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The Shared Bibliographer: TRLN Builds Cooperative South Asia Collection

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Summary

The Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) consortium appointed a shared bibliographer for South Asia collections in Fall 2001. The appointment was the result of a faculty/library partnership in which the libraries received a portion of a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant to the Triangle South Asia Consortium. Monies from the grant provide partial support for the shared bibliographer and for collection purchases and processing. The libraries in the consortium lie within a 35-mile radius of each other in central North Carolina, so the bibliographer has a real presence and impact on the campuses served as well as the opportunity to build a single, shared collection for faculty teaching and research across the four campuses.

The Participants

TRLN is a collaborative organization of the libraries of Duke University, North Carolina Central University (NCCU), North Carolina State University (NCSU), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). The consortium offices are based on the UNC campus. For most of the consortium’s history, the cooperative programs have consisted of coordinated collection development and resource sharing. (www.trln.org). Cooperation dates back to the 1930s and current selected areas of cooperative print collections include agreements for Africa, East Asia, Russia & Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

The North Carolina Center for South Asian Studies is an arm of the Triangle South Asia Consortium (TSAC). The consortium is an educational cooperative of the same four universities that TRLN serves. Due to the operation of the Center are paid by the member universities. TSAC’s history dates to 1987 and its primary participants are the 32 core and 21 allied faculty whose research and teaching areas are related to South Asia. (http://www.nccu.edu/tsac/index.html)

Getting the Ball Rolling

Faculty from the NC Center for South Asian Studies met with the University Librarians in 1998 to discuss their grant application for a Title VI Undergraduate National Resource Center and also an accompanying FLAS (Foreign Language and Area Studies) request. The faculty wanted to propose a new model for building South Asian collections in the Triangle and to build support for the new model into their grant. The grant, if awarded, would provide monies over three years directly to the libraries. The faculty envisioned a unified, consortial collection development policy for South Asia and a shared South Asia bibliographer.

The proposal to the University Librarians also outlined how collections might be built to maximize the complementarity of collections in vernacular materials that support teaching and research at the four universities. Each university would build a basic collection for beginning and intermediate language instruction and the more specialized vernacular collecting would be distributed to each university in a division by language. Duke would collect Bengali...
The state of cooperative collection building at the time of the grant proposal was a loose arrangement with Duke University by far holding the strongest South Asia collection. Duke was a founding member of the Center for Research Libraries South Asia Microform Project (SAMP) and joined the PL 480 program in 1961. UNC began collecting on South Asia in the 1980s, principally in religious history and literature. NCSU also purchased material in religion, history, anthropology, and literature, and initiated vernacular acquisitions during the 1980s. The approximate size of each vernacular collection for South Asia varies: Duke, 219,748; UNC, 14,614; NCSU, 15,806; NCCU, 270.

The Money Arrives

The three-year grant was awarded in 2000. The grant requested $25,000 per year for the libraries to acquire and process South Asia collections. Salary money for the shared bibliography was used in the first year to hire a consultant, who evaluated the shared collections in the Triangle and advised on a job description for the bibliographer. At that same time, UNC and NCSU joined the Library of Congress Overseas Program for South Asia. The libraries worked to coordinate their profiles with Duke, already a participant.

A job description was prepared for the TRNL South Asia Librarian that detailed the duties of the position. The person holding the position would have responsibilities in collection development, public services, technical services, and external relations. In order to continue to develop the relationship with the faculty who initiated the grant, the TRNL South Asia Librarian will serve as a voting member of the Triangle South Asia Consortium Executive Committee.

The job description did not detail how the new TRNL librarian would be integrated into each university library. Instead the description contained the expectation that the librarian would “develop a unified collection development policy,” “develop standards for the core reference collections,” “determine appropriate levels of funding for South Asia collection development” and “recommend specific books, periodicals, non-print media, and electronic databases for acquisition.” Each item stipulated that these duties would be performed in consultation with each TRNL library’s own librarians.

The TRNL South Asia Librarian is Hired

In October 2001, the Duke subject librarian for South Asia, Avinash Mashewary, assumed the new position of TRNL South Asia Librarian. Avinash’s position in the Triangle and knowledge of the faculties would jumpstart the new, innovative position. To support Avinash’s role and to carry out some Duke-specific responsibilities, a two-year TRNL South Asian Studies Library Fellow position was created. The university libraries intended to divide costs for Avinash’s TRNL position; the Fellow position was funded partly by Title VI money and partly by Duke’s library. The Fellow is currently funded through September 2004.

The successful Latin American Post-Doc toral Fellowship program at the Duke libraries funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation served as the model for the South Asia Fellow position, which would work closely with the South Asia Librarian and other librarians in TRNL, “in a cumulative experience to gain hands-on knowledge of collection development, cataloging, and public services work.”

The job description for the Fellow position emphasizes surveying the collection for strengths, weaknesses, and complementarities. Additionally, the Fellow assists in identifying materials for weeding and transfer offsite. Because this is a new model for TRNL and for the South Asia teaching and research community, the Fellow creates and maintains a strong web presence for South Asia on the libraries’ websites. Brent Bianchi serves as the TRNL South Asian Studies Library Fellow.

Issues

The program is considered to be successful, although challenges remain to be resolved.

A new Title VI grant was awarded to the NC Center for South Asian Studies in 2002, and includes additional monies for collections. The understanding from the start was that the TRNL libraries would absorb the costs of the shared librarian and develop a sustainable funding model.

The Committee on Information Resources (CIR) of TRNL oversees cooperative collections programs. CIR will continue to monitor the vernacular collection development arrangement from the perspective of both the library and the users.

Each library has assimilated the TRNL librarian into the organization a little differently. The TRNL librarian is based in the library, but divides his time physically, with office hours and appointments at each campus. There are disparities in the way each campus has granted budget and purchase authority to the TRNL librarian for grant and non-grant funds to build South Asia collections.

The full integration of the TRNL librarian as a staff member in collection development has not been fully achieved on every campus. These disparities may remain, even in a healthy and successful program.

Wrap-up

This successful model for sharing a bibliographer among research institutions/libraries grew out of an environment that was ripe for this experimentation. The libraries already had a long history of area studies cooperation and collection building. The faculties from the four institutions that work/teach/research in South Asia were already meeting and were willing to conceive of the four library collections as a single entity. The faculty envisioned that investing a single librarian with the responsibility for building “one South Asia collection” in TRNL would result in the creation of a stronger, more coherent collection that would benefit teaching and research. In addition, duplication would be avoided, and resources could be used more effectively. The libraries received new monies from the grant, although not the total cost of the program, for this experiment. As this new shared librarian model matures, TRNL can consider whether there are other areas that could benefit from such collaboration.

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