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## OverDrive on an Academic Campus

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**OverDrive on an Academic Campus**

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## **OverDrive on an Academic Campus**

### **Abstract**

OverDrive is an online platform that provides access to digital resources, such as audiobooks, magazines, or ebooks. It launched its services in 2000, providing "the largest digital content catalog in the world to more than 88,000 libraries and schools in 109 countries, and the highest-rated apps built to create reading happiness" (OverDrive, n.d.). Overdrive offers four distinctive digital catalogs, targeting Public Libraries, K-12 schools, Professional Organizations, and Academic Libraries, featuring more than "3 million titles from over 30,000 publishers" (OverDrive, n.d.). The digital catalog targeting academic libraries features "leisure reading, academic content, and curriculum support titles" (OverDrive, n.d.). Although Overdrive's catalogs feature millions and millions of books, users are not given access to the entire catalog. Instead, library staff shop around within the catalog Marketplace designated for their institution type, only purchasing titles that meet their specific curriculum and content needs. Purchased titles are then available for checkout in the library/institution's custom digital Overdrive collection, featuring titles purchased directly from OverDrive and any titles transferred from another vendor. Whether through OverDrive's online website, or OverDrive's app Libby, users can access ebooks and audiobooks purchased by their library. The goal of this article is to describe the successful implementation of the OverDrive system, and its impact, at an academic library.

*Keywords:* library services, academic libraries, audiobooks, ebooks, OverDrive

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### **Implementation of OverDrive in an Academic Setting**

OverDrive can be a powerful tool for academic campuses. We at the Levi Watkins Learning Center (LWLC) at Alabama State University (ASU) use OverDrive to provide ASU students, faculty, and staff with easy, user-friendly access to ebooks and audiobooks related to their college/department. The library purchased OverDrive in 2017, however, it was not until July 2019 that books were added to the site. The site officially went live in September 2019 and we have been constantly using it ever since. The pandemic was the motivating force behind Overdrive's consistent usage since we needed a way to offer the students, faculty, and staff instantly downloadable access to certain books.

Twenty-nine academic departments are served each year using the OverDrive collection. Each academic department at ASU has a dedicated librarian who operates as the subject specialist or liaison for the college and can reach out to faculty and staff of the department for input on areas of interest. The librarian carefully curates the collection based on the special curriculum needs of the department's faculty and students.

The library's current subscription is a capped plan. At the beginning of each school year, dedicated librarians, serving as subject specialists or liaisons are provided with the budget to select two books from OverDrive's Marketplace. Afterward, they are asked to select 2-3 titles each month that complement the LWLC's monthly theme, while remaining in line with their department's collection needs. Themes are carefully selected by the Acquisitions, Procurement & Budget Manager, and the Access Services Librarian, with representation in mind; the LWLC seeks to increase representation of groups that are often marginalized or under-represented.

### **Marketing of OverDrive**

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The idea of marketing in libraries was once regarded with dismay and distaste since it seemed to imply an inappropriate commercial relationship. However, over the past 30 years, a shift began to take place; library marketing has come to be seen as something essential and appropriate, providing mutual benefit to both libraries and their user communities (“Managing and Marketing Resources,” 2016, 41). Marketing OverDrive to our library users is made possible through OverDrive's Resource Center, in-house collaboration, and participation from external actors such as academic departments on campus.

OverDrive provides libraries with free access to marketing tools through their online Resource Center, which includes pre-made digital and print-ready banners and display toppers that market the OverDrive or Libby Brand. In the future, we hope that OverDrive will provide more customization of marketing materials, for example, more theme-based backgrounds and banners that can be displayed at the top of the webpage and app.

Interactive digital and in-person displays are created each month to market that month's newly purchased and pre-existing OverDrive titles related to the theme. The thematic collection of books, along with a description of the theme, are strategically featured at the top of the library's OverDrive website and the Libby app home page for maximum visibility. Also, a physical display is placed in one of the library's high-traffic areas, featuring traditional print books and printouts of each ebook and audiobook cover for the month's OverDrive collection. Each book cover printout displayed on the book stand features a QR code, routing the patron directly to the digital book on the Overdrive website.

### **Impact of OverDrive**

Overdrive's ebooks and audiobooks cover a wide spectrum of colleges and departments

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at ASU, serving as a resource for students and faculty alike. Undecided majors can explore more about their options, declared majors, and faculty members searching for new e-reading materials in their field of study. As months go by and themes change, the main goal of the OverDrive collections is to build upon ebook and audiobook materials that the library offers, using themes as a collection development strategy.

All titles purchased from OverDrive, however, are not available indefinitely. The length of time and number of digital copies available for checkout depends on the stipulations outlined in the plan associated with each title. Overdrive offers several options "for purchasing and renting digital titles, from individual copies that never expire to yearly simultaneous-access plans to pay-per-use plans" (OverDrive, n.d.). Within our library, we have made a conscious decision only to buy titles that can be owned entirely once purchased. This decision does take several books out of the selection process, but the goal is to grow the collection. Textbooks are not purchased, and we currently do not have a subscription for any of the magazines offered; however, that could change if the demand meets the cost. While some books can be pricey, OverDrive offers sales throughout the year that could help offset the cost; the platform also offers open-access books from some projects, such as Project Gutenberg. While some books can be purchased with simultaneous users, mostly study guides and textbooks, most of the books purchased are single users only. However, those books can be purchased multiple times allowing for multiple checkouts at once; this is only done for two reasons: high demand and selectors' request.

### **Outreach to University Minority Communities**

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With today's climate of colleges and universities, community outreach is more important than ever. Consequently, many academic libraries have created new positions or formed committees primarily focused on community outreach. For example, Mississippi State University's library has both a full-time Outreach Coordinator that "works to expand the projects of faculty outreach teams," and an Outreach Coordinating Committee that "oversees outreach" (Carter & Seaman, 2011).

At the LWLC, community outreach is a responsibility that all librarians are expected to incorporate into their work. Consequently, OverDrive's collection development policy is primarily informed by LWLC's monthly themes, which are often centered around minority or marginalized communities. Because librarians/subject specialists are asked to select 2-3 department-appropriate titles each month that speak to the LWLC's monthly theme, they are provided with monthly opportunities to reach out to minority and marginalized communities through the development of their respective collections.

Themes range from Asian American and Pacific Heritage Month to LGBTQ History Month, which provide many opportunities for librarians serving as subject specialists and liaisons to build cultural awareness and inclusion into the collection they manage. For example, the Health Sciences librarian may look to purchase a health-related ebook written by an Asian American author during Asian American and Pacific Islander Month.

### **Popular Fiction Collection**

Fiction sections in academic libraries were not always popular. Among the many reasons that contribute to this negative attitude toward fiction is the lack of physical space in the library. Attitudes toward recreational reading in academic libraries began to change around the twentieth

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century with the growth of recreational activities geared toward outreach; this, however, did not change the physical problem that comes with adding a fiction collection (Brookbank et al., 2018, 58). OverDrive allows a library to grow its fiction collection without having to worry about space. Therefore, the buying model and sales offered for ebooks, audiobooks, and magazines by OverDrive make it a perfect alternative for growing a fiction collection for your university library.

### **Affordability**

Overdrive offers four distinctive digital catalogs, targeting public libraries, K-12 schools, professional organizations, and academic libraries, featuring more than "3 million titles from over 30,000 publishers" (OverDrive, n.d.). The digital catalog targeting academic libraries features "leisure reading, academic content, and curriculum support titles" (OverDrive, n.d.). Although Overdrive's catalogs feature millions and millions of books, users are not given access to the entire catalog. Library staff shop around within the catalog Marketplace designated for their institution type, only purchasing titles that meet their specific curriculum and content needs. Purchased titles are then available for checkout in the library/institution's custom digital Overdrive collection, featuring titles purchased directly from OverDrive and any titles transferred from another vendor.

### **Conclusion**

Overdrive is an excellent service for academic libraries. Its various buying models allow libraries to have more control over their ebook/audiobook budget. Additionally, OverDrive's large selection of culturally inclusive titles provides a fantastic opportunity for incorporating



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diversity, equity, and inclusion in the library space through its collections. Furthermore, with librarians and subject specialists at the helm of LWLC's OverDrive ebook and audiobook purchases, twenty-nine academic departments at ASU are represented in Overdrive's collection, thereby serving as a great resource for students and faculty. Additionally, OverDrive's large selection of popular fiction allows the LWLC to continue to grow its fiction collection without impinging on physical space. While lacking customization features, with the company's growth being the largest digital content supplier worldwide, hopefully, libraries can expect more customizable features in the future. Depending on how much time, resources, and energy libraries allocate to OverDrive, the benefits for users could outweigh the costs.

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