E-Preferred Approval Plans – Is This the Right Choice for an Academic Library?

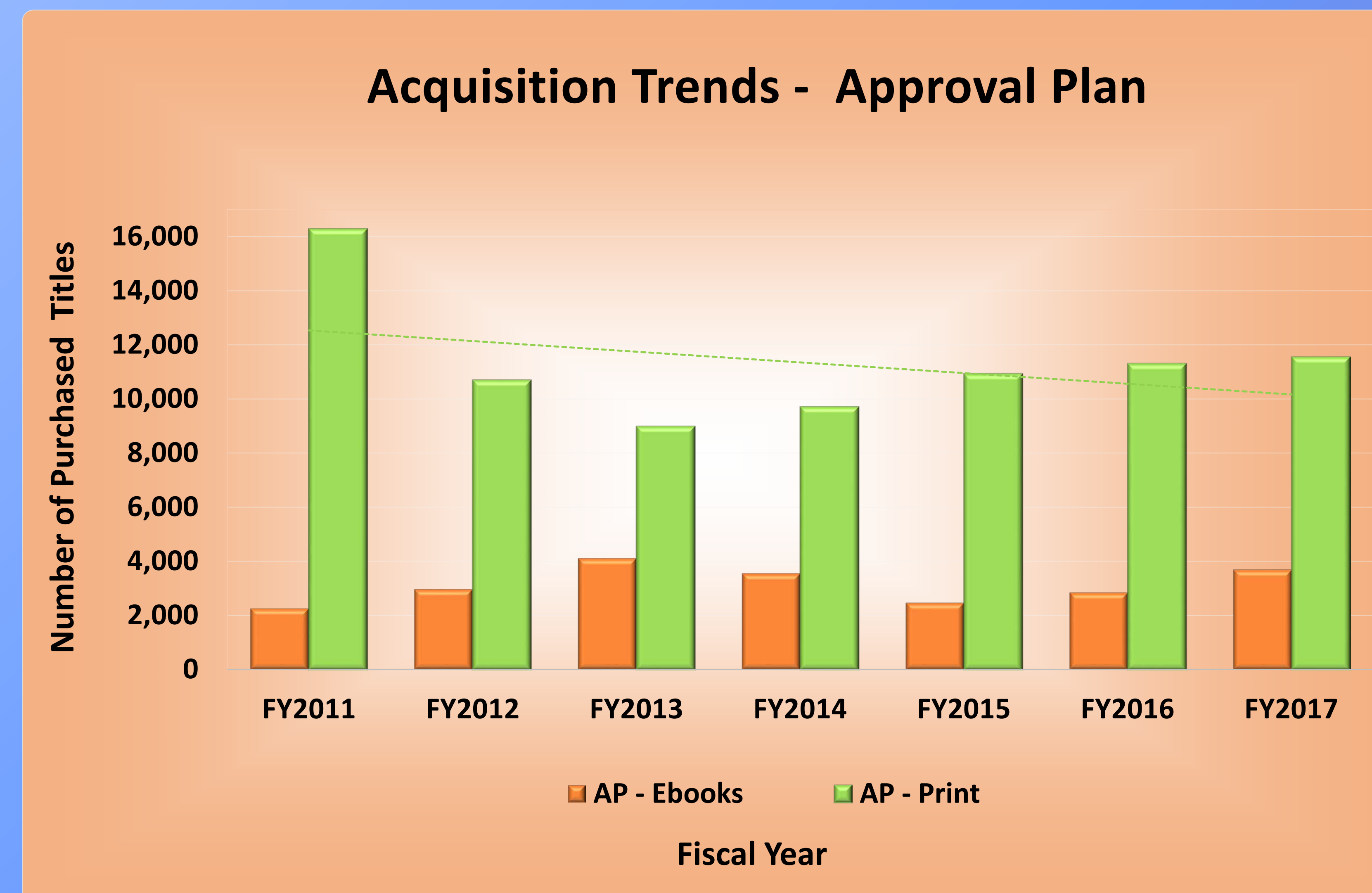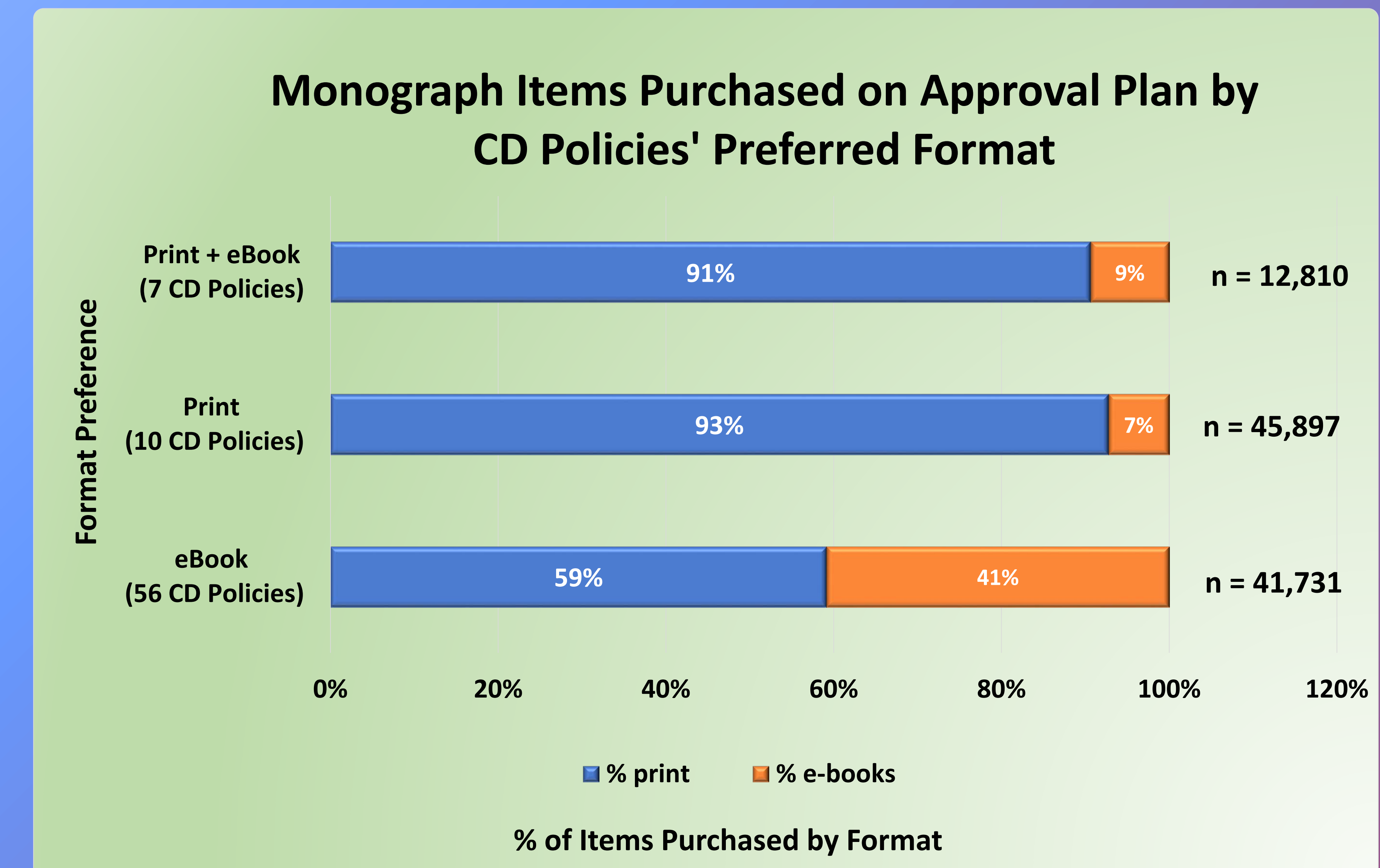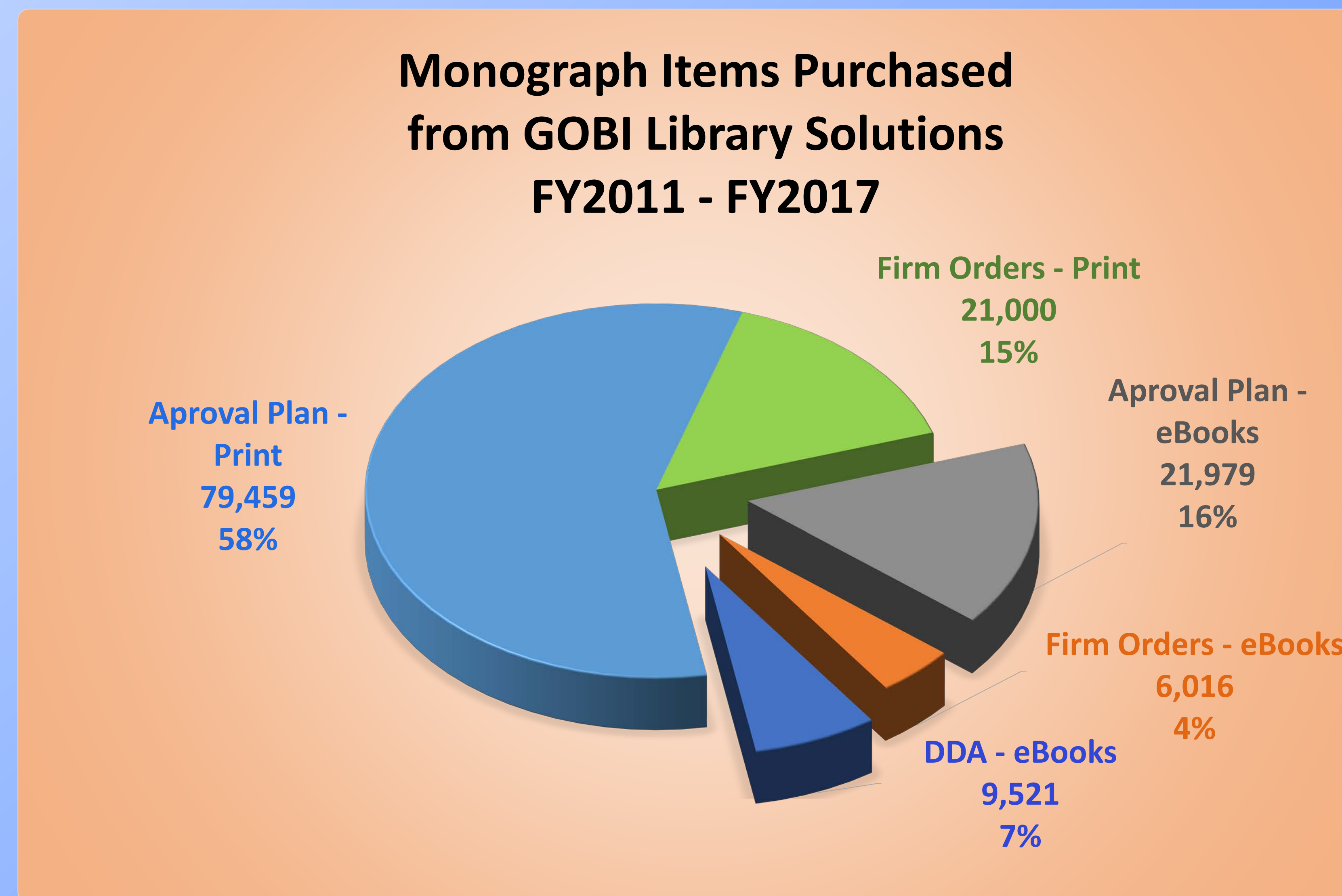## Simona Tabacaru, Texas A&M University

About the Study

Texas A&M University (TAMU) Libraries implemented an e-preferred approval plan in December 2010. To identify the impact of the e-preferred approval plan on the library's monograph collections, an evaluation of the print and eBooks purchased from GOBI Library Solutions in the past seven fiscal years was conducted. Acquisition and usage data were analyzed in the context of the subject-specific collection development policies maintained by the TAMU Libraries.

The goal was to determine whether eBooks effectively support the TAMU programs and to what extent hybrid print and e-collections should co-exist to support diverse user information needs.

Methodology

- Title lists were obtained from GOBI database – library activity reports for invoiced orders covering seven fiscal years (September 1, 2010 – August 31, 2017).
- Circulation data for print monographs was obtained from Voyager, the TAMU Libraries' integrated system, using MS Access queries.
- Usage data (COUNTER Book Reports 1 and Book Reports 2) for eBooks were obtained from 20 eBook suppliers.
- Cost data was obtained from GOBI database and Voyager.
- To determine support of TAMU programs, the analysis grouped monograph titles by the existing 73 subject-specific CD policies. The CD policies closely mirror the TAMU programs.
- The study identified approval plan budget expenditure trends and investigated the % of approval plan print and eBook titles used by subject areas as defined in the TAMU Libraries' CD Policies.

Monograph Items Purchased from GOBI Library Solutions FY2011 - FY2017

- Firm Orders - Print 21,000 15%
- Aproval Plan - eBooks 21,979 16%
- Firm Orders - eBooks 6,016 4%
- DDA - eBooks 9,521 7%
- Aproval Plan - Print 79,459 58%

Monograph Items Purchased on Approval Plan by CD Policies' Preferred Format

Format Preference	% print	% e-books	
Print + eBook (7 CD Policies)	91%	9%	n = 12,810
Print (10 CD Policies)	93%	7%	n = 45,897
eBook (56 CD Policies)	59%	41%	n = 41,731

% of Items Purchased by Format

Acquisition Trends - Approval Plan

Number of Purchased Titles (0 – 16,000) by Fiscal Year (FY2011–FY2017), AP - Ebooks and AP - Print

% of Monographs Approval Plan Budget Spent on eBooks

- FY 2011 – 22%
- FY 2012 – 37%
- FY 2013 – 51%
- FY 2014 – 44%
- FY 2015 – 35%
- FY 2016 – 39%
- FY 2017 – 44%

Comparison of Use Rate for Purchased Print and eBooks by Acquisition Method

Format & Acquisition Method	% of Titles Used	
DDA	100%	n = 9,521
FO - Ebooks	58%	n = 6,016
AP - Ebooks	49%	n = 21,979
FO - Print	55%	n = 21,000
AP - Print	39%	n = 79,459

% of Titles Used by Format & Acquisition Method

Table - Comparison of Use Rate for Approval Plan Print and eBooks by CD Policy

Collection Development Policy - eBook Preferred	AP – Print			AP - eBooks			Use Rate Difference
	Number of Titles Acquired	Total Titles Used	% Titles Used	Number of Titles Acquired	Total Titles Used	% Titles Used	
Top 5 CD Policies with higher eBooks use rates compared to print books							
Management	1,214	413	34%	1,218	661	54%	20%
Marketing	447	162	36%	368	230	63%	26%
Chemical Engineering	381	164	43%	139	92	66%	23%
Chemistry	173	86	50%	81	53	65%	16%
Geology	131	53	40%	100	56	56%	16%
Top 5 CD Policies with similar use rates for print and eBooks							
Library Science	140	79	56%	49	27	55%	-1%
Middle Eastern	438	122	28%	152	41	27%	-1%
Sociology	3,630	1,525	42%	3,185	1,329	42%	0%
Aeronautical Engineering	96	48	50%	26	13	50%	0%
Astronomy	232	125	54%	94	52	55%	1%
Top 5 CD Policies with higher print books use rate compared to eBooks							
Meteorology	211	108	51%	156	68	44%	-8%
Landscape Architecture	128	74	58%	18	9	50%	-8%
Physics	453	321	71%	206	128	62%	-9%
General Science	372	200	54%	245	108	44%	-10%
Agriculture, General	116	57	49%	88	31	35%	-14%

*Handout is available for a complete comparison of use rate for approval print books and eBooks by CD Policy

Conclusions

- Overall, 73% of the monographs purchases from GOBI Library Solutions in FY2011-FY2017 were print items and 27% were eBooks.

- For the 56 subject areas that have eBook as preferred format, only 41% of the items received on the approval plan in FY2011-FY2017 were eBooks. This is an indicator of the low percentage of eBooks that are released simultaneously with their print counterpart by publishers.

- While only 21% of approval plan purchases are eBooks, the money spent on eBooks varies between 22% and 51% on the approval plan budget, with an increasing trend in the past three fiscal years.

- Overall, eBooks received higher use rates than print books. However, approval plan eBooks tend to receive less usage compared to firm-ordered eBooks, and firm-ordered eBooks tend to receive less usage than DDA eBooks.

- Of the 73 subject areas (CD Policies), 16 subjects have a higher use rate in print than in electronic format. Surprises: General Science, Physics, and Meteorology.

- 19 subject areas have similar use rates in both formats (less than 5% circulation rate difference). These are subject areas that might require both formats to satisfy user needs.

- In 15 subject areas TAMU Libraries acquired less than 100 print books or eBooks on the approval plan over a seven-year period. These subjects should be reviewed to determine whether adequate support is provided to the respective TAMU programs. Are these separate collection development policies needed for these subjects or should they be folded into broader existing subject areas?

- Some print-only approval subject areas have high eBook usage rates. To determine whether more eBooks should be purchased in those areas, an analysis of firm orders and DDA purchases is underway.

- Overall, the e-preferred approval plan seems to adequately support the TAMU programs, although deeper analysis is needed to determine why some subject areas 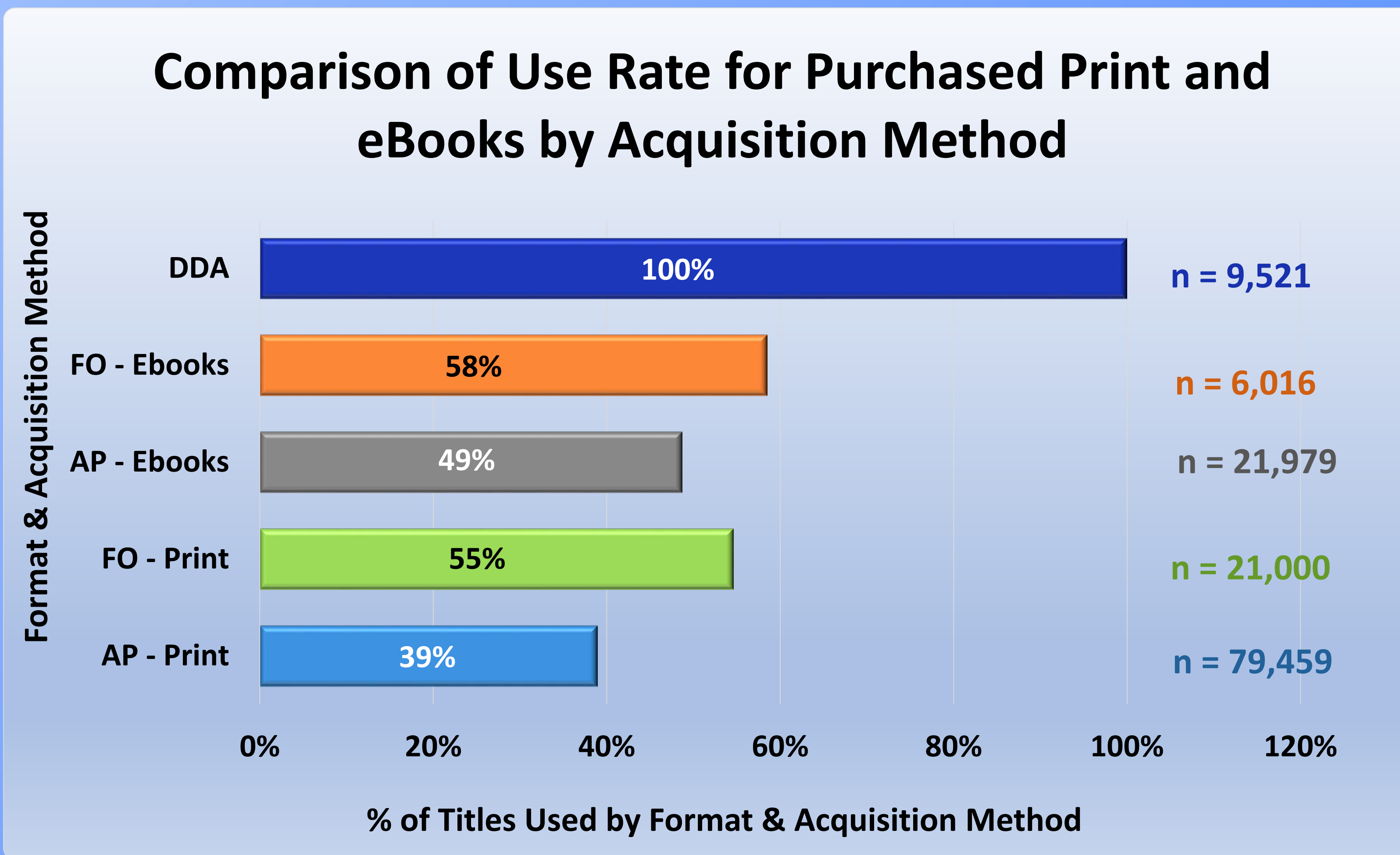have lower use rates than other.