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Biz of Acq -- Part II -- Collection Assessment of the CONSORT Collections

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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-

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tus collection level goals⁴ to the various subject areas at each campus. This was not very successful as some folks were not used to thinking of the collections in this way or had little experience with collection development. Another approach I tried was to use the lists provided by **Howard D. White**.⁵ A check of the titles in the four lists included in this monograph also indicates that we are much stronger collectively than individually (e.g. for Cultural Anthropology, Instructional Level, the individual library totals range from 30-50%, but consortially we hold 80% of titles listed). **White's** examples provide a handy and easy tool to use in assessing collection levels and it would be useful, at least for smaller libraries such as ours, to have readily available lists for all disciplines.

The three types of analyses that could be obtained fairly easily from **CONSORT**, our **Innovative Interfaces, Inc.** online catalog were: holdings, age of collection, and circulation counts. Would this data tell us anything about our individual and consortial collections? Are the individual collections particularly strong or weak in any area(s) that then might be used as a starting point for future cooperative projects? Is the age of materials in specific subject areas appropriate for that discipline and that library? Do we have recent materials in areas of recent scholarship and interest? How much do our circulating materials get used and is there any particular pattern by discipline or institution? These are all questions that I hoped such analyses might answer for us.

Total holdings by item count (copy level data) was obtained by running lists in the create lists function of the **Innopac** system of all items

held up to a specific date (June 30, 2001) and then running these lists through the conspectus statistical call number table (**SCAT**) that had been set up when we first merged our records into a shared online system. There is not a great deal of difference in holdings between the four collections overall: two libraries are about the same size, one library has about 18,000 more items than these two, the other about 18,000 fewer. There are small differences in counts of the individual subject areas.

Age of collection was determined through a report available through the **Web Management Reports** function. This report is based on the first date in the imprint of the bibliographic record (title level data) and gives counts for each decade by **SCAT** category. These results have been particularly revealing as they show that one library has a much smaller percent of its collection added since 1990 on as compared to the other three. This corresponds with a reduction in the allocation for monograph purchases at this library, and the director has now used this data to request an increase in this budget line for the 2002/2003 fiscal year.

Circulation counts were obtained in two different ways: one through the create lists function of all items that have circulated at least once and then running this list through the **SCAT** analysis; the other through the **Web Management Reports**. Also through the **Web Management Reports** we can get data on home library of borrower for circulation from both **CONSORT** and **OhioLINK** patrons. Some summary results may be seen at our project Website.⁶ The circulation rates show us as falling slightly lower than the 51.63% cited in the Pittsburgh Study;⁷ 41.54% of **CONSORT** items circulated during the approximate 6-year period since the formation of **CONSORT** to 6/30/01 and 46.57% non-document circulating monographs circulated. Individual institution rates vary from 34.4% to 49.1% of total collections circulated. At the subject level, HQ, Marriage & Family, shows the highest rate with 72.29% of the collection circulating.

Concern was expressed by several of our library directors that there is too much duplication among the four collections, particularly in current purchasing. Overall there are 1.41 items per bibliographic record — this includes monographs and serials with multiple copies and multiple volumes that may be at a single institution or at several institutions. In order to determine duplication in current purchasing, I took a sample of print titles purchased in a recent three-month period, and determined that among this sample, there were 1.66 copies per title (which, if I did my calculations and sample size correctly, is at a 99% confidence level of being within .1 copy per title). We quickly realized that the duplication figures have very little meaning by themselves, and raise a lot of questions. This prompted my interest in some wider discussion on the topic, and there was a panel discussion on the topic at the **2002 Charleston Conference**.

A quick comparison of the results of two or more assessment methods shows that we are likely to find areas in which more could be moved to storage (age & circulation) and in

which we should be doing more purchasing of current materials (holdings & circulation, list comparison & circulation).

Assessment Lessons

What I've learned so far has more to do with the process of collection analysis and data gathering and less from the data itself; lessons that others probably learned long ago. It takes time to gather data and costs a lot to outsource, it takes time and attention to interpret the results, and the results have political impact. What I did locally was kind of a fishing expedition and I would do things differently if I started now.

Gathering data is costly in terms of time and money. If I were to start over now, I would start with a better sense of what was needed and why, of what skills were needed to manipulate and analyze the data, and try to be up on the very latest assessment methods in general use in the academic library community. With a few exceptions, I did not take the time to figure out what we really wanted and why before we started, nor did I (or we) have any sense of what would be sufficient information. I used the full conspectus subject/call number categories for most of the data, but in some cases simple summaries by broad call number categories would have been sufficient and taken less time. Also, being able to perform and interpret some statistical methods beyond the basic mean, median and mode would make it possible for me to get additional useful information from the data.

Since we started our project last year there have been some new efforts toward standardizing data gathering goals and procedures which were reported at the **Summer 2002 ALA Conference** program, "Measuring the New Measures: What are the Implications for Collection Management?"⁸ There has also been some informal discussion among some **Oberlin Group Library** members about setting up some standard measures for comparing collections.⁹ These methods should be considered for any future assessment.

Interpreting the data is going to take more time and effort because staff from the individual libraries need to be the ones to do it and it is hard for all to squeeze in one more activity. To help the librarians and individual libraries deal with this mass of data, separate reports for each broad subject area were created. For example, a report was created for Religion that includes summary data of the individual collections and consortial whole for the call number categories of BL-BX of holdings counts, age of collection, **OCLC** list comparison summary data, and circulation counts. These summaries are being made available to our consortium librarians through electronic reserves on a password-protected dummy course listing. It is hoped that librarians at each of the member institutions will have time to study these more closely to see if the figures reflect perceptions of the collection and provide information to guide them in confirming or changing purchasing patterns.

There are always some quick to see political implications in the data. In our case, it has become necessary to emphasize that the

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Endnotes

1. Service now called Library Dynamics Shelvespace Reclamation Program, available from Paratext <http://www.paratext.com>.
2. See <http://www.oclc.org/western/products/aca/bcl3.htm>.
3. See http://www.wooster.edu/library/oh5/cccd/CCCD_Data_BCL3.pdf and http://www.wooster.edu/library/oh5/cccd/CCCD_Data_OAT.pdf for summary results.
4. One Website listing these is at Oberlin College: <http://www.oberlin.edu/library/colldev/policies/CollDevPolLevels.html>.
5. White, Howard D. *Brief Tests of Collection Strength: A Methodology for All Types of Libraries*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995.
6. See at <http://www.wooster.edu/library/oh5/cccd/>.
7. Kent, Allen, et. al. *Use of Library materials: the University of Pittsburgh Study*. New York: Marcel Dekker, 1979. p.12.
8. See at <http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas/newmeas.html>.
9. Linda Bills, TriColleges of Pennsylvania, private communication on a discussion at the 2002 Innovative Users Group Meeting of Oberlin Group members who are also customers.

Between the Stacks: The Emergence of a New Library Community

by Allen Williams, MLIS (Founder, Between the Stacks, Sunnyvale, CA)

Library science professionals all know that the Internet is a powerful and easy way to aggregate and disseminate information. Oddly enough, I have tried for years to locate a place on the Internet where members of our field could congregate. I envisioned a Website where all sorts of individuals could freely come and go, ask questions and share their work experiences. The site would be a casual yet informative oasis where we could find support from other library science professionals around the world. Late one night in November 2002, unemployed and needing a creative outlet, I decided to take action and create what I could not find.

To my knowledge, **Between the Stacks** (www.betweenthestacks.com) is the first online discussion site created exclusively for library and information science (LIS) professionals. Containing a series of online forums where everyone from library students to library directors may gather, the site creates a common ground for discussing issues, sharing ideas or chatting with a fellow colleague. Still in its infancy, the site is growing steadily with an international membership of nearly 200 registered users to date.

In an attempt to be all-inclusive, forum topics run the gamut and include specific areas for academic libraries, public libraries, special libraries, government libraries, school libraries, archives, medical libraries, competitive intelligence, LIS students, LIS instructors and even a place to post your job announcements. Discussion areas also include off-topic sections such as "Rant & Relax" where you can talk (i.e. vent) about your workday or "The Book Nook" to discuss a book you recently read.

You might be wondering, but what is a "forum?" Although a common form of online discussion, it seems to be a newer concept for members of our profession. We are familiar with listservs and how they function, but the discussion forum differs in some respects and provides a broader discussion platform. You simply visit the Website and review the threads of discussion. Once you have registered, you may post questions or join a thread of discussion. New discussions occur everyday and site users are finding that they check the forums each day to participate in the latest discussions.

The discussion forum format allows you to be selective in what you read. You go to it when you have time, instead of having its contents forced into your ever-growing inbox. Everything is nicely categorized and you can quickly view new posts since your last visit. My favorite feature though is that forums allow for a greater range of personal expression and anonymously if you so chose. You can express your opinions freely without the fear that your colleagues will stone you during your lunch break.

Throughout college I utilized discussion forums for a variety of uses — for hobbies and personal interests. The site utilizes open source software that is both powerful and easy to use. Site functionality allows for seeing who is online at any given time and the ability to send personal messages between site members. All content within forums is searchable and members may create profiles

about themselves, post pictures or even create online polls.

From its initial conception, **Between the Stacks** was up and running within only a few days. For the past three years, I used my library science skills in an information architecture role to create a Web-based content management application. Although I have worked in both academic and special libraries over the years, I drew upon my non-traditional library science experience to technically build the site. In some ways I have the dot-com bust to thank for **Between the Stacks** finding life. My unemployment status gave me the time and energy to create this service.

My initial goal of creating an online community for our profession has been met, but I plan on continuing to foster the growth of **Between the Stacks**. In only a few short weeks, I have received numerous emails from library professionals across the states commenting on the forums. Everyone loves the idea of bringing students, instructors, and LIS professionals together in one setting.

The only obstacle for **Between the Stacks** is the slight apprehension from library professionals in using the discussion forum medium. I am not sure where the fear comes from, but I would encourage site visitors to post on the forums and realize that it is a friendly and welcoming environment. There is nothing to fear

here. The forums are only what we are willing to make of them — the more that they are used, the more robust and useful they will become.

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findings showing the comparative strength or weakness of an individual collection are not a report card or value judgment, nor are low or high circulation rates bad or good. The results are only to help us identify areas of the collection that might go to our storage facility, or areas in which some cooperative purchasing might be appropriate. If age of collection seems inappropriate in particular subject areas or if low circulation rates are seen as problematic, then let this cooperative project try to address those issues.

So far the assessments done and the data gathered are beginning to tell us some things about the individual and consortial collections. I hope that over the next year the librarians at our four institutions will be able to continue to examine the data to learn even more to help us make decisions for cooperative collection building and management.

On the Road from page 73

has been designated "Library Way," and it is being decorated with bronze plaques in the sidewalk honoring great authors. The **Algonquin Hotel** is only a few blocks away, making this a real literary Mecca.

Some of the other "library" amenities include a selection of international newspapers, a video library of the **American Film Institute's** Top 100 films, and a complimentary breakfast in the Reading Room with real New York bagels. There is also a "Poetry Garden" with a terrace and a "Writer's Den" with a fireplace. They are both open 24 hours a day, just for when that bolt of inspiration hits you at 3 AM. The terrace is surrounded by vistas of the neighboring parapets and cornices of the early twentieth century skyscrapers that surround the neighborhood. Ziggurats and Greek temples and Moorish fantasies of the time tower all around. These are the architectural fantasies that are in-

visible from the street, but which create a floating world of their own. It's easy to get carried away in the Poetry Garden.

The Hotel was built as an office building in 1912. It is where **Teddy Roosevelt** worked on *Outlook Magazine*. It was completely redesigned by **Stephen B. Jacobs** and decorated by his wife **Andi Pepper**. The over 6,000 books in the Hotel were all selected by the **Strand Bookstore**. **Adele Gutman**, Director of Sales and marketing and "Honorary Librarian" tells me that the books can be purchased at check out.

The atmosphere of the **Library Hotel** is an island of tranquillity in New York City. I would highly recommend it for a thoughtful weekend or as a quiet retreat during a business trip. It is a great place to explore the joy of reading in the heart of indomitable New York City.

The Library Hotel is at
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