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Cooperative Collection Development in Consortium of College Libraries: The CONSORT Experience

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Column Editor's Note: While cooperative collection development is not new, it is always highly challenging, from finding time and money, to resolving disparate visions of the goals. How does a major cooperative collection development project even get off the ground? In the first of two articles, Margo Warner Curl, Coordinator of Cooperative Collection Development, CONSORT Colleges, describes how four Ohio Libraries found a way to begin a cooperative collection development program, and her early efforts, as Coordinator of the project, to clarify goals. This article is followed by a second article by Margo on the grant-funded collection assessment of the CONSORT Collections. — MF

Background

The **Five Colleges of Ohio Consortium** was formed in 1995 with **Denison University, Kenyon College, Oberlin College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and The College of Wooster**. In 1996 four of the college libraries (excluding **Oberlin**) merged their online systems into a shared online catalog called **CONSORT**. At the same time, the **CONSORT** libraries became a group member of **OhioLINK**, and have enjoyed the benefits of access to electronic resources and direct patron borrowing.

Since the formation of the **Five Colleges of Ohio** and of **CONSORT** there have been a number of library discussions and projects underway — some including **Oberlin**, some not — in the areas of cataloging, government documents, information literacy, collection development, circulation, AV & Media.

Three things converged in late 2000. First, the directors of the **CONSORT Libraries** had asked their collection development librarians to come up with a written cooperative collection development plan in order to push us into thinking more towards cooperative efforts, and a draft plan was submitted in September of that year. Second, for several years the directors of the **Five Colleges of Ohio** had been considering options for shared storage space for lesser-used materials. That fall they learned of the availability of space in what had been a public library close to **Denison University**. Third, the directors learned of funds available through the **Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA)** from the **Andrew W. Mellon** foundation for cooperative library projects.

Cooperative Collection Development Project

A grant proposal was submitted by the four **CONSORT** libraries to the **GLCA** for "Cooperative Collection Development to Enhance the Liberal Arts College Library" in October 2000. The purpose of the grant for the libraries was to maximize the strength, currency, and diversity of both the individual and the consortial collections and to reduce the need for building additional library materials space on any of the campuses. Funding was received to start early 2001, primarily for costs associated with storage, personnel, and collection analysis. I was appointed as Coordinator starting July 1, 2001.

During my first six months on the job, I did a lot of background reading on collection development, cooperative collection development, and collection analysis. I also met with each library director to learn what he or she expected of the grant; and I met with each collection development liaison librarian to get a better sense of the nature of the collections and collection development practices at the four institutions.

It became apparent, both to respond to the varying degrees of understanding about collection development and various opinions on the purpose of the cooperative project, and for the long term viability of cooperative activity, that we needed some sort of statement of purpose or guiding principles. Such a statement was drafted, discussed, and revised over the course of several months, and finally adopted in May 2002.¹ The **Collection Development Subcommittee**, with a representative from each campus, is now working on translating the intent of this statement into new policies and practices.

Another early struggle I had was in finding a way to deal with my need to apply some sort of organization to the activities and to help clarify what was being accomplished. It came to me that our activities fall into three spheres: the past, the present and the future.

The first sphere, the *Past*, includes older materials, storage, deselection and weeding. When materials were first transferred to our shared storage facility, **CONStor**, a *Memorandum of Understanding*² regarding ownership of materials was drafted and approved by the chief financial officers in order to clarify legal ownership materials. This memorandum included a statement regarding last copy items, so then we created a

last copy policy and procedure statement. We had earlier set up a library of record policy regarding print runs of **JSTOR** titles, but with the establishment of the storage facility, the library of record essentially became the first library to send a periodical run there. To help us identify titles that could be deselected (either sent to **CONStor** or withdrawn), we contracted for *WeedList*³ analyses of our individual collections. The documents librarians at the four libraries have selected several federal "dead agencies" which they are inventorying for completeness and condition, with the intent of moving to **CONStor** as complete a collection, and in the best condition, as possible.

The second sphere, the *Present*, includes activities and projects related to current collections. We have done a considerable amount of collection analysis in order to understand existing collections and collecting practices and to determine particularly strong and weak collections. I hope to talk about some of the things that we are learning in a future article in *Against the Grain*. We are also working towards more liberalized circulation policies. Starting in January 2002, faculty at **CONSORT** institutions have been able to borrow other **CONSORT** materials for a full semester, renewable for an additional semester. We are hoping this fall to permit limited use of material from other **CONSORT** libraries for Reserves, but selling this is a bigger political challenge.

The third sphere, the *Future*, deals with future collecting — some of which quickly becomes the present collection. We are working with **YBP Library Services** to develop a shared approval plan in the areas of Asian Studies, Play scripts, and Exhibition Catalogs.⁴ A profile was developed and is currently being refined. I hope to report on this when we have made more progress with it. We will be looking into other types of shared plans from other sources and also at such things as series, standing orders, and non-book materials.

We are open to new ideas in all three of these spheres and are also looking at ways we can advocate increased use of existing collections.

Results

So, now one year into the three year grant, where do we stand? Will this project have met the original goals? Will this project have maximized the strength, currency, and diversity of the individual collections and the shared collection? It will at least be moving us in that direction. Will it have reduced the need to build

continued on page 54

Cooperative Collection ... from page 65

additional library materials space on the individual campuses? Yes, this is a clear outcome.

What issues are current challenges? Staffing is one. Can such cooperation continue without a person to guide it? It may be possible, but any such activity would require very strong commitment from all library directors, be much more difficult, and move more slowly. It also takes staff time of librarians to interpret and use the data, to consider issues of policy, and to consider changing local routines to incorporate looking at the consortium as a whole. It takes staff time in technical services and circulation to consider materials for deselection and weeding, to process materials for storage, and to improve turn-around time for materials requested by patrons. The other perennial challenge is politics. Even though the four institutions are similar as selective undergraduate liberal arts colleges, there are differences in history and culture among the libraries and the institutions. Our budget cycles and expenditure controls are dif-

ferent. Some libraries allocate funds by discipline, others don't; in some the faculty have much more control over library material funds than in others, etc. Then there are those pesky disciplinary differences in attitudes towards keeping print material on the shelves where students might browse or in the acceptance of resources in forms other than print.

Another challenge is the question: can this serve as a model for other consortia, **OhioLINK** particularly?²⁵ The issue of having staff time to devote to moving such a project forward is certainly one to consider. Our **CONSORT** project is also working on projects very much at the "micro" level, which would be very difficult to sustain on a larger scale.

In spite of these challenges, I am confident that at the end of the three years of the grant, we will have strong guiding policies in place, a good understanding of the characteristics of the individual collections and the consortial whole, and some model projects underway with others that can be worked in as we continue on the path of cooperation.

Endnotes

1. This statement can be seen at the project Website at: <http://www.wooster.edu/library/oh5/cccd>.
2. Also on the project Website.
3. See Farber, Evan Ira, "Books Not for College Libraries," *Library Journal* 122, no. 13 (August 1997): 44-45. Service now available from Paratext (www.paratext.com).
4. We had worked with David Swords in the late '90s on trying to develop a shared plan for the Five Colleges in the area of Philosophy. This project was dropped, but YPB was anxious to continue to work with us on testing a shared plan. The **CONSORT** colleges selected these areas after Michael Zeoli, our YBP Library Services representative, had met with collection development folks at each campus and the Collection Development Subcommittee had discussed possibilities. Next year we will be further in the process and I should be able to report more fully about it then.
5. Our cooperative project is being watched very closely by OhioLINK, and it is hoped that some of our activities might serve as models for statewide cooperation in Ohio.

Bix of Acq — Part II

Collection Assessment of the **CONSORT** Collections

by **Margo Warner Curl** (Coordinator of Cooperative Collection Development, **CONSORT** Colleges, c/o The College of Wooster Libraries, Wooster OH 44691; Phone: 330-263-2056) <mcurl@wooster.edu>

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Column Editor's Note: In *Margo Warner Curl's* second article she describes the collection assessment performed as a preliminary step in getting a cooperative collection development program off the ground. The information in her article and her lessons learned will be essential to anyone embarking on a major collection assessment project. *Margo's* frank admission that she would do things differently if she were starting over is refreshing and highly informative. The pitfalls to avoid may be more valuable than "best practices." —**MF**

Background

The previous article gave a general overview of the **CONSORT** cooperative collection development project. One major component of the first year of the grant has been collection assessment, as a portion of the grant funds were designated for specific assessment services and I was curious as to whether various assessment methods discussed in the literature of librarianship would really tell us anything about our collections. In this article, I'll describe what collection assessment has been done to date as a part of our project, and share some of the most obvious preliminary findings. We are only be-

ginning to look more closely at the results of the various assessments.

Collection Assessment

To help us identify titles that could be deselected (either sent to our storage facility, **CONStor**, or withdrawn), we contracted for *WeedList*¹ which is based on an idea of **Evan Farber**. He created a list of titles that he called "Books Not For College Libraries," — titles that had been in earlier editions of *BCL* but were not included in the latest (3d) edition. The commercial service compares the titles in a library's database to this list and produces a list of matching titles. The library then gets a simple spreadsheet file and printouts sorted by LC call number giving call number, author, title, and imprint. We also had them include our online system item record number to make it easier to check or link to the record in **CONSORT**. Each library has received a printout of the results. Only one of the libraries has been anxious to use this tool for a portion of their collection, but now all have it and can use it as they wish.

Assessment of our collection by the **OCLC/WLN ACAS List Comparison Service**² was also funded by the grant. The holdings of the four individual collections and the consortial

collection as a whole were compared with two lists: *Books for College Libraries*, 3d ed., and *Choice Magazine's* "Outstanding Academic Titles." We wanted to learn if the individual libraries were developing their own collections according to local goals and criteria and to identify areas of strength and weakness in the individual and consortial collections. A file of all non-document print monographs was sent for analysis (depository items, non-book materials, and serial items were excluded). The results came as files sorted by conspectus subject areas and listing individual bibliographic information in three main files of matches (titles that match), close matches (titles that are a close match in terms of LC card number, author and title), and missing (titles listed in the standard lists but not held); and with summary counts for each set. The most obvious information from the data is that we can provide many more resources consortially (average of 78% of titles matched) than we can individually (averages ranging from 43% to 52% of titles matched).³

While we were waiting for the results from the above list comparison service, I met individually with each of the subject liaisons at the four campuses, in part to try to apply conspec-

continued on page 56