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Graphic Novels in Academic Libraries: From *Maus* to Manga and Beyond

Abstract

This article addresses graphic novels and their growing popularity in academic libraries. Graphic novels are increasingly used as instructional resources, and they play an important role in supporting the recreational reading mission of academic libraries. The article will also tackle issues related to the cataloging and classification of graphic novels and discuss ways to use them for marketing and promotion of library services.

A Brief Introduction to Graphic Novels

Graphic novels grew out of the comic book movement in the 1960s and came into existence at the hands of writers who were looking to use the comic book format to address more mainstream or adult topics. There is some debate about who coined the phrase, but one of the first graphic novels, if not the first, was Will Eisner's *Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, published in 1978.¹ Eisner, who began working in comics in 1936, has stated that he devised the term as a marketing technique to increase the chances that his illustrated series of interlinked short stories about working-class Jewish families during the Great Depression might be published.²

The format has gained popularity over the past 25 years in a variety of geographic and topical areas, including the expected superhero stories and adaptations, but also works of satire, non-fiction, memoirs, historical fiction, and a Japanese form called manga. Some graphic novels are the product of a single writer, or a writer and illustrator
team, but there are examples of collaborative works, such as the graphic novel series created by a collective of women called CLAMP. As Steven Weiner notes, 1986 was a “turning point,” although not the revolutionary year many had hoped it would be.\(^3\) In that year, DC Comics launched two series for adult readers, \textit{Watchmen} and \textit{Batman: The Dark Knight Returns}. Also, Art Spiegelman's \textit{Maus}, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Holocaust memoir that casts the Germans and Jews as cats and mice, was published.\(^4\)

\textit{Maus} is just one example of a historical graphic novel. Graphic novels are proving to be an effective vehicle for historical writings, both fictional and not. Consider \textit{Still I Rise} by Roland Owen Laird and Elihu Bey, which tells the history of African Americans in the United States, beginning in 1619. The book includes extensive historical information and chronicles the accomplishments and struggles of African Americans. Novelist Charles Johnson contributed the introduction, which includes information about African Americans’ little known contributions to the field of cartoons and comics. Also of note are Ho Che Anderson’s three volumes about the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. Other examples of historical graphic novels are Keiji Nakazawa’s \textit{Barefoot Gen} series, which tells of Japan before and after Hiroshima, and Joe Kubert’s \textit{Fax from Sarajevo}, which depicts the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. Many graphic novels go beyond representing historical facts and offer portraits of a culture. One example is Marjane Satrapi’s \textit{Persepolis} series, which is an autobiographical account of her life, including her childhood in Iran during the Islamic revolution.\(^5\)

Increasing popularity may be linked to several graphic novels which have been adapted into feature films, including Daniel Clowes' \textit{Ghost World}, Max Allan Collins and
Richard Piers Raynner's *Road to Perdition*, Jamie Delano and Garth Ennis’s *Hellblazer* (made into “Constantine”), Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* and Frank Miller’s *Sin City.* These exemplify several genres of graphic novels, including memoir, crime fiction, coming of age stories, and action stories. The fact that an increasing number of graphic novels are being used as the basis for films is not surprising. Graphic novels, with their texts created within a visual context, are a natural fit for film adaptation, providing a ready-made storyboard.

**Graphic Novels as Literature**

Given the wide array of styles and topics described above, one may ask whether graphic novels are really novels or how they can be considered together as one genre. Although they vary widely, and some of them may be better characterized as “graphic short stories” or “graphic memoirs,” they can be legitimately considered as works of literary fiction. The term “graphic novel” may be better viewed as a label for a particular format rather than representative of a single specific genre.

The fact that they include visual images may make them stronger contenders for use in the classroom. Rocco Versaci notes that many of his students see literature defined too narrowly and expect painful, boring experiences. He urges literature instructors to not “strive to get students to accept without question our own judgments of what constitutes literary merit” but to “encourage students to see themselves as having a voice” in that matter. Versaci discusses using graphic novels in his courses at Palomar College. Versaci details his use of John Callahan’s “I Think I Was an Alcoholic,” an adult-themed short comic that tells the story of a man whose drunken driving leaves him a quadriplegic. Students were surprised by the themes in the comic, and discussed it as
they had discussed other literary works, exploring the tone of the narrator, irony and character development; the three page story fueled discussions for two class periods.¹¹

Versaci also notes the use of other graphic novels, including Judd Winick’s *Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss and What I Learned*, Katherine Arnoldi’s *The Amazing “True” Story of a Teenage Single Mom*, Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman* series, and Debbie Drechsler’s *Daddy’s Girl*, which deals with sexual abuse.¹²

At Washington State University (WSU), at least one faculty member in the English department uses graphic novels as texts. One course, Science Fiction Film (English 339), looks at science fiction writing and film adaptations. In the spring of 2005, the course also used graphic novels that influenced the films or represent the novels. For example, the class looked at Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and the movie “Blade Runner” and also has considered Jean Giraud’s “The Airtight Garage,” one of the stories in *Long Tomorrow and Other Science Fiction Stories*, which influenced director Ridley Scott’s vision in “Blade Runner.” The class also explored the visual and thematic connections between Fritz Lang’s film “Metropolis” and a Japanese anime film version of “Metropolis,” which was based on a manga by Osamu Tezuka.¹³

In addition to being taken seriously by educators and librarians, scholars have also begun to write and present more frequently about graphic novels. Two key conferences were held in 1998 and in 2000: the “1st International Conference on the Graphic Novel” was held in November 1998 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and two years later, another international conference was held in Belgium. Proceedings for this second conference are available in print.¹⁴ In 2002, the University of Florida hosted a
conference on comics and graphic novels called “The Will Eisner Symposium,” which featured Eisner as a keynote speaker, invited other artists and writers, and offered twenty presentations by various scholars.15

Academic literature journals have also begun publishing these works of literary criticism. Until recently very few scholarly analyses had been published, with most appearing in science fiction journals and the International Journal of Comic Art, but it is important to note that more traditional English literature journals are beginning to cover graphic novels. Two recent articles both have looked at connections between Neil Gaiman and Shakespeare. Annalisa Castaldo’s essay in College Literature explores Gaiman’s use of Shakespearean motifs in several of his Sandman works.16 Kurt Lancaster explored the links between A Midsummer’s Night Dream and the Sandman series in an essay appearing in the Journal of American and Comparative Cultures in 2000.17

Another notable contribution to the scholarly study of graphic novels is Joseph Witek’s Comic Books as History, published in 1989.18 Witek noted in his introduction that a critical analysis was “especially necessary now, when a growing number of contemporary American comic books are being written as literature aimed at a general readership of adults and concerned, not with the traditionally escapist themes of comics” but with culture clashes, dysfunctional families, and working class life.19 In his work, Witek discusses Pekar’s American Splendor and Spiegelman’s Maus, both mentioned above, as well as the work of Jack Jackson, who writes about historical events involving Native Americans, exploring the works as literary texts and historical narratives.
The Rise of Graphic Novels in Libraries

Most young adult librarians and teachers would agree that anything that gets students reading is a good thing. Gretchen E. Schwarz argues that graphic novels can promote literacy.20 According to Michael R. Lavin, reading graphic novels “may require more complex cognitive skills than reading text alone.”21 Schwarz also points out that the graphic novel format is being used for other subject areas beyond fiction and history. Examples include Gonick and Smith’s *The Cartoon Guide to Statistics*, Gordon and Willmarth’s *McLuhan for Beginners*, and Sardar and Van Loon’s *Introducing Cultural Studies*.22 All of these are introductory guides for serious topics, are geared toward adult readers, but are presented in illustrated panels.

At WSU, graphic novels have become a focus of collection development in the past year, and it appears that other academic libraries are also paying attention to the genre. Librarians active in the Association for College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) Literatures in English Section (LES) recently addressed the collection of graphic novels at a conference meeting. An informal poll of the LES listserv members showed that a number of universities, including Duke, MIT, Michigan State, Chicago, UC Berkeley and Rutgers are collecting graphic novels fairly extensively, with recreational reading in mind.23 WSU holds an extensive collection of underground comics or comix that was begun in the 1970s, and interest in the graphical genres is keen among many faculty and students. Collecting in the burgeoning field of graphic novels is an appropriate choice for our collections.

Academic library interest in these items is also supported by the growing interest in graphic novels and the comic form in both popular culture and the media. Teachers and
academics have not been the only ones to reassess the value and use of graphic novels. Recent coverage of graphic novels in widely read publications such as the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor shows that graphic novels are becoming part of the cultural landscape. A recent article in the New York Times Magazine suggests that graphic novels and comic books may be transitioning into a new literary form and provides an extensive critical analysis of graphic novels as literary, visual, historical, political and cultural artifacts.24 Another article in the New York Times suggests that visual media is becoming a more effective way to push a message, even asking if film studies now serves as the “new MBA.” 25 Graphic novels share that visual image-plus-text sensibility, including the capacity to emotionally connect with readers. Elizabeth Daley, dean of the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television, suggests that "the greatest digital divide is between those who can read and write with media, and those who can't…Our core knowledge needs to belong to everybody."26 Print format graphic novels and the increasingly popular web-based comics and graphic storytelling provide a natural meeting of the image and the word in sequential art; a sophisticated partner to film and other electronic media.

Academic Libraries, Pleasure Reading, and Graphic Novels

Beyond the value of graphic novels as scholarly and cultural resources, an academic library that collects graphic novels is also continuing in a tradition of providing resources for students and others in the academic community who are looking for reading material not only to enhance their scholarship or teaching, but also to enjoy for personal pleasure and recreation. Decades ago Henry M. Wriston, a former president of Brown University, noted the value of pleasure reading for college students:
In a large and more genuine sense, however, recreational reading is often the most truly educational, even the most really intellectual, element in experiences with and through books. It may well furnish an intellectual project within which the student establishes his own goals and determines his own significant values. It is the place where his tastes, aptitudes, and skills find freest play. Individual differences, recognition of which is the keynote of modern education, here come to richest fulfillment. It is precisely through independent reading that the task of knotting together the raveled sleeve of information may best be achieved. Here the student’s own philosophical structure takes form as a result of reading and reflection.27

In the past academic libraries often had browsing collections to provide easily accessible pleasure reading opportunities to their academic community (although few such collections remain today) and campus libraries “vigorously promoted recreational reading interests of students.”28 Today, while physical browsing collections may be gone, technology has provided a number of tools that academic librarians can use to connect readers with books, including subject heading and keyword searches, electronic pathfinders, and online book review databases such as Amazon and Barnes and Noble. But are students using academic library collections to read for pleasure?

In 2004, a report by the National Endowment for the Arts, Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America noted, “Over the past 20 years, young adults (18-34) have declined from being those most likely to read literature to those least likely (with the exception of those age 65 and above).”29 Lara Saunders and Karen Bauer suggest that “high-tech interests and activities may be replacing reading, especially of non-required textbooks,” and note that students have competing forces in their lives, including part-time employment.30

In such an environment, librarians must look for opportunities to encourage students to take advantage of pleasure reading opportunities in their library collection, including fiction, magazines, and graphic novels. The common view of the academic
library is that its purpose is to support the academic program of the institution, but libraries have always had a reading agenda as well. Amanda Cain wrote in 2002 of the need to incorporate thoughtful or “deep” reading into library instruction, but academic librarians can also enrich the student experience and lifelong learning preparation by building collections that support academic departments and provide opportunities for reading for enjoyment, becoming advocates for reading in all its forms and formats.

The key to reading is often access, both bibliographic and physical. Graphic novels bring their own complications to both of these dimensions, within the context of the decisions a library makes about how such works will be catalogued.

Introduction to Graphic Novels Cataloging

A quick look at citations to library literature about graphic novels reveals that the primary concerns at the moment are: 1) whether or not such items belong in library collections; and 2) how to select titles for a collection. So far, very little has been formally published about how to catalog and process these items for library collections. Robust discussions on these issues do occur, however, on cataloging listservs, such as AUTOCAT, and other forums, including GNLIB (Graphic Novels in Libraries). Generally, the participants in these exchanges work at public libraries or school media centers, and they are most interested in how to classify graphic novels in the Dewey system. In brief, there is much debate about whether graphic novels should simply be assigned a 741.5 Dewey call number, which typically designates items about “Cartoons” and/or “Cartooning,” or classed under a different number based upon a variety of
bibliographical description criteria, such as fiction or non-fiction, standalone story or series, and one or multiple creators.

**Classifying Graphic Novels**

Recent discussions about how to catalog graphic novels in Dewey have occasioned a reconsideration of the current Dewey classification recommendations for such items. Namely, the editors of the Dewey schedules have proposed to continue classing graphic novels along with other comics and caricatures but to subdivide these materials according to the length of narratives contained in such items. This solution attempts to circumvent the problem of trying to separate graphic novels from other graphic items while acknowledging that graphic novels can be quite different from comic strips and cartoons in respect to content, scope, and audience. In addition, the wider application of Dewey classification to graphic novels would allow catalogers to subclass these items according to the creator’s country. The proposed Dewey expansion is similar to Library of Congress (LC) classification of graphic items, which are generally classed in the PN6700-6790 range. One of LC classification’s signature excellences is the potential to class items narrowly according to specific subdivisions, including author, place, and special topics. While not as flexible as options available in the LC classification schedules, the Dewey revisions allow for more logical, inclusive cataloging of graphic novels without demanding arbitrary distinctions between graphic materials.

While the classification needs of public libraries and school media centers may be distinct from the classification practices of academic libraries, the distinction between Dewey and LC classification chief among them, these organizations do share common concerns regarding graphic novel cataloging. The classification question, for example, is
a thorny one for each type of institution for a couple of reasons. First, the underlying preference suggested on the listserv discussions seems to be a desire to make these items available in a common location. There are understandable reasons for this position, especially in information settings where specific parts of collections can be separated from each other and targeted to specific user groups. Even in targeted collections, though, items of various genre and format are classified together. Second, simply classing graphic novels with items about cartoons and/or cartooning inadequately describes the unique complexities of these items. This particular problem is not unique to Dewey classification. While LC classification perhaps offers catalogers more nuanced options for classifying graphic novels, including classifying them under numbers for specific creators, no classification schemes currently exist that specifically apply to these unique items. Of course, graphic novels are as diverse in content, genre, form and audience as any other type of literatures, so classing these items according to rigid schemes may only be an artificial way to make them more accessible. On the other hand, as graphic novels become increasingly available on the market and legitimate as a subject of scholarly study, it seems useful to highlight these items in some unique way, perhaps through user education and departmental liaison activity at the course level. These solutions, though, do not address how to catalog graphic novels in ways that are most useful for academic library patrons.

**Graphic Novels and LC Classification**

Steve Raiteri\(^{37}\) asserts that a graphic novel, “by definition, is a standalone story in comics form, published as a book.”\(^{38}\) Though he does not cite a source for this definition, Raiteri’s simple description alludes to a few of the factors that make cataloging graphic
novels so challenging. First, there is the idea of a standalone story. Traditionally, novels are fictional, though not all stories are. The same is true of graphic novels. Whether or not some of the most familiar and widely-read graphic novel titles are actually fiction, such as Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Pekar’s *American Splendor*, is subject to debate. In addition, both titles were issued serially before issues were collected and published in standalone book formats. “Comics form” also suggests a very specific illustrating style (cartoon) and format (strip or other serially published format) that does not necessarily encompass the breadth and depth of contemporary graphic novel publishing.

From just a basic parsing of Raiteri’s simple definition, it is easy to imagine numerous scenarios about how we might discuss bibliographically describing graphic novels for use in academic libraries that organize materials according to LC classification. As mentioned above, the LC classification schedule is flexible enough to allow for a varied arrangement and subarrangement of graphic materials in a library collection, especially in the PN6700-6790 call number range. As a canon of graphic novels begins to emerge through their increased use as legitimate academic resources, we face new opportunities to think about these materials and their creators in ways that make cataloging and processing them even more challenging than in the past, especially in respect to graphic novels published as series. Standalone graphic novels like Craig Thompson’s *Blankets* and Daniel Clowes’ *Ghost World* are easily cataloged as books. For our purposes here, however, an outline of specific graphic novel series cataloging inconsistencies encountered by the cataloging staff at WSU Libraries will provide the framework for the remainder of this discussion, and issues that have affected consistent cataloging of these materials will receive primary attention. It bears mentioning, too, that
while these issues are typical in cataloging, the WSU cataloging staff has had a rare opportunity to discover patterns and inconsistencies in graphic novels cataloging precisely because they have dealt with these materials in volume, processing several hundred graphic novel titles over a period of several weeks.

**Complexities of Cataloging Graphic Novels**

Primarily, catalogers see inconsistent manifestations among individual volumes that constitute a graphic novel series. For example, in the stacks we may have a 5th edition copy of *Love and Rockets Collection 1* published in 1996 (PN6727.H47 M87 1996)\(^{39}\) shelved near a 4th edition copy of *Love and Rockets Collection 2* published in 2001 (PN6727.H47 C435 2001).\(^{40}\) Even though Fantagraphics Books is the publisher of both volumes, cataloging consistency stops there. In addition to widely disparate dates and edition statements, each volume in this series has a unique title. The call numbers indicate that while each number has been classed under a cutter for the Bros. Hernandez (H47), the subsequent cutters have been created according to the title on the volume. So volume two (“Chelo’s Burden”) actually precedes volume one (“Music for Mechanics”) on the shelf. It is doubtful that this situation is problematic for users, who can at least browse like volumes grouped under similar call numbers. Conceptually, though, this situation is an exemplary problem in respect to cataloging graphic novels.

The example of the Bros. Hernandez raises another cataloging conundrum because one writes and the other illustrates. While more and more graphic novels are being published by single author-illustrators, how do we handle those titles produced by more than one chief creator? Indeed, how do we determine chief creator? Additionally, how do we handle titles produced by more than one creator, each of whom may have a
unique LC call number assigned to different parts of the classification schedule? It is rare, but we have come across titles that could be classified in the N’s for the illustrator or artist and assigned to the P’s for the author, as in the case of Eric Drooker’s *Flood!: A Novel in Pictures* (NC139.D76 A4 2002).

This last point brings us back to the problem of classification in general, especially in respect to how we catalog graphic novels in academic institutions where these items may be resources for scholarly study. As graphic novels gain credibility as literary texts, it is intriguing to notice the formation of a graphic novels canon consisting of a core of seminal creators. Bros. Hernandez, Art Spiegelman, Alan Moore, Jill Thompson, Frank Miller and Neil Gaiman are significant creators of widely influential graphic novels. All have multiple, critically renowned, and widely recognized publications to their credit, and as such, each can arguably be considered a significant author. Accordingly, LC classification rules allow catalogers to group primary and secondary works by and about a creator under a single base call number. This rule certainly applies to any of the authors listed above, and yet most of our graphic novels have been classed in the PN6700’s, which is a general illustrated literature category. In this area, in addition to graphic novels, patrons will find books about comics, comic strips, cartoons, cartooning, satirical illustration, illustrated versions of books and films, and illustrated adaptations of books and films. Questions emerging from the WSU graphic novel project have been whether or not to begin assigning unique call numbers to these established authors, how this new practice may influence other graphic novel cataloging issues such as editing inconsistent cataloging copy, and how most effectively to deal with graphic novel series.
Graphic Novels and Seriality

As indicated above, graphic novels are often issued as monographic series. Typically, WSU cataloging staff follow a single record concept and catalog most series on one bibliographic record, to which we attach separate item records for each issue or volume. This situation becomes complicated, however, when we receive a series like *Love and Rockets* or Frank Miller’s *Sin City*, which consists of several separate but interconnected stories, each volume of which has a unique title. Further complicating matters is the fact that each separately titled volume consists of individual issues previously published sequentially. Do we catalog the series on one record? Or do we catalog each uniquely titled volume separately on unique records?

Given that each volume in the series contains a discrete story, it makes sense here to catalog each uniquely titled volume separately. Also, since LC classification allows for subdivision according to geographical location, which can further subdivide according to author or title, it is easy to create a place for *Sin City* on the shelf among other graphic novels in the PN6700 range. In the case of the *Sin City* story “The Big Fat Kill,” for example, staff assigned the item a base call number of PN6727, which places this title among other graphic materials produced and published in the United States. Staff then added a cutter derived from the author’s surname and another cutter derived from the name of the story followed by publication year: PN6727.M55 B5 1996. This call number sensibly places “The Big Fat Kill” on the shelf next to other books by Miller, among graphic materials produced by creators from the United States. The LC schedule, however, allows for cuttering by author or title. If this call number had been cuttered by the *Sin City* series title (PN6727.S5 B5 1996, for example), it would stand in a different
place on the shelf, perhaps shelved near other *Sin City* stories, but apart from other works by Miller.

This latter scenario, though a credible cataloging option, would not have been chosen for at least two reasons: Frank Miller is clearly identified as the sole creator (writer and illustrator) of the work; and it is difficult to tell the extent of the *Sin City* series from the bibliographic record:

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001 38032968
003 OCoLC
005 20040916153235.0
008 971203s1996 orua 000 c eng d
020 1569711267 (hbk.)
020 1569711712 (pbk.) $15.00
040 ZQP|ZQP|dJED|dOCLCQ|dNTE
049 NTEA
090 PN6727.M55|bB5 1996
092 741.5
100 1 Miller, Frank.|d1957-
245 14 The big fat kill :|ba tale from Sin City /|cFrank Miller.
260 Milwaukie, Ore. :|bDark Horse Comics,|c1996.
300 [183] p. :|bchiefly ill. (some col.) ;|c26 cm.
500 "This book collects issues one through five of the Dark Horse comic-book series *Sin City: the big fat kill.*"
650 0 Horror comic books, strips, etc.
650 0 Graphic novels.
730 0 *Sin City: the big fat kill.*
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Here, we see that the record features a note (in the 500 field), transcribed from the item, indicating that this book collects separate issues of a comic book series. Also, the 730 field records this volume’s uniform series title. But there is no field present clearly indicating that *Sin City* is a series. Fortunately, users conducting title searches for books published in the “*Sin City*” franchise will find this record because of the 730 field, though a 440 field (Series statement/Added title) might also be useful in records for items from
this series because it would allow users to conduct title searches for “Sin City” and receive separate citations for each unique volume.

Indeed, “The Big Fat Kill” example raises an issue that lies at the heart of almost all cataloging, especially serials cataloging: consistency. Though many graphic novels are issued in series consisting of uniquely titled volumes, the cataloging staff has identified very little cataloging copy that includes series notes allowing users to conduct title searches at the series level. Adding, say, a 440 field would make these records more useable and the indexing throughout the catalog more consistent.

Of course, some cataloging inconsistencies are unavoidable in cooperative cataloging environments. Public libraries, for instance, may target different users with their graphic novel collections than academic libraries, and as suggested above, their cataloging and classification of these items may represent this goal. More fundamentally, cataloging departments and agencies may have different shared cataloging input standards and capabilities, and individual catalogers hold varying interpretations of cataloging rules and standards. Finally, graphic novel publishing is itself inconsistent and graphic novel materials do not necessarily yield the same traditional sources of information that are cornerstones for consistent cataloging, such as title pages, colophons, or series statements.

**Promoting Graphic Novels in Academia**

Graphic novels have a place in academic library collections, but a library intending to start such a collection would do well to consider how to promote their use and availability, both within and outside the library. 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.

Within the academic library, opposition to graphic novels often can take the form of concerns about cataloging, selection issues, and increased theft potential. Cataloging is discussed above, and although there may be questions of collection scope to address, selection issues are by far less significant for academic libraries than they are for public or school libraries that must consider issues of age-appropriate content. Theft, however, is a potentially significant issue. Graphic novels, like magazines, newspapers, and world civilization monographs, are potential targets. Libraries with graphic novel collections should consider library binding their covers in addition to the usual tattle-taping and marking. Although that may lessen immediate appeal, the covers can be glued to buckram to retain visual interest, and there is the side benefit of increased durability. These strategies can help ease concerns, but in the end the library may have to plan for replacements, consoled by the fact that graphic novels are considerably less expensive than many other materials that are added into the collection.

Lavin’s work in *Serials Review* brought attention to the lack of holdings of comic books in North American libraries and the reasons for that. The growth of graphic novels and book length comics in the publishing industry – and patron interest in the genre – may help change that.
Faculty/Staff Outreach

As noted above, teaching faculty in higher education are increasingly using graphic novels in the classroom as well as studying them as academic fodder in their own right. Nevertheless, many faculty members retain antiquated notions of graphic novels based on their own past exposure to comic books in their youth, or are unaware of them at all, resulting in what one European scholar calls a “deeply rooted suspicion towards the medium in [the] American academy.” Indeed, Weiner suggests that “the sophistication of the American comic book/graphic novel may be the most underrated literary movement in recent United States history.” Librarians may want to consider an educational campaign to increase faculty awareness of graphic novels as literary, artistic, and discipline-based resources for scholarship and teaching. This does not require a huge effort; education and marketing opportunities can arise naturally from the work librarians do as liaisons to academic departments and their patrons at large, such as creating displays, advertising new acquisitions, and demonstrating scholarly applications for library resources.

An excellent starting resource for librarians and teaching faculty alike is the National Association of Comics Art Educators (NACAE). This organization, started by graphic novelist and instructor James Strum, provides information for teaching cartooning, but also for using comics in art, design and literature coursework. NACAE’s website includes articles on the value of a comics curriculum, as well as sample syllabi, study guides, exercises, discussion forums and more. Another excellent resource to highlight to faculty is the interdisciplinary peer-reviewed online journal ImageText. The journal’s webpage notes it covers a wide range of time periods and
geographic locations, embraces a number of disciplinary approaches, and is designed to promote “innovative discussions of the political and social implications of comics, to generate original formal aesthetic analyses of comics, and to broaden theoretical discussions” in the medium.\textsuperscript{48}

A first step toward expanding awareness of graphic novels is creating a display or exhibit in the library to showcase scholarly writing, student papers, and the novels themselves. Examples that emphasize multiple genres, focusing on historical, cultural, autobiographical, romantic, comic or dramatic topics provide multiple opportunities to pique interest. Graphic novels with popular movie adaptations have their own built-in constituency, and locally-created graphic novels, posters or comic strips, if available, can add to the appeal. Aesthetics create interest as well, and examples of beautiful or avant-garde art, design elements, lettering and coloring can be displayed. Sending press releases or a simple email note to reporters at the student paper, as well as any campus newsletters or newspapers primarily read by faculty and staff, can certainly increase the visibility of the collections and exhibits. Librarians who serve as liaisons to academic departments could include information about relevant additions to the library collection in their regular communications with departments and faculty that might have an interest. Potential targets include English, creative writing, American Studies, history, ESL, Cultural/Ethnic/Women’s/Disability Studies, foreign languages, International Programs/Study Abroad, art and graphic design, film studies, advertising, communication, and political science.

Academic opportunities do not stop at the classroom door. Recently, student blogs and online diaries have emerged as a college recruitment tool: “The idea is simple:
Supply the budding authors with a digital camera and let them write about their freshman year as it’s happening. The approach seems to be working. Librarians could suggest to the campus recruitment office that they consider sponsoring a student-created online graphic novel/graphic journal about life at the university as a vehicle for the admissions office, to provide an additional creative opportunity to illustrate the campus environment and the benefits of becoming part of the academic community.

**Outreach to Pre-Service Teachers**

Special outreach efforts should be considered for departments or schools of education, as graphic novels are increasingly being used in the K-12 realm. Bucher and Manning note that “growing up with television and video games, contemporary young adults look for print media that contain the same visual impact and pared-down writing style and contribute to their enthusiasm for visual rather than written literacy,” but graphic novels are also a way to actually teach the craft of writing. Frey and Fisher describe using the “hidden literacy” of graphic novels to teach students how to write by providing a structure that students can use and build upon. They conclude “having begun with the idea that graphic novels were comic books at best and a waste of time at worst, we now realize the power they have for engaging students in authentic writing. These forms of popular culture provided a visual vocabulary of sorts for scaffolding writing techniques, particularly dialogue, tone, and mood.” Beyond composition, graphic novels are also effective mechanisms for enhancing the teaching of other curricular topics, including social studies, history, cultural studies, art, media literacy, language, science and math.
Pre-service teachers benefit from familiarity with works created in this format not only for scholastic applications but also because this is a literature that their pupils already read, share, and talk about. Speaking about young adult males, Thomas Newkirk writes that young men are more likely to read items that are relevant for conversations with their friends and that address their shared interests. Graphic novels are not just of interest to boys, of course; girls are strong fans as well, especially of girl-centered manga. For boys and girls alike, using reading materials in a text-plus-graphic format provides a non-intimidating way to discuss and integrate scholastic concepts.

While graphic novels clearly are inappropriate materials for many lessons and classes in middle school and high school, they are powerful mechanisms to supplement reading and other subjects, and they provide a bridge for framing other narratives:

Adolescent readers face a host of complicated problems, ranging from general reluctance to pick up a book to aliteracy, an inability to fully grasp the meaning of words. Proponents suggest that comic books and graphic novels can help. For the reluctant reader, they are absorbing. For the struggling reader or the reader still learning English, they offer accessibility: pictures for context, and possibly an alternate path into classroom discussions of higher-level texts. They expand vocabulary, and introduce the ideas of plot, pacing, and sequence.

Class discussions of the visual narrative and integrated art in graphic novels provide a way for students to discuss content and theme through a medium that is accessible and cool and that speaks to multiple learning styles, making them a powerful addition to a teacher’s toolbox.

Exposure to this format in pre-service education gives new teachers knowledge and resources that can immediately be put into use when they start their teaching careers, but they will also need to be aware of issues dealing with the appropriate selection of graphic novels or other comic materials based on age-appropriate content and concerns.
about the “dumbing down” of education. Philip Charles Crawford’s *Graphic Novels 101: Selecting and Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy for Children and Adults – A Resource Guide for School Librarians and Educators* offers a good starting place for educating pre-service teachers about the possibilities and limitations of comics in the K-12 classroom.58

**Student Outreach**

Beyond increasing faculty awareness of graphic novels as academic objects for themselves and their students, library outreach and marketing efforts aimed directly at students can increase general student awareness of graphic novels as scholarly resources, artistic vehicles, and pleasure reading opportunities beyond the classroom presence. In addition to the displays and exhibits described above, potential outreach and marketing efforts could include

- Featuring graphic novels prominently in “New Book” display areas.
- Showcasing graphic novels that appeal to women to combat any misperception that graphic novels are violent, hyper-sexualized or intended for male audiences.
- Suggesting graphic novels published in foreign languages as tools for enhancing learning of language skills and gaining insight into other cultures.
- Including graphic novels in special pleasure reading displays created for academic breaks and holidays.
- Including appropriate graphic novels in brief topic or discipline-related “book talks” at the start of library instruction sessions (i.e. *The Golem’s Mighty Swing* for history or *Persepolis* for Middle Eastern studies or women’s studies).
- Creating a library-hosted bulletin board (print or electronic), collective weblog, wiki or other collaborative space for students to post reviews and recommendations for reading and purchase. This practice could lead to increased notice of or interest in “regular” fiction or non-fiction books as well.
- Providing opportunities for students to create their own by offering resources such as Will Eisner’s *Graphic Storytelling* and Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*. Another possibility would be a partnership with library special collections, preservation units or campus art departments to offer book-making or paper-making classes to emphasize the complete creative experience.
• Sponsoring an annual juried competition, with judges from the library, faculty or staff from academic departments such as art, English or history, and non-academic units such as college publications, student affairs, or the administration.
• Starting a collection of locally-created graphic novels. Print graphic novels can have MARC records created and be added to library catalogs. Since some graphic novels are published in .PDF format, or are hypertext documents created and intended only to be viewed online, links could be added to the library catalog or placed in an institutional repository, with proper attention paid to intellectual property issues.
• Recruiting a student or student library employee to write and draw a regular library strip highlighting library staff, issues, resources and the student research process.

These awareness techniques are designed not just around the format of the graphic novel but around the notion of pleasure reading and reading in general. Art Spiegelman calls comics a “gateway drug into books.” Increasing literacy and promoting reading may be generally thought of as a K-12 or public library issue, but for the busy and stressed undergraduates of today, graphic novels are a good reminder that reading for pleasure is entertaining, accessible, academically stimulating, and ultimately rewarding.

Conclusion

Graphic novels are growing in academic stature; in addition to their appeal as recreational reading, their perceived relevance may also lead to increased collection emphasis. Once the decision to purchase them at all or more aggressively is made, local decisions will need to be made about their circulation and security.

Beyond the intrigue and allure of the works themselves lies a cataloging and classification puzzle that may, finally, hold a key to one of the reasons why these items have not seen wider use in academic libraries. Traditionally limited to a specific location on the library shelf, graphic novels have been separated from other literary and artistic
works, and have not been as widely available to students who browse the stacks in search of specific authors, literary traditions and themes, or criticism.

Graphic novels can support the literature curriculum and will certainly support the mission of the academic library to provide recreational reading. Myriad opportunities for promotion and marketing exist. Graphic novels can perhaps be a mechanism for the return to the humanistic ideal that reading should both educate and delight.

Endnotes


8 Ibid., p. 61.

9 More information about Versaci’s work with teaching and comic books is available at http://english.palomar.edu/Versaci.


19 Ibid., p. 3.


23 LES-L (ACRL Literatures in English Section listserv), personal emails, March 2005.


26 Ibid., p. 2.1.


Information about AUTOCAT, the longstanding discussion group for cataloging and authorities is available at http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/cts/autocat/. Information about GNLIB is available at http://www.angelfire.com/comics/gnlib/

See http://www.oclc.org/dewey/discussion/papers/741_5supplement.htm for the full discussion on this matter.

See http://www.oclc.org/dewey/discussion/papers/graphicnovels.htm for detailed discussion of how graphic novels will be subarranged in Dewey, along with recommendations for classing historical, critical and interpretative secondary resources on the topic.

A librarian at Greene County Public Library (Xenia, OH) responsible for graphic novels selection, Raiteri also reviews graphic novels for Library Journal.


WSU bib record for this item:
001 35712211
003 OCoLC
005 20010618164004.0
008 961010t19961994waua 000 0 eng d
020 093019313X
040 RSD|cRSD|dNTE
049 NTE2
090 PN6727.H47|bM87 1996
100 1 Hernandez, Gilbert.
245 10 Music for mechanics /cLos Bros Hernandez.
250 5th Fantagraphics books ed.
490 0 Love and rockets collection ;v1
500 "A Love and rockets collection"--Cover.
According to Weiner, *Flood!* was unusual in many ways, mainly in that it did not have any dialogue or captions. The story is told completely through the images; its subtitle is “A Novel in Pictures.” Although it looked more like an art book, it received major notices as a work of fiction, receiving an American Book Award and being short-listed for a National Book Award (p. 52).


Lavin, “Comic Books and Graphic Novels for Libraries.” See also *Serials Review* 24.1 (1998) and 24.2 (1998); both issues were devoted to comics and graphic novels.


Ibid., p. 24.

Schwarz, “Graphic Novels for Multiple Literacies,” pp. 262-264.


Ibid, p. 11.

