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Library Profile

Cornell University Library

Column Editor: **Roger Williams** (Input Culture) <73612.242@compuserve.com>

Column editor's note: This is the first of a series of profiles we are planning that will be based on interviews and documentation provided by a featured library. We are interested in hearing from as many of you as possible. Write Roger Williams, Managing Director, Input Culture, 5927 Fausold Road, Valois, NY 14888. Phone 607-546-8576, fax 607-546-2219; email <73612.242@com-puserve.com>. — RW

We visited recently with **Scott Wicks**, who heads up the twenty-four-member team of acquisition staff for the endowed-side libraries which are served by the Central Technical Services Department at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. His office is located in the John M. Olin Library, atop East Hill overlooking Cayuga Lake. This graduate-level research library built in the 1960s now closes one end of the previously three-sided "quadrangle" of original federal style stone buildings. One of these, Morrill Hall, just a couple of doors down from Olin, housed the university's first library.

When they collaborated in the mid nineteenth century to build a new university, **Andrew D. White** and **Ezra Cornell** intended to establish "an institution where any person can find instruction in any study." Their ambitious plan and a combination of private and state funding produced a major university named after Cornell; but it was White, who was the motivating force behind a university library of similar scale and scope. A booklover and collector, White deemed a large library "absolutely necessary to the efficiency of the various departments," and he warned that without it members of the university community "will be frequently plodding in old circles and stumbling into old errors." In 1868, when the first students arrived, the university's library was entrusted to Morrill, the only building in the Arts Quadrangle to have its roof. Its two rooms boasted a collection of 18,000 volumes. Today, Cornell's collections are among the twelve largest in the country. They comprise more than five and a half million books and serial volumes and six and a half million microforms. These and approximately 53 thousand cubic feet of manuscripts occupy some 880,000 linear feet in shelving capacity.

A land grant as well as a private institution, Cornell University's state-funded mission included education for the practical as well as the scholarly life. This public-private division of the university's academic life is reflected in the current structure of its library acquisitions. Acquisitions for the eleven unit libraries serving the endowed schools is carried out in a unified process. Libraries for the state-funded schools are responsible for budgeting and managing their respective processes. Overall, Cornell University acquires about a hundred thousand new volumes each year and adds about 2,000 new serials, about twice as many as it discontinues.

Like their counterparts in other university libraries, Scott's teams oversee day-to-day operations of acquisitions, at the same time contending with shrinking budgets and expanding technologies. Budget cuts over the past few years have required some cutting of staff, but Scott reports that he's been fortunate and was able to accomplish these

reductions through attrition. He points out, however, that the loss of positions has in some cases diminished services; for instance, centralization of payment for approval materials has made it more difficult to track acquisitions according to detailed subject area.

At Cornell just as at other large research institutions, acquisitions are occurring in two modes. Scott and his staff obtain materials in conventional formats — print, microform, packaged media — via **NOTIS** automated ordering procedures, and increasingly, they are working through the challenges of offering materials to library users online.

For materials in conventional formats, the collection building process begins with specialist bibliographers, who work within individual budgets to recommend titles in their areas of expertise. The acquisitions staff then codes these "orders" to initiate a series of online and system-wide searches. The orders go to the Searching/Fastcat unit (searching and fast cataloging) to create a basic MARC record.

Scott reports that **NOTIS**, the mainframe system the university is using in version 6.0, continues to serve its purposes well, although the university is keeping an eye on the development of new server-based systems. "We've taken a peek and decided there was nothing ready for us," he says. "We'll see again in 1997 how things look."

When it comes to acquisition of electronic resources,

Scott says the tasks are new and the procedures far from routine. The goal is to offer the user access through a single point of entry and, from there, a seamless interface that allows the user to search catalogs, indexes, abstracting services and to obtain fulltext materials. The University Library has made some progress toward this, primarily in the search function. The Cornell University Library homepage on the Internet <<http://www.cornell.edu:3002/library/cul.html>> provides a guide to the libraries'

electronic resources, and from computers in the libraries or in authorized users' homes and offices. Authorized users can log on to search journal indexes, abstracts, and a number of databases in fields such as art, architecture, biology, business, and engineering.

The actual provision of materials and online publishing is a new endeavor, and Scott says he and others in the system are proceeding with caution. Central concerns are archiving and the increasing complexity of copyright issues. He now spends a good deal of time negotiating licensing agreements with publishers. He finds this challenging because communication by computer has made many standard terms and provisions obsolete. "Who is an authorized user?" he asks. "What is a site?" Aware of a general initiative within the library community to develop a set of standards for these agreements, he says he and others in the system are wary of provisions that might be considered to set precedent which might impede the Library's ability to fulfill its mission. He notes with humor that because the technologies are expanding so rapidly, any agreement to control use of material becomes "a dart thrown at a moving car," and he expects the online revolution will continue to keep electronic resources near the top of his agenda at Cornell. 🐜

