

ACCESS VS. OWNERSHIP IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

The author briefly states the reasons that access vs. ownership is a concern in academic libraries in the United States in the 1990's. Ways of coping with increasing serial costs and computer technology are discussed at length, and examples of successful strategies are given: cooperative collection development, interlibrary loan, and commercial document delivery. Copyright issues in regards to the above strategies are also discussed. The author concludes by summarizing the key factors needed for the successful and effective resolution of the access question.

While "access versus ownership" is an issue which has come to the fore in the library world over the past twenty-five to thirty years, similar concepts, such as resource sharing, call back to the beginning of contemporary librarianship. In the June, 1886 issue of *Library Notes* Melvil Dewey, speaking of the "modern library movement" of his time, said that there should be "a practical means of bringing the enormous benefits of cooperation, which has been the watch word of the whole movement, into full play in the interests of the libraries" (quoted in Gribbin 1974, 105). Jumping ahead almost ninety years, two articles by DeGennaro (1975) and Schmidt (1975) referred directly to "access versus ownership". In one, DeGennaro stated, "The traditional emphasis on developing large research collections must be shifted toward developing excellent local working collections and truly effective means of gaining access to needed research materials..." (quoted in Hoadley 1993, 192). What caused Dewey's "watch word" to become DeGennaro's necessity?

A confluence of many factors has forced this issue to the forefront in academic libraries. The publication explosion is taking its toll. For these libraries, which often desire to collect comprehensively in many subject areas, it is estimated that they can only acquire between five and seven percent of the output of publishers' worldwide (Dougherty 1988, 289). At a time when publication prices are rising at a rate much higher than inflation, library budgets are shrinking. Books printed in the United States in 1982 were over three and a half times more expensive than in 1967, and foreign books were up over four and a half times. This when the Consumer Price Index was only up two and a half times (Moran 1984, 63). Serial prices were over five times their base cost during this same time period (up 14.5 percent in 1981 alone (Holicky 1984, 147)). Ownership of all relevant research materials is out of reach of even the most well-funded libraries.

Technology has also played a part in hastening this crisis. With the advent of online catalogs, online indices, and the Internet, more and more students and faculty can peruse the plethora of sources which exist "out there". With fax machines, scanning, electronic journals, and full text databases, they are demanding what they see "out there" to be "here" - "now"!

By 1972 these converging factors helped to cause a flowering of over 125 academic library consortia, of which 96 were established between 1966 and 1970 (Gribbin 1974, 105). "Resource sharing", in its many guises of reciprocal borrowing privileges, cooperative collection development, interlibrary loan, as well as commercial document delivery and full text electronic access, continues to be experimented with, to varying degrees, by university libraries, and with varying degrees of success.

Cooperative collection development (CCD) is a specific type of resource sharing. Member libraries maintain a core collection of materials at each of their respective libraries and agree to build collections in certain peripheral subject areas (of common interest), which will be inter-loaned to other member libraries. As a result, non-core material budgets can potentially be increased by not duplicating non-essential purchases. CCD goes back at least to 1866 when nine Chicago seminary libraries instituted such an agreement (Cochenour and Rustein 1993, 35). Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill began an agreement in 1933 which is still in operation; the now defunct Farmington plan was begun in 1947, and the famous RLG (Research Libraries Group) brought together Columbia, Harvard, Yale and the New York Public Library in 1974.

Historically, most of the literature on CCD, while extolling the “virtues” of the “theory”, has been rather short on its practicality. Robert F. Munn, the former Dean of Library Services at West Virginia University, is one of the few who saw no hope at all that cooperative collecting would aid libraries in their current collection dilemma. In his 1986 article “Cooperation Will Not Save Us”, he states that the overexpansion and needless duplication of graduate programs in the 1960’s and 1970’s has led universities to their present predicament. By way of an answer to the problem, he quotes from Richard Dougherty’s 1972 article “The Paradoxes of Library Cooperation”, when he says, “Really major subject specialization among university libraries can occur only if it is parallel with specialization among the universities themselves” (Munn 1986, 167). This analysis ignores two important factors: 1) the geographic limitations of students to any university; 2) universities respond, albeit slowly, to “market pressures” in that students will not continue to enroll in non-desirable areas.

While it is true that many cooperative collection schemes fail, it is also true that some succeed. One example is that of Marylhurst College and Mount Angel Abbey Libraries in northwest Oregon. They explored the possibility of sharing collection responsibilities by first assessing their patrons’ needs and their current collections. After careful analysis they found specific areas of fruitful partnership and created CHARM - the “Cooperative Holdings in Art, Religion and Music” (Hamilton and Feiss 1989, 9). Another successful joint collecting plan is the “Northwest Regional Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies”, developed by the University of British Columbia, the University of Washington, and the University of Oregon (Ritter 1991, 367). Cooperation occurs by British Columbia collecting materials on Indonesia, Oregon collecting on the Philippines, and Washington collecting the remainder of mainland Southeast Asia. What makes these projects work while others fail? Are there any key characteristics of these successful arrangements?

There are some characteristics which most ongoing CCD plans share (Cochenour and Rustein 1993; Thompson 1992). Several of them are physical in nature. The institutions should possess a common database and be in close proximity in order to facilitate interlibrary loan. Standardization is important in various computer protocols and in the interlibrary loan and document delivery procedures. User needs must be assessed, especially in light of all of the collections involved. This is where the RLG Conspectus (online or in CD-ROM format) can prove to be useful. Using it, each university can analyze their collections compared to other institutions which offer the same majors in order to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. Sandra Scott, of the Three Rivers Library System in Colorado, refers to a three year cycle in developing cooperative goals and processes. In the first year, organizations must design the overall framework for studying the possibilities for cooperation among their institutions. In the second year, user needs and conspectus-like collection data should be collected. In the third year, analysis of the data should allow the team to make meaningful decisions and set attainable goals (Scott 1992, 5).

There are also human considerations which are attended to in successful cooperative collecting ventures. Foremost is the fact that these collaborative ventures can be extremely political and sensitive areas. Richard Dougherty (1988) points out that,

There is a fear among faculty that, over time, such programs of divided collection responsibility will diminish the luster of their own program’s reputation and could ultimately influence academic decisions regarding appointments, promotions, and tenure. (289)

Communication is essential between all levels in each university and between the various institutions. The cooperative goals need to be incorporated into the general goals of each university, and administrators, from boards of directors on down, must integrate these new ideas. As much as possible, the CCD should be handled by existing librarians, and a central staff should be developed to coordinate the process. It is essential that librarians provide leadership and direction in the overall process, both because of their expertise in the field and their ultimate responsibility in making the cooperation succeed.

Dougherty also points to another hurdle which is faced by members of consortia: that of traditional measures of performance and success in libraries. One major, and easily measurable, benchmark for libraries has been "the number of volumes", or, in the case of serials, "the number of titles", in a collection. With cooperation, while access to volumes increases, the immediate ownership of volumes decreases. This can lead to consternation in those concerned with evaluation and accreditation. Dougherty goes on to say,

Many librarians and academic officials still subscribe to a 'more-is-better' philosophy. When evaluating resource sharing programs, however, greater emphasis might be more usefully placed on criteria such as user satisfaction, speed of delivery, and transaction costs rather than on the sheer volume of transactions. (288)

Even when volumes are "owned" some studies have shown between one-third and one-half of searches are "non-productive", in that while the material sought exists on the shelves, the person desiring it fails to find it (Shaughnessy 1991, 3). Clearly the ideas of quality and quantity need to be redefined, especially where cooperative collection development is concerned. {1}

Interlibrary loan (ILL) is another area of resource sharing which gives libraries access to unowned materials. ILL is used by itself or in conjunction with CCD. The ILLINET Online system in Illinois supports ILL with the online catalogs of thirty-eight member libraries which have reciprocal borrowing privileges. In 1990, 523,420 ILL transactions occurred among the over 800 libraries which have access to ILLINET (Brown 1992, 142).

If reciprocal borrowing privileges do not exist then cost is a factor in owning or accessing via ILL. A study was conducted at Columbia University from 1990-1992 in the areas of ILL related to Biology, Physics, and Electrical Engineering. The cost of owning the borrowed monographs was computed to be an average of five times greater than borrowing them (Ferguson and Kehoe 1993, 93). The "cost" included only the purchase price and the costs of acquisition and cataloging of the materials, not subsequent storage and preservation. The price of copying articles and acquiring them via ILL varied with the number of times a title was asked for - twenty-one times more expensive to subscribe to if it was only borrowed once a year; eleven times greater to own if asked for twice, and twice as expensive to purchase if asked for ten or more times (93). In a 1968 study performed at the Center for Research Libraries, it was found that,

...unless the title is used more than about six times a year, it is less expensive for the library to acquire a photocopy of articles from it [ILL] when needed than to maintain its own subscription. (Williams 1968, quoted in Hoadley 1993, 194)

Whatever figure is used, it would seem that ILL can save a library a good deal of money, especially for items which are more peripheral to the foci of an institution's primary research.

One must not lose sight of the human factor - the library patron. How much are patrons willing to substitute a book in the future for a book now? A 1979 study found that 64% of students and faculty felt they needed their materials in two days or less, 23% found three to four days acceptable, and 12% would agree to one to two weeks (Hacken 1992, 18). When the Purdue University Calumet Library cut \$25,000 worth of esoteric periodicals from their subscription list, many of the faculty reacted very emotionally and territorially. The librarians ameliorated the situation with plenty of dialogue and "free" ILL, which only ended up costing \$7,000 (Holicky 1984, 147).

Commercial document delivery service (CDDS) is another way of accessing information. It has been defined as,

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...the purchase of photocopies, usually of journal articles, from document delivery suppliers, whether they are libraries or commercial firms. Suppliers process requests rapidly, usually within twenty-four hours. Articles are sent by the most efficient available delivery methods, and materials are supplied either to libraries or directly to end-users. (Jackson 1993, 610)

Some suppliers include CARL Uncover, OCLC Dispatch Service, Article Express, Faxon Research Services, and the RLG's ARIEL. The Association of Research Libraries statistics for 1993 state that CDDS is a \$60 to \$70 million business, as compared to \$800 million to \$1 billion for journal subscriptions (Jackson 1993, 611).

CDDS is no panacea, as each institution and situation is unique. There are a host of questions to be answered and decisions to be made by the librarians in order for CDDS to work effectively (Jackson 1993, 612-3). The turnaround time and delivery options of the service are critical for the same patron/time related factors of ILL above. What the service covers (i.e. popular or scholarly journals, in English or foreign languages), and their historical fill rate are also important to ascertain. How the orders are to be placed (via OCLC, RLIN, phone or fax) and by whom (by the patrons or with the intercession of librarians) also need to be coordinated with the capabilities of the library and its users.

Technical and equipment related questions also abound. The cost of hardware, software, and user training needs to be factored into fixed costs. How much of the equipment is unique to CDDS and dedicated only to that function, and how much is "off the shelf" and flexible? The current user base for the same system is a factor, especially if one will be limited to sending and receiving information from only the members of the same service due to software and hardware incompatibilities.

The RLG's CitaDel/Ariel system is one example of document delivery systems currently used by libraries. CitaDel is comprised of citations and abstracts from popular sources (ABI/Inform, Newspapers Abstracts etc.) and scholarly sources (PAIS, Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals, etc.). The libraries must be able to access RLIN, and purchase software (\$479 in 1993), in order to use the ARIEL document delivery portion of the service. Over 1,000 libraries worldwide use ARIEL, and it is also used by UMI, Faxon and Article Express (Jackson 1993, 614). Combined with the facts that the software is easy to learn and easy to use, and is Z39.50 compatible, it is a good choice for many institutions looking at CDDS to supplement the materials they physically own.

One consideration which librarians need to keep in mind with CCD, ILL and CDDS is the issue of copyright. Mary Brandt Jensen (1993) notes,

According to the Supreme Court, 'The sole interest in the United States and the primary object in conferring the [copyright] monopoly lie in the general benefit derived by the public from the labor of authors'. If a particular activity, such as making information more generally available in a useful format, benefits the public, it ought to be permitted *upon reasonable compensation to the copyright holder*. (642, emphasis added)

Jensen points out that when serial subscriptions are canceled by libraries in a consortium, with the agreement of copies being provided upon request, the author's copyright could be considered infringed, and compensation due (635). Conversion to electronic form (as is done in many document delivery situations) is considered reproduction, and, again, the author is due compensation (637). With electronic journals becoming more and more popular, the issue of copyright becomes more relevant daily. If easy methods of calculating royalties are not found soon, Jensen concludes that "copyright law will continue to be a major stumbling block in building and using the electronic information base necessary for a library without walls" (642).

In this last decade of the twentieth century a turning point for many academic libraries is being reached. Budget austerity, the publishing explosion, and computerization are all conspiring to turn the old "guardians of the collection" into the new "accessors of information". Accessing can succeed in completing ownership in a library's collection. The technology is here, successful models exist, and soon the important copyright issues, which this new accessibility is engendering, will be resolved.

Cooperation usually doesn't work just because people think it is good, or because it can theoretically work. Cooperation works because people need, usually for financial reasons, to cooperate. The human factors - the patron base, user needs, institutional politics, and member's personalities - are critical to the success of any cooperative venture. In his paper "Information System Design: A Case Study in the Generation of Innovations", Calabrese and Acker (1987) argue that "action research" should be used in studying the social effects of new systems on the participants; and the sooner in the design of the system, the better. And rightly so. The "best" system can be created, but if people do not use it, for whatever reason, then it's value goes unrealized. As John H. Gribbin (1974) offers in his article "Interlibrary Cooperation and Collection Building", "Human acceptance and cooperation themselves constitute a condition for success and require perhaps as much or more attention than the technology" (115).

NOTES

{1} The Center for Research Libraries has created a unique CCD arrangement. They maintain a collection of periodicals for their member's use, which are "jointly owned" by all of the members. It is estimated that a CRL member receives from \$26 to \$52 of "return" for every \$1 spent (Boylan 1992, 137).

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