought it might be useful to determine if there were any regional variations in the results. In order to accomplish this, the researcher divided the country

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[12] ARL statistics can be viewed at http://www.arl.org/stats/annualsurveys/arlstats/index.shtml. Statistics used here are for 2005-06, the last years for which they are available.

into five regions. Only states with libraries that were part of this study were included. The Northeast region includes states New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The Southeast region includes Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The Midwest region includes Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska. The Southwest includes Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. The Pacific Region includes California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii. The researcher then calculated the average number of titles held for each reason. The results of the calculations are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Average Percentage Owned by Region

	Northeast	Southeast	Midwest	Southwest	Pacific
Average %	32.9	28	40.48	28.71	34.33
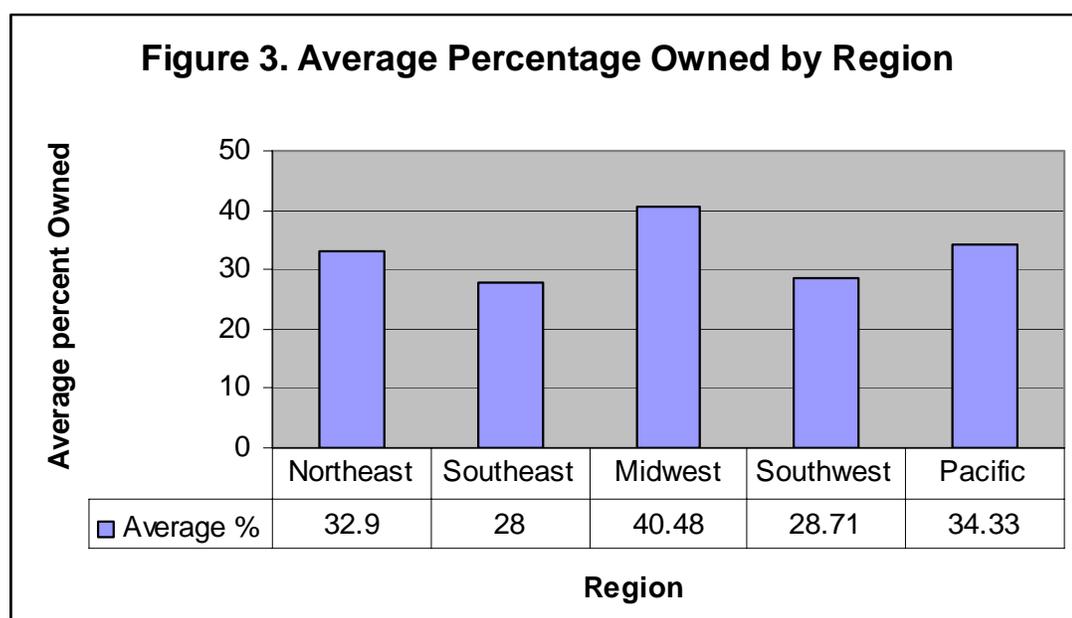
There does, in fact, appear to be some fairly notable differences among the five regions. The Pacific and Northeast regions are both very close to the mean for all libraries (34%), at approximately 34% and 33%, respectively. The Southeast and the Southwest are both approximately 5 to 6 percent below the mean for all libraries, while the Midwest is approximately 6.5% above it. Presumably, the Midwest's high average

is partially due to the two high-level comics research libraries at the top of the list. The poor showing of the Southeast and the Southwest is harder to explain. It can be speculated that the lack of any extremely large ARL members (except the University of Texas) has pushed their numbers slightly lower. In addition, the Pacific and the Northeast are the two wealthiest regions of the country, which may give the institutions there some advantage in collection building.

Graphic Novel Characteristics

Next, the author examined what characteristics might make a title more or less likely to be owned by an academic library. This examination focused on two major characteristics: type of publisher and genre. Graphic novel publishing is considerably different than most of the fields that libraries deal with, in that large percentage of graphic novels are published by specialty comic publishers. The two largest of these are Marvel and DC (often times referred to as "the big two), who have dominated the industry for decades. They have focused largely on publishing superhero stories. In addition, there are a host of smaller, independent publishers, often devoted to publishing more experimental or literary stories. The foremost among these include Fantagraphics, Dark Horse, and Drawn & Quarterly. In recent years, mainstream publishing houses have also begun to publish graphic novels in greater numbers, but they still produce only a small percentage of the total number of titles released each year. Figures for total market share are not available, but for May 2008, the largest comic distributor, Diamond, reported that Marvel had a 43.28% market share in terms of dollars, while

DC had 27.76%.[13] While these figures are only for sales in comic book stores, they help to give a general picture of how heavily dominated the market is by these two publishers.

The make-up of the core list constructed for this study does not match particularly well with that of the industry as a whole. As can be seen in Figure 4, almost half of the titles on the list were put out by independent comics publishers. This makes some sense, considering that the types of stories that these companies publish are more likely to be sophisticated enough to win major awards. The same is true for the high (relative to the small number of tiles they produce) number of titles put out by mainstream publishers.

Figure 4. Titles on List by Type of Publisher
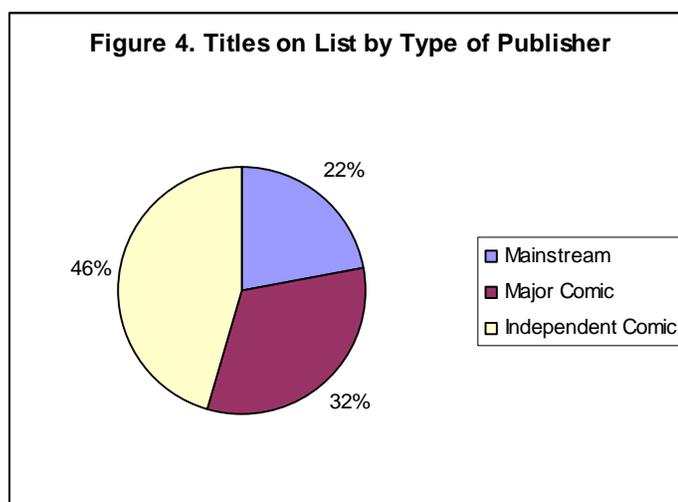
However, it is when examining how these three different types of publishers fared in the final results of this study that the real discrepancies between the market and academic library collecting policies show up. Figure 5 shows the average percentage of ownership for works on the list, sorted by these different types of publishers. As this graph makes immediately apparent, mainstream publishers have an average rate of

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[13] Figures from http://www.newsarama.com/comics/080616-diamond-salescharts.html.

ownership (62.65%) that is considerably higher than those of comics specialty

publishers. In fact, Pantheon, the mainstream publisher whose graphic novel line is

most visible, has an average ownership rate of 74.86%. The rates are both significantly

higher than the mean ownership rate for this study, 34%. Conversely, the two major

comic book publishers have an average rate of only 23.24%, while the average for

independent publishers is not much higher at 26.97%. Partially this is undoubtedly due

to the higher marketing budgets and visibility being produced by mainstream publishers

affords the relevant titles. In addition, the work put out by these publishers may be

more in sync with these libraries' collecting goals. However, while Marvel and DC

focus largely on publishing superhero stories, independent publishers, like mainstream

ones, also put out a substantial body of comics with more literary value. The fact that

these publishers are extremely small, that their work may not be available via the

regular suppliers libraries use for their acquisitions, and that their titles can sometimes

go out of print quickly may explain why their ownership average is so low.

Figure 5. Average Ownership by Type of Publisher

	Mainstream	Major Comic	Independent Comic
Average %	62.65	23.24	26.97
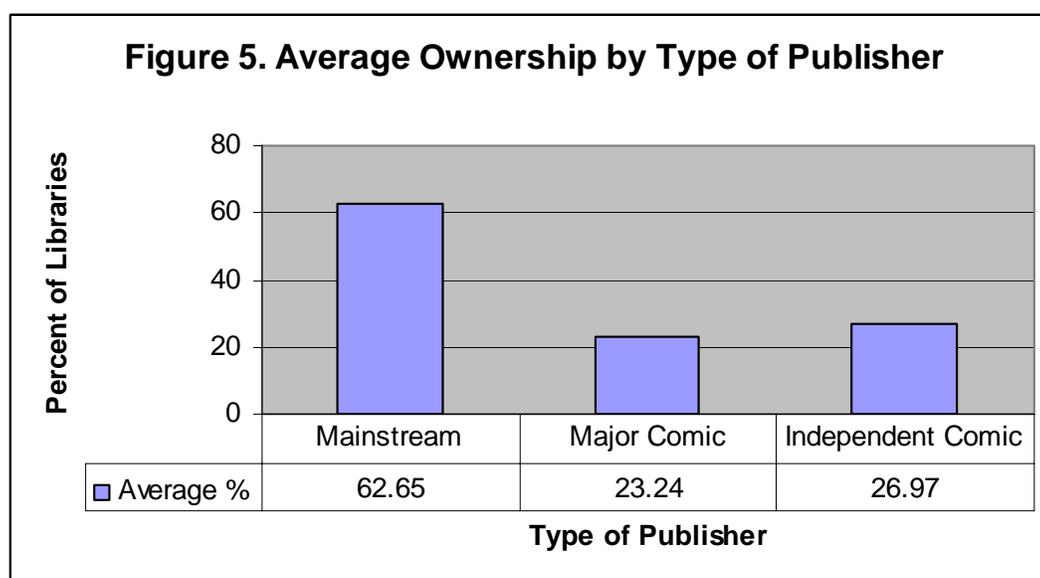
The research also wished to investigate whether or not genre had an effect on ownership rates. The titles on the list were divided into six different types of works: Superhero, Memoirs, History/War, Genre Fiction (e.g. crime, fantasy, etc.), General Fiction, and Other. It was sometimes difficult to discern which genre a given work fell into given the slippery nature of some stories. For instance, *Black Hole*, the story of mutant teens, might seem at first to have a strong relationship to the superhero genre, but, on closer inspection, that relationship is actually superficial. The story is actually, in many ways, much more connected to "literary" fiction, being as it is driven by the characters and by the artist's style. However, in the end the substantial fantastic elements in the story caused it be classified as "genre fiction." The researcher attempted, despite these difficulties, to find the most appropriate classification for each work. The distribution of these genres in the core list genres can be seen in Figure 6. While works of the superhero genre and of genre fiction make up a respectable 21% and 19%, respectively, much of the list consists of more "serious" genres, such as memoirs, history, and "literary" fiction.

Figure 6. Titles on List by Genre

Other 8%
Superhero 21%
General Fiction 31%
Memoir 13%
History 8%
Genre Fiction 19%
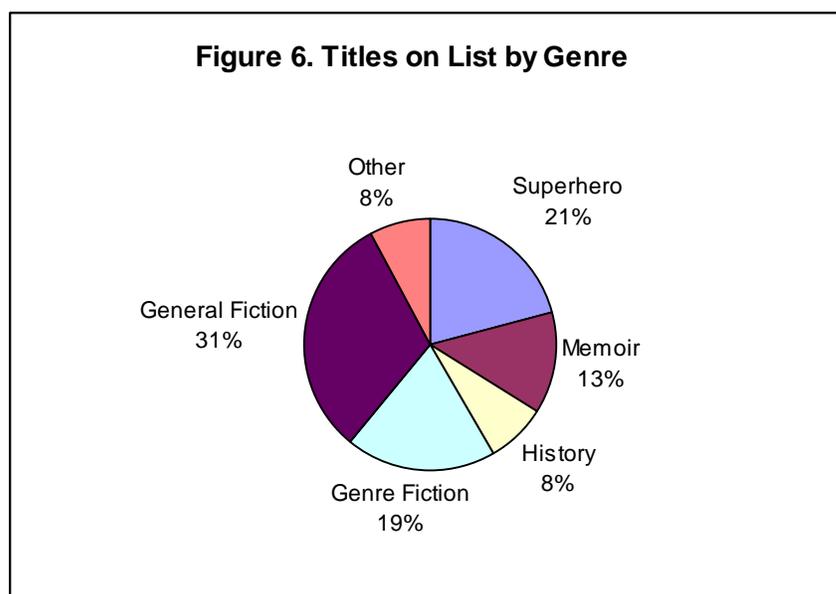
It was expected that the genres that ARL members might normally collect would have higher ownership percentages, and an examination of the data bore this out. As can be seen in Figure 7, both the Memoir and History categories had average ownership rates significantly higher than the mean for the study as a whole, at 59.70% and 40.67%, respectively. General Fiction and Other had ownership rates very close to the mean at 34.58 and 34.5%, respectively. Genre Fiction was several points below the mean at 28.8%, while Superhero was less than half the mean at 17.38%. It is particularly notable that the Superhero category is so low, since that is generally considered to be the dominant genre of the comics medium, at least in the U.S.

Figure 7. Average Ownership by Genre

	Superhero	Memoir	History	Genre	Fiction	Other
Average %	17.38	59.70	40.67	28.80	34.58	34.50
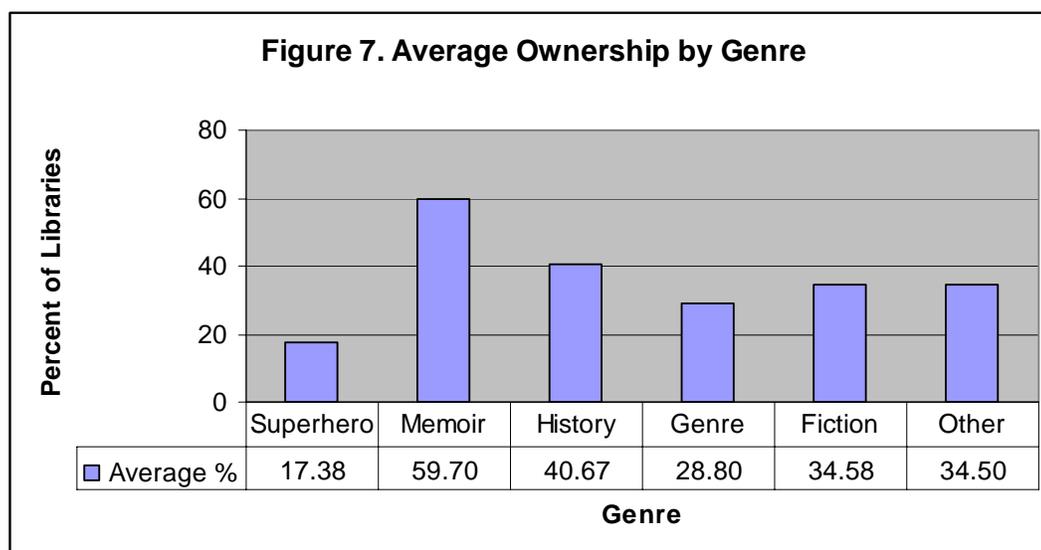
The general picture that can be gleaned from the above data is that academic libraries are collecting certain types of graphic novels more regularly than others. In particular, they are selecting works from mainstream publishers over those from comics specialty publishers, and they are selecting memoir and history titles over titles relating to other genres. While collection development decisions must always place greater

emphases on certain aspects of a collection over others, it is worth taking notice of these emphases to see what their underlying causes might be.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

In general, while the results of this study indicate that the ARL libraries do not yet have strong collections of even prize-winning graphic novels, this is perhaps not extraordinarily surprising considering the relatively new status of graphic novels as an acceptable popular form in academia. Still, it is worth noting the paucity of many libraries' holdings of graphic novels, especially since these titles should be among the most significant works available in the medium. If libraries want to be able to support the needs of their students, faculty, and staff, they must attempt to collect newly prominent forms such as graphic novels at an acceptable level.

Of particular note are this study's findings regarding the types of graphic novels collected by ARL members. Libraries have a particular deficit in terms of collecting both comics not put out by mainstream publishers and those focusing on storylines not relating to mainstream genres. Librarians should pay special attention to the low ownership rates for independent comics publishers, since these publishers are producing serious works in fields such as fiction, memoir, and history. While these failures may simply be a reflection of these libraries' selection policies, it may also be a failure to satisfactorily explore different collection development avenues.

It would be worth examining, in a future study, the reasons behind the relatively poor results of some of the libraries. A number of suppositions as to these reasons seem likely to have some validity. Presumably some of these libraries are not facing an especially high demand for graphic novels, especially those with a focus on science and

technology. Other librarians may still harbor some prejudices against the form, of they may feel that they do have adequate collection development tools to make satisfactory selection choices. A survey of academic librarians' perceptions and knowledge of the format would be invaluable while attempting to see to what extent these suppositions are true.

In addition, such a survey could also look into the reasons why librarians responsible for collection development make the graphic novel selection decision they do. Are they attempting to provide students with appealing leisure reading material? Are they supporting a curriculum where graphic novels are often included on reading lists? Are they supporting faculty members who are doing research related to the form? Perhaps they simply have a personal affinity for them? Answers to these questions could provide librarians with knowledge of where their weaknesses lie, and their strengths.

A further study could also look at other types of academic libraries, such as liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and comprehensive universities. It would be useful to be able to compare the quality of these types of collections across different types of institutions. While it was a supposition of this study that the size and depth of ARL members' collections would lead them to have higher quality graphic novel collections, perhaps these other types of institutions could have different qualities that lead them to collect graphic novels in substantial numbers. Librarians at smaller institutions could be more aware of the needs and desires of their students and faculty, and, if this is so, they might be able to adjust their collection development decisions accordingly.

It seems that the importance of the graphic novel format will only continue to grow rapidly for the foreseeable future, and so the need to evaluate and enhance these collections will only become more important. To those who might say that comics are not suitable materials for an academic library collection, it can be said that "comics are not a mindless but a mindful form of escapism that uses a unique kind of language – 'graphic language' – to invite us into different worlds in order to help us better understand our own" (Versaci, 2007, p. 6). Academic libraries should embrace this new language and build the collections that will be needed to allow both faculty and students to master it.

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Appendix A

Core List of Graphic Novels			
Title	**Author(s)**	**Year**	**Award**
A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories	Will Eisner	1978	
Batman: the Dark Knight Returns	Frank Miller & Klaus Janson	1987	
Watchmen	Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons	1988	Hugo, Eisner, Harvey
Batman: the Killing Joke	Alan Moore & Brian Bolland	1989	Eisner, Harvey
Blood of Palomar	Gilbert Hernandez	1989	
The Death of Speedy	Jaime Hernandez	1989	
Ed The Happy Clown	Chester Brown	1990	Harvey
Sandman: Dream County	Neil Gaiman et al.	1991	World Fantasy Award
Elektra Lives Again	Frank Miller & Lynn Varley	1991	Eisner
Sandman: the Doll's House	Neil Gaiman et al.	1991	Eisner
Why I Hate Saturn	Kyle Baker	1991	Harvey
Warts and All	Drew Friedman	1991	Harvey
The New American Splendor Anthology	Harvey Pekar et al.	1991	Booklist
Maus	Art Spiegelman	1992	Pulitzer
Maus II	Art Spiegelman	1992	Eisner, Harvey
To the Heart of the Storm	Will Eisner	1992	Eisner, Harvey
The Playboy	Chester Brown	1992	
Signal to Noise	Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean	1993	Eisner
Sin City (The Hard Goodbye)	Frank Miller	1993	Eisner
Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde	P. Craig Russell	1993	Harvey
Hey Look!	Harvey Kurtzman	1993	Harvey
A Small Killing	Alan Moore & Oscar Zarate	1994	Eisner
Cerebus: Flight	Davis Sim and Gerhard	1994	Eisner
Understanding Comics	Scott McLoud	1994	Harvey
Bone: Out From Boneville	Jeff Smith	1994	Harvey

Paul Auster's City of Glass	Paul Karasik & David Mazzucchelli	1994	
Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde, Vol. 2	P. Craig Russell	1995	Eisner
Hellboy: Seeds of Destruction	Mike Mignola	1995	Eisner
Our Cancer Year	Harvey Pekar et al	1995	Harvey
Marvels	Kurt Busiek & Alex Ross	1995	Harvey
Stuck Rubber Baby	Howard Cruise	1996	Eisner, Harvey
The Tale of One Bad Rat	Bryan Talbot	1996	Eisner
Hellboy: the Wolves of St. August	Mike Mignola	1996	Harvey
Fax From Sarajevo	Joe Kubert	1997	Eisner, Harvey
Stray Bullets: Innocence of Nihilism	Dave Lapham	1997	Eisner
Astro City: Life in the Big City	Kurt Busiek & Brent Anderson	1997	Harvey
The R. Crumb Coffee Table Art Book	R. Crumb	1997	
Ghost World	Daniel Clowes	1998	
Batman and Superman Adventures: World's Finest	Paul Dini, Joe Staton & Terry Beatty	1998	Eisner
Sin City: That Yellow Bastard	Frank Miller	1998	Eisner
Sin City: Family Values	Frank Miller	1998	Harvey
Batman: Black and White	Various	1998	Harvey
Cages	Dave McKean	1999	Harvey
Superman: Peace on Earth	Paul Dini & Alex Ross	1999	Eisner
Batman: The Long Halloween	Jeph Loeb & Time Sale	1999	Eisner
You Are Here	Kyle Baker	1999	Harvey
Ethel & Ernest	Raymond Briggs	1999	
The Fatal Bullet	Rick Geary	1999	
The Jew of New York	Ben Katchor	1999	
From Hell	Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell	2000	Eisner, Harvey
Batman: War On Crime	Paul Dini & Alex Ross	2000	Harvey
Alec: The King Canute Crowd	Eddie Campbell	2000	
Safe Area Gorazde	Joe Sacco	2001	Eisner
Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth	Chris Ware	2001	Eisner, Harvey
Last Day in Vietnam	Will Eisner	2001	Harvey
Palestine	Joe Sacco	2001	
The Golem's Mighty Swing	James Sturm	2002	Harvey
The Name of the Game	Will Eisner	2002	Eisner
Batman: Dark Victory	Jeph Loeb & Time Sale	2002	Eisner
Lone Wolf and Cub	Kazuo Koike & Goseki Kojima	2002	Harvey
One! Hundred! Demons!	Lynda Barry	2003	Eisner

Batman Black & White vol 2.	Various	2003	Eisner
The Cartoon History of the Universe: From the Rise of Arabia to the Renaissance	Larry Gonick	2003	Harvey
Twentieth Century Eightball	Daniel Clowes	2003	Harvey
Persepolis	Marjane Satrapi	2003	
Blankets	Craig Thompson	2004	Eisner, Harvey
Batman Adventures: Dangerous Dames and Demons	Paul Dini et al	2004	Eisner
Louis Riel	Chester Brown	2004	Harvey
The Originals	Dave Gibbons	2005	Eisner
Blacksad 2	Juanjo Guarnido & Juan Diaz Canales	2005	Harvey
American Born Chinese	Gene Luen Yang	2006	Michael L. Printz, Eisner
Tricked	Alex Robinson	2006	Harvey
Black Hole	Charles Burns	2006	Eisner, Harvey
Top 10: The Forty-Niners	Alan Moore and Gene Ha	2006	Eisner
DC: The New Frontier	Darwyn Cooke	2007	Eisner, Harvey
Pride of Baghdad	Brian K. Vaughn & Niko Henrichon	2007	Harvey
Fun Home	Alison Bechdel	2007	Eisner

Appendix B

American ARL Academic Libraries Ranked by Holdings of Core List of Graphic Novels			
Rank	**School**	**Number of Titles**	**Percentage of Titles**
1	Michigan State University	69	90%
2	Ohio State University	68	88%
3	University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign	64	83%
4	Harvard University	59	77%
5	Columbia University	54	70%
6	University of Wisconsin - Madison	51	66%
7	Yale University	50	65%
8	University of Michigan	49	64%
9	Pennsylvania State University	47	61%
	Texas A&M University	47	61%
11	University of Iowa	45	58%
	University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill	45	58%
13	University of Washington	44	57%
14	University of Virginia	43	56%
15	Indiana University - Bloomington	42	55%
	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	42	55%
	University of Missouri - Columbia	42	55%
	University of Pittsburgh	42	55%
19	University of California - Berkeley	41	53%
20	University of Texas	40	52%
21	University of Cincinnati	39	51%
22	University of California - Los Angeles	38	49%
	University of Nebraska - Lincoln	38	49%
24	Dartmouth University	36	47%
	New York University	36	47%
26	University of California – Davis	35	45%
27	University of Houston	34	44%
	University of Pennsylvania	34	44%
29	University of Utah	33	43%
30	University of Delaware	32	42%
	Washington State University	32	42%
32	Duke University	31	40%
	University of Florida	31	40%
34	University of Minnesota	30	39%

35	Cornell University	29	38%
36	University of California – Riverside	28	36%
	University of Louisville	28	36%
38	University of Chicago	27	35%
	Colorado State University	27	35%
	Florida State University	27	35%
	George Washington University	27	35%
42	University of California - San Diego	26	34%
	University of Georgia	26	34%
	North Carolina State University	26	34%
	Northwestern University	26	34%
46	University of Massachusetts - Amherst	25	32%
	Rutgers University	25	32%
48	Arizona State University	24	31%
	University of South Carolina	24	31%
50	University of Ohio	23	30%
51	Iowa State University	22	29%
	Notre Dame University	22	29%
	Southern Illinois University - Carbondale	22	29%
	Temple University	22	29%
55	University of California- Irvine	21	27%
56	University of Alabama	20	26%
	Emory University	20	26%
58	University of California - Santa Barbara	19	25%
59	Georgetown University	18	23%
	Louisiana State University	18	23%
	Texas Tech University	18	23%
62	Brigham Young University	17	22%
	University of Kentucky	17	22%
	Princeton University	17	22%
	University of Southern California	17	22%
	Washington University in St. Louis	17	22%
67	Boston College	16	21%
	University at Buffalo – SUNY	16	21%
	University of Miami	16	21%
	Virginia Tech	16	21%
71	University of Colorado - Boulder	15	19%
	Stony Brook University – SUNY	15	19%
	University of Tennessee - Knoxville	15	19%
74	University of Connecticut	14	18%
	University of Oregon	14	18%
	Rochester University	14	18%
	Vanderbilt University	14	18%
78	University of Arizona	13	17%
	Brown University	13	17%
	Johns Hopkins University	13	17%
	University of Kansas	13	17%
	Rice University	13	17%

83	Auburn University	12	16%
	University of Hawaii – Manoa	12	16%
	Syracuse University	12	16%
	Wayne State University	12	16%
87	Kent State University	11	14%
	University of New Mexico	11	14%
	Oklahoma State University	11	14%
90	Case Western Reserve University	10	13%
91	University at Albany – SUNY	9	12%
	University of Illinois – Chicago	9	12%
	University of Maryland	9	12%
94	University of Oklahoma	8	10%
95	Boston University	7	9%
	Purdue University	7	9%
97	Tulane University	6	8%
98	Georgia Tech	3	4%
99	Howard University	0	0%

Appendix C

Rank	Title	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Libraries
**Core List of Graphic Novels Ranked by Holdings in American ARL Academic Libraries**			
1	*Maus*	98	99%
	Maus II	98	99%
3	*Persepolis*	94	95%
4	*Understanding Comics*	93	94%
5	*Watchmen*	75	76%
	Palestine	75	76%
7	*American Born Chinese*	73	74%
	Fun Home	73	74%
9	*Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*	72	73%
10	*The R. Crumb Coffee Table Art Book*	69	70%
11	*Blankets*	65	66%
12	*American Splendor*	64	65%
13	*Safe Area Gorazde*	62	63%
14	*A Contract With God*	58	59%
	Ghost World	58	59%
16	*Batman: the Dark Knight Returns*	57	58%
	The Jew of New York	57	58%
18	*The Death of Speedy*	56	57%
	Sandman: the Doll's House	56	57%
20	*Blood of Palomar*	55	56%
21	*One! Hundred! Demons!*	54	55%
22	*Sandman: Dream County*	52	53%
23	*Ethel & Ernest*	50	51%
24	*Black Hole*	49	49%
25	*Stuck Rubber Baby*	48	48%
26	*Bone: Out From Boneville*	43	43%
	Louis Riel	43	43%
28	*From Hell*	42	42%
29	*Sin City*	41	41%
30	*Our Cancer Year*	36	36%
	Pride of Baghdad	36	36%
32	*City of Glass*	35	35%
33	*The Golem's Mighty Swing*	32	32%

	The Cartoon History of the Universe: From the Rise of Arabia to the Renaissance	32	32%
35	*The Tale of One Bad Rat*	31	31%
36	*Sin City: That Yellow Bastard*	30	30%
37	*Sin City: Family Values*	26	26%
	Twentieth Century Eightball	26	26%
39	*Marvels*	25	25%
40	*Last Day in Vietnam*	24	24%
41	*To the Heart of the Storm*	22	22%
42	*Astro City: Life in the Big City*	21	21%
	Lone Wolf and Cub	21	21%
44	*Fax From Sarajevo*	19	19%
	DC: The New Frontier	19	19%
46	*Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*	17	17%
	Hellboy: Seeds of Destruction	17	17%
	Cages	17	17%
	Tricked	17	17%
50	*Batman: the Killing Joke*	16	16%
	Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde, Vol. 2	16	16%
52	*The Name of the Game*	15	15%
	Top 10: The Forty-Niners	15	15%
54	*Why I Hate Saturn*	14	14%
55	*The Originals*	13	13%
56	*The Playboy*	12	12%
57	*Stray Bullets: Innocence of Nihilism*	11	11%
	Batman: The Long Halloween	11	11%
	The Fatal Bullet	11	11%
60	*Hellboy: the Wolves of St. August*	9	9%
	Batman: Dark Victory	9	9%
62	*Signal to Noise*	8	8%
	Cerebus: Flight	8	8%
64	*A Small Killing*	7	7%
	Superman: Peace on Earth	7	7%
66	*Ed The Happy Clown*	6	6%
	Elektra Lives Again	6	6%
	Warts and All	6	6%
	You Are Here	6	6%
	Blacksad 2: Arctic Nation	6	6%
71	*Batman: Black and White*	5	5%
72	*Hey Look!*	4	4%
	Batman: War On Crime	4	4%
	Batman Black & White Vol. 2	4	4%
75	*Alec: The King Canute Crowd*	2	2%
	Batman Adventures: Dangerous Dames and Demons	2	2%
77	*Batman and Superman Adventures: World's Finest*	1	1%