Collaboration, Advocacy, and Recruitment: Area and International Studies Librarianship Workshop

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Panel Remarks of Thomas H. Teper

I am an administrator back home in Illinois. I recognize that fact makes anything else that I say somewhat suspect, and I am comfortable with that. I am, however, a preservation librarian by training, a discipline that embodies the inherently conservative nature of librarianship. I only stumbled into administration after the fact.

As many of you know, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign faced some difficulties in recent years with respect to supporting the Area Studies. Failed tenure cases combined with a voluntary retirement program, regular attrition, and a hiring freeze took a particular toll on two areas in our library – librarians in the area studies and support personnel in the technical services. Over the last several years, we lost area studies librarians supporting Middle Eastern, South Asian, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, African Studies, and Japanese Studies, as well as professional personnel in Slavic Studies. Combined with a debilitating loss of support personnel with language expertise in acquisitions and cataloging, we were on the ropes. In the midst of this, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was setting about undoing the damage done decades earlier in the creation of the "holistic library." No longer could we support forty different libraries. Among the many changes that were

executed as part of the New Service Model program was the creation of a single International and Area Studies Library from the multiple, autonomous units that previously existed.

In response to our personnel problems, we started to improvise. Our cataloging, acquisitions, and collections management personnel set about developing project teams, workflows, and staffing profiles that would enable us to both keep up with the incoming acquisitions and address backlogs (many of which were not the sole responsibility of area studies) despite the loss of nearly thirty classified staff. With respect to the backlogs, the programs developed and executed over the last three fiscal years have enabled us to address backlogs numbering 97,510 items from East and South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and the former Soviet sphere of influence.

 In addition to tackling those, our acquisitions personnel experimented with acquiring records from third party providers, hiring temporary employees with language skills that enabled them, once trained, to process materials in more than just English, and most recently, to secure an Innovation Grant from our own Library that will enable them to develop a pilot experiment toward establishing a mechanism for sharing cataloging expertise between institutions.

We also tried some experiments that were not as successful. Robert Davis' discussion of the 2CUL model brings to mind a couple of the options that we tried. And, we learned some of the same lessons that he highlighted about what would make such programs more successful. The fact that our experiments at sharing professional expertise were not as successful as 2CUL's is doesn't bother us though. Illinois has

not been afraid to experiment when situations indicate that we should. When we do, we might not succeed. That's OK. That's how we learn.

Given that, we also know that some experiments work and, in fact, have unintended consequences. Decades ago, Illinois did two things. First, we embarked on an aggressive accessibility model – lending anything appropriate to just about anyone for minimal cost. A goal of ILL/DD has always been getting out of needing to duplicate holdings of lesser used materials. Research has demonstrated that within lending networks the size of Ohio and Illinois, there is a relatively thin margin of items that require duplication. And, research in progress at Illinois has demonstrated that collection usage for Less Commonly Taught Language Materials (LCTL) indicates that aggregated collections tied with a strong outwardly focused service arm can be an effective way of serving scholars at a distance. Indeed, nearly 60% of lending from Illinois for LCTL materials in the last five years has been to regions outside of the geographic Midwest. If the viability of minimizing duplication in networks is also to be believed (which I would be inclined to think is possible based on the 2CUL results), we have other opportunities – to collect more deeply across the networked community, to divert collective resources to the digitization of specialized materials, and to focus more attention on the types of partnerships that Marion Frank-Wilson described in her response to the initial provocations.

The second experiment at Illinois started forty years ago when we began building the Slavic Reference Service with Title VIII funding. It was envisioned as a mechanism to help scholars locate needed, hard to locate items. It has been wildly successful in helping Slavicists locate needed materials, so successful in fact, that half of its traffic comes from off-campus and a great deal of it comes from individuals at institutions with Slavic librarians – sometimes pointing them to items in collections at their home

institutions. This model remains uncommon (as it should – we don't need 20 of the same thing), but it is also a model that could be expanded to other areas of study, providing expert service to help students and scholars be more successful in their research.

I have found the discussions at this workshop to be particularly interesting and informative. Over the past two days, several points struck a chord with me, and many served to confirm my existing feelings about next steps.

- I believe (and evidence shows) that we fulfill most user needs with remotely held collections of book-type materials. By doing this and committing to sustaining the collection development resources dedicated to such acquisitions, we can collect more deeply and dedicate an increasing percentage of our resources toward more specialized resources and services.
- I that we have a robust history of collaboration in the Area Studies, and I believe that our ILL/DD networks can support models in which very few institutions service the bulk of the area studies collections in any particular subject/language area.
- I believe that we need to experiment, and I believe that we need to be comfortable with the results being somewhat less than optimal in some cases.

Peter Zhou response mentioned the challenge of developing fair, cost effective, efficient models for collection development among all partners when we seek broader collaboration. That is a challenge that we should accept. However, it is also one that we should acknowledge from the get-go will not likely achieve all of those goals the first time around. But, if we commit to supporting the experimentation, we might achieve much more than we ever would have otherwise.