Advances in Collection Management:
The Use of Technology to Create a New Basic List of Veterinary Serials

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Abstract

The original 1977 Basic List of Veterinary Serials, a classic collection management tool for veterinary librarians, was last updated in 1986. A new list has long been overdue. The Veterinary Serials Committee of the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section/Medical Library Association has been working on a new edition, taking advantage of new technologies and selection tools.

Objectives: To provide a current list of the most important veterinary journals for veterinary librarians, as well as agricultural, animal health and medical librarians wanting to add a veterinary component to their journal collections.

Methods: Librarians at all AVMA accredited veterinary schools were asked to assign level of importance to individual journal titles via an online survey tool. These results were used in a weighted formula, in combination with variables such as impact factor, required readings for AVMA Specialty Board certification, and where indexed.

Results: A new Basic List has been compiled. This list represents a core list containing substantive veterinary medical journals that are absolutely essential to the veterinary medical library, regardless of the research thrust of the college, and provides a starting point upon which to build a collection based on the research objectives and goals of the local institution.

Conclusions: With the use of online survey technology, input from the veterinary library community was dramatically increased. Combining librarian feedback with additional journal quality measures should make the new Basic List of Veterinary Serials a more accurate reflection of current journal usage and importance.

Background

The Basic List of Veterinary Serials is a tool dating back more than 30 years. In 1976 the Veterinary Medical Libraries Group, a section of the larger Medical Library Association (MLA), identified the need for a resource that would serve both veterinary and non-veterinary librarians building a serial collection in veterinary medicine. An ad hoc committee was formed and given two charges: 1) compile a basic list of veterinary medical journals that could serve as a guideline in establishing and maintaining a veterinary library, and 2) promote the adoption of the basic list as a tool for assessing an adequate library collection during accreditation of
veterinary medical schools (1). The committee accomplished their goals and distributed the first edition of the Basic List in 1977. The section, now officially called the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association (VMLS/MLA), recognized the need for regular updating of the Basic List and established the Veterinary Serials Committee as a standing committee. A second, revised edition of the basic list was published in 1986 and followed guidelines similar to the first edition with regard to the serials that were included and the overall focus on “substantive veterinary medical journals that are absolutely essential to the veterinary medical library” (2). Although the lists were created based in part on information gathered from other recognized serial lists, indexing services, and citation data, this input was weighted against the expert opinion of a committee of experienced veterinary librarians.

In creating a third edition of the Basic List, an effort was made to employ new technology that would facilitate the gathering of additional sources of expert opinion and tap into the wealth of journal information available electronically from various resources. In order to deal with the need to consider inputs from multiple sources with varying degrees of importance, a matrix was devised that weighted each factor in a systematic way. The tabulated scores from this analysis allowed the committee to examine a set of 238 journals and objectively determine a minimum threshold for inclusion on the final list of essential titles. This project shows how new technologies and data, in a variety of forms, allowed the committee of librarians to prepare a basic list of veterinary serials in a way that strikes a balance between experiential knowledge and objective bibliographic data.

Methodology

General

In 2007, the committee began assembling the group of journal titles that would be considered for inclusion in the new Basic List, and identified specific quantitative and qualitative elements that could be examined for each title. While the committee took ownership of the selection process, there was always the intention of expanding the experiential input beyond the five core committee members. Newly available polling technology made it possible to easily create an online survey that presented the list of potential titles and directly engaged veterinary librarians from around the world in the process of ranking which titles they thought were essential. In addition to this polling data, the committee also sought to take advantage of advances that have been made in online access to all types of bibliographic data. Journals under consideration for the third edition of the Basic List were awarded points based on the extent of their coverage in major indexes, their scholarly impact rank as tracked in two sources, and whether any of the 15 veterinary specialty boards recommended a particular journal as useful to preparation for board exams. This combination of bibliographic data and experiential input provided a unique and unprecedented opportunity to rationally select the most important publications in the field for inclusion in the Basic List.

Survey

The committee felt input from the practicing veterinary librarians would greatly strengthen the process of selecting the journals for the Basic List and began the process of preparing the
documentation for a survey. It was decided librarians at each of the institutions currently accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) would be sent an email inviting them to participate in this important project. The email message provided the history and purpose of the Basic List, a description of the guidelines used for updating to the third edition, and instructions for completing the survey. To aid in the decision making process, invited librarians were also provided with additional details about the prospective titles, such as ISSN, language, subject area (i.e. Animal Welfare, Internal Medicine, Public Health, etc.) indexing sources, and impact factor.

An online survey tool, Survey Monkey, facilitated the design of the survey instrument, provided easy access via the web for completing the survey, and supplied thorough analysis of all the collected responses. An institutional license for this service made it possible for one of the committee members to create the survey pages listing all the potential journal titles with check boxes permitting one choice from the possible responses. Respondents were asked to mark one of the four choices: 1) A key title for the list; 2) A title to keep on the list; 3) A title to remove from the list; or 4) No opinion. Comment boxes were also included to allow ample space for suggesting titles to be added or to provide any general feedback. Prospective participants were given six weeks to complete the survey.

A scoring system was devised to assign more points for a title that was deemed “key,” and fewer points for the other categories, with votes of “remove from the list” receiving zero points. An average score was calculated for each title and when weighted in the decision matrix accounted for 40% of the overall score.

Other elements

Guidelines that were in place from previous editions were reviewed and generally accepted as still applicable to the process of creating a new edition of the Basic List. For example, the guidelines listed several exclusions, including journals in the areas of human medicine and general science which were considered an important adjunct to the core list but not addressed with this list. Also excluded were publications from extension services, federal publications, house organs, newsletters, specialty veterinary organization publications, as well as state and local publications. Indexing sources and impact factor were elements that had been considered with the second edition but the relative importance of one factor over another was not defined. For the new Basic List, four major veterinary bibliographic indexes—Agricola, CAB, MEDLINE, Web of Science—were consulted to determine indexing practices for the journals under consideration. It was deemed that journals included in a major index should receive points on the matrix over journals that were not indexed.

In preparing the third edition several new elements were considered such as a journal’s scholarly impact ranking and whether a journal was included on a specialty board’s suggested reading list. One member of the committee consulted approximately 15 veterinary specialty boards to identify titles recommended for study in preparation for their board exams. In some cases, this information was available on the board’s website, but occasionally it was necessary to contact the specialty board by phone or email to inquire about any recommended study lists.
Also new was a second scholarly impact measure, the SCImago Journal and Country Rank (SJR). This ranking uses a different algorithm which could provide a counterpoint to the JCR impact factor.

Points for indexing, scholarly impact and usefulness to study for board exams were entered into a spreadsheet and accounted for 60% of a journal’s overall score. Matrix elements were weighted in such a way to ensure that the survey (the human input) counted for more than any other single element in the matrix. The goal was to achieve a balance between the objective bibliometric data and more subjective practitioner expertise.

**Results**

Librarians from 24 AVMA accredited institutions completed the survey, a 57% response rate. All elements from the matrix were combined in a spreadsheet in order to tabulate overall scores for each of the 238 journals under consideration. The committee set the minimum score for inclusion on the Basic List at 15 out of 40 possible points. The final list consisted of 117 titles, representing 31 subject areas – plus the highest ranking journal from an additional 5 categories needed for breadth of subject coverage.

The 117 journals included in the Basic List had an average score of 23.80 (median score: 23.32). Several journals earned the same number of points and were assigned tie ranking. Only one journal, the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, garnered 40 points.

**Top 10 Journals**

1. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association
2. American Journal of Veterinary Research
3. Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine
4. Veterinary Pathology
5. Veterinary Clinics of North America-Small Animal Practice
6. Equine Veterinary Journal
7. Veterinary Clinics of North America-Equine Practice
8. Veterinary Clinics of North America-Food Animal Practice
10. Veterinary Surgery

The resulting core list contains substantive veterinary medical journals that are essential to the veterinary medical library, regardless of the research thrust of the college, and provides a starting point upon which to build a collection based on the research objectives and goals of the local institution.

**Conclusion**

The creation of the third edition of the Basic List of Veterinary Serials benefited from several different sources of technology, not only in collecting the data but in analyzing and managing the data. Today’s basic technologies, such as email and spreadsheets, provided a significant
time savings and were tools not available to the committees creating the earlier editions. Indeed, they conducted most of their work in person at annual meetings. The work of previous committees has been a valuable collection management tool for years. However, as the nature of serials has changed since the second edition of the Basic List, so too have ways to evaluate those serials.

The use of online survey technology permits a much larger portion of the veterinary library community to be collectively engaged in the title selection process. Combining this feedback with additional journal quality measures makes the new Basic List of Veterinary Serials a more accurate reflection of current journal usage and importance as reflected by bibliometric data as well as librarian practitioner expertise.

References