

Paper #1: Collaborative Collection Strategies: New Models and Best Practices

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The New Information Environment

A variety of environmental trends urge college libraries to rethink their approaches to collection development. Key factors influencing the concept and practice of collection development include a) a delivery vs. on-the-shelf model for materials and b) a set of expectations that the library is online for many of its materials and almost completely for its discovery and selection functions. The following are trends that characterize this changing environment:

- Research university libraries are putting increasing percentages of their collections into remote or on-campus storage rather than building traditional public book housing space on campus, thus changing expectations of new faculty who train at these universities.
- Many libraries are adding to their catalog tables of contents, links to e-texts, and other information that affords better online evaluation of materials not available locally.
- Users, especially faculty members, spend less time in the library building because catalogs, indexes, reference works, ILL services, and many patron record-keeping services are online.
- Network infrastructure and delivery services/technologies make it much easier and faster for libraries to share both information about materials and the materials themselves as consortial and regional catalogs integrate the local with the remote.
- Such projects as Google Library and Open Content Alliance, as well as commercial and governmental publishers, are producing vast numbers of digitized monographic titles.
- Social networking technologies are changing communication and information-seeking and -using practices among students; in turn, students are relating differently to library spaces and collections and are prompting us to rethink pedagogies and other aspects of the ways in which colleges establish and maintain relationships with students.
- Improved portable devices and software for information/text access and reading are becoming available.

College libraries, like their university counterparts, are moving away from the familiar model of the physical "book box" library and toward the online "search-box" library. Like their university counterparts, college libraries are also asking how they can best offer access to information, and how they can most productively collaborate with partners to provide materials to their campuses. But while both research and college libraries are asking similar questions, they are likely to look to different models for answers, because they meet user needs in different ways.

Certainly models are available to colleges for "the new library" from the research library community. Given, however, the teaching mission of colleges, the fact that ARL models themselves are changing, and the increasing costs of offering the range of materials, services, and

technologies that colleges' ambitious curricula demand, we are less certain that those ARL models apply well to the college situation. Moreover, college governance structures and collegiate traditions may make it harder for college libraries to change than some others. Colleges' proximity to other large academic institutions may also play a part in local assumptions about collections. Moreover, colleges have a history of cooperating less than universities, and less of a history of forming organizations to address common interests and problems in a collective way. Most importantly, the teaching role of college collections, as well as of the staff and services around them, must fulfill the same promise of personal attention that characterizes college classrooms--librarians and libraries in colleges have to meet user needs in a way different from the large university library.

Collaboration Possibilities

Over the decades libraries have cooperated on collections for a number of reasons; in most cases, the bottom line for such cooperatives is to provide users access to a greater variety of material. The list of cultural changes noted above raises questions about and suggests intensified attention to cooperation as well as better means for accomplishing the goals of cooperative collecting. Collections cooperation has many aspects or dimensions, and not all cooperatives will or need pursue all of them. The following are typical possibilities for collections cooperatives arranged in ascending order of difficulty.

- awareness of what exists to be collected
- awareness of what is in partner collections
- privileged resource sharing, including on-site borrowing and the promise of rapid delivery
- buying expensive (printed and microform sets) and sharing them
- deaccessioning titles with knowledge of what is held in partner collections
- agreement to buy and give access to the same electronic subscriptions
- agreement to share responsibility for purchasing materials to support less-taught or marginal subjects
- agreement on which formats and types of materials to purchase (electronic or print, serials or monographs)
- aligning circulation rules and practices
- division of consortial tasks among acquisitions and cataloging staff
- using the same vendors to obtain purchasing power
- implementing access tools for searching, discovery, browsing
- housing collections in a cooperative facility
- agreement on conservation and preservation policies and practices
- retention decisions(re-selection that assumes de-duplicating older, less used materials, together with assignment of archiving responsibilities)
- deploying bibliographer expertise across the consortium
- agreement to share responsibility for acquiring "core" materials
- shared staff for managing collection processes

Best Practices

The history of cooperative collections work is long and checkered, with some of the above forms or aspects of cooperation having enjoyed greater success than others. Based on discussion with and reports from college library consortia, best practices or favorable conditions appear to be the following:

- Precursors to or conditions for successful collaboratives include:
 - Discussion of the levels and elements of cooperation (see list above) based on past experience, especially in the context of regional and state resource-sharing arrangements.
 - History of resource-sharing locally or active involvement in a regional/state resource-sharing group, that is, involvement in planning and governance of a regional resource-sharing consortium as opposed to a "passive" willingness to lend materials to regional libraries.
 - History of sharing students, faculty, or curricula among colleges; experience working together on services and programs/projects other than collections.
 - Agreement that certain things are and will be true of libraries and their collections in the future; agreement about the changing nature of collections.
 - Tolerance for change and for differences of budget, institutional culture, and personalities among partners.
 - Need for pragmatism; idealists and ideologues will have trouble with cooperation since partnerships, like politics, are the art of the possible.
 - Negotiation with users, many of them faculty, whose sense of the collection is local as opposed to collective; working pragmatically with disciplines and departments that can adopt a collective view while working toward a day when collaborative collections are the norm.
 - Belief that in most cases it does not matter where a book is located among partner libraries.
 - Proximity or a strong state or regional coordinating agency

- Technology-related collaborative activities include:
 - Having an easy way to share information about what is in collections and their circulation status; easy, "press-the-button" means for users to request items from other libraries (no online or paper forms for each item).
 - Rapid delivery services for digitized or physical documents, ideally less than 24 hours and as much to the desk top as possible; commitment to acting quickly on requests from partners.

- Policy -related elements of successful collaboratives
 - Statement about the goals for and elements of the cooperative; explicit understanding of obligations.

- Willingness to negotiate changes to local practices and policies; willingness to negotiate the local v. federal tension of a partnership.
 - Observing the same circulation policies and the same practices for inventory control (shelf reading and other systematic efforts to make sure the shelf and catalog agree; trust that what each partner says is on the shelf is on the shelf).
 - Agreement about weeding standards/practices and communication about deaccessioned titles; last copy policy or archiving agreement.
 - Agreement on preservation/conservation standards/practices to ensure long-term availability of collections.
- Staffing-related dimensions of successful collaboratives:
 - Communication structures for bibliographers and other staff; regular use of those structures for projects and daily work.
 - Interest in working together; that is, at some level believing that independence is less stimulating for staff and less productive for users than working together.
 - Leadership at all levels of the organization, not just the top; staff at all levels and in all departments must be committed to a collaborative approach to collections.

Questions for Discussion

What is the role of inter-institutional cooperation on library collections in libraries' response to the questions below:

1. How are college library collections changing in terms of their relations to other libraries' and to other sources of information; to what extent or under what circumstances is the idea of a "(local) collection" useful?
2. What is the significance of local collection size today and tomorrow?
3. What changes are occurring in the uses made of collections and in the genres and formats in the collection?
4. Are the distinctions between college and research libraries blurring? Are college libraries now effectively research libraries as curricula change and as we partner with research libraries in regional consortia? How do resource needs change as undergraduate curricula become more research intensive?
5. How are college cultures different from university cultures, and how do such differences affect library collections? How does a college's location affect library collections and the campus's understanding of how that collection should be built/maintained or how collection partnerships might operate?

6. How can we think of the library as a group of services concerned with information access as opposed to a collection of objects?
7. What assumptions do we make or practices observe that make us think about collection cooperation as a hard task? What is the role of physical collections and building spaces today? How do collections and library buildings retain a vibrant place in campus culture in an age of digitized and distributed, access-oriented collections?
8. What are the effects of new publishing models and digital scholarship on liberal education and on library collections?
9. How do collections and their discovery/access mechanisms change with the changing communication and information seeking/use patterns of today's students?
10. What new budgeting and economic models can we develop to build the "new library"? What practices for shared materials acquisitions can help us model cooperative collections work, and what are the effects of shared acquisitions on collections budgets?

Further Reading

Clement, Susanne. "Skills for Effective Participation in Consortia: Preparing for Collaborating and Collaboration," *Collection Management* 32:1/2 (2007) 191-204.