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# Curating Collective Collections: Shared print MOU's: Thoughts on Future Coordination

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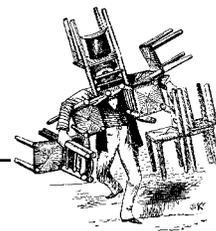
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# Curating Collective Collections — Shared Print MOUs: Thoughts on Future Coordination



Column Editor: **Sam Demas** (College Librarian Emeritus, Carleton College & Principal, Sam Demas Collaborative Consulting) <sdemas03@gmail.com>

**Column Editor's Note:** *This is my final column as editor of "Curating Collective Collections." The opportunity to write in a more informal, journalistic vein for the past few years has been liberating. Working with my esteemed guest columnists has been a privilege, and feedback from readers gratifying. Special thanks to Katina and all the good ATG folks for supporting me in bringing this column to life.*

*I am delighted that Bob Kieft has agreed to take over as column editor. Bob — who works tirelessly at the center of the movement towards collective collections, and who always has good questions and thoughtful opinions — is uniquely qualified to carry on the aims of the column. Doubtless he will shape it to fit changing needs as this noble collective movement advances. — SM*

*Designating the Five Colleges Library Depository Collection as persistent is intended to give all Five College libraries and Affiliate Members the assurance that they can withdraw duplicates of deposited items from their campus collections and rely with confidence on access to the copies placed in the Depository.*

— From the Introduction to Five Colleges Consortium  
"Depository Policies," March 2002 and subsequent revisions.

Most of the 13 shared print program MOUs analyzed in the previous column<sup>1</sup> contain variations on this goals statement. "Persistent" deposits — i.e., a long-term retention commitment — and provisions for access by other libraries are, of course, the key principles undergirding shared print. These twin goals engender the trust necessary for member libraries "to withdraw duplicates of deposited items...and rely with confidence..." on the collective collection. While the ubiquity of this phrasing about goals might seem to indicate a gathering consensus on both the purposes and the methods of shared print programs, the devil is in the details.

Analysis of this set of MOUs reveals very significant differences in the policy and governance details that define how these twin goals will be realized. For me, this raises questions about their adequacy as a foundation on which to build a national trust network for shared print. Looking closely at the policy discrepancies and ambiguities embedded in this set of 13 MOUs analyzed, I initially found myself wondering if we are:

- building a firm foundation on which to build a coherent national collective collection (trust network) against which U.S. libraries can withdraw duplicates with confidence of *persistent* preservation of and access to print originals, or
- devising temporary consortial safety nets of sufficient durability to allow for repurposing of space locally, while waiting to see how the long-term national need for persistent access to print collections shakes out, or
- moving towards some as-yet-undefined hybrid of the above?

However, on reflection about how we are in the very early days of operationalizing shared print programs, and after talking with colleagues about the results of my analysis,<sup>2</sup> I have begun to think of these mostly very recent MOUs as second generation drafts of shared print policy frameworks that will change as the field develops.

"Last Copy Policies" might be seen as the first generation of MOUs, essentially serving as loosely structured safety nets that are antecedents to shared print. The second generation comprises startup programs focusing (at least at the start) on one genre (monographs or journals). Over the next five years existing programs will mature and some will expand into handling multiple genres, and new programs will form. This will produce a next generation of MOUs, both new and rewritten, based on operational experience and evolving mechanisms for coordination. These programs and their MOUs will constitute nodes in a national network spanning existing consortia to demonstrably provide the "persistence" and "assurance" needed to support a set of collective collections.

*My assumption* is that there will be a more explicit synchronization of the goals, policies and operational details of many of these programs, and that collectively the individual program MOUs will come to constitute a more coherent shared policy framework. *My hope* is that the community will make the development of model MOU language an intentional outcome of ongoing efforts to define and implement a robust and coordinated shared print service infrastructure, a set of collection management standards, and attendant business models, and governance structures.

The focus of this column is on identifying the elements of existing MOUs that will likely need to be harmonized to fashion a coordinated national trust network.

## Towards a Taxonomy of Approaches

Comparing the approaches manifest in the 37 extant MOUs identified presents an "apples and oranges" conundrum. In an attempt to sort out their commonalities and differences, I constructed a simple taxonomy of existing program-types.

### A. Membership Types

1. *Agreements among members of pre-existing consortia:* The majority of MOUs have grown out of consortia with pre-existing MOUs defining consortial purposes, governance, and policies. Nevertheless, these sub-MOUs (e.g., CIC, 5C, OCA, and PALCI) are among the more detailed documents. Most are written to anticipate future growth of shared print activity and clearly define decision-making mechanisms for shared print. Their programmatic approach is designed to provide a road map for growth over time and likely reflects hard-won consortial experience about the importance of being clear up front about roles and expectations.

2. *Purpose-built cooperative networks:* A growing number of institutions (CI-CCI, MSCC, MI-SPI) are cooperating specifically to use **Sustainable Collections Services (SCS)** collection analysis software to identify redundant monograph titles. They characterize their work more as "projects" with MOU provisions applied to a specific list of titles that might be increased over time.

3. *Consortia offering different levels of membership:* WEST is the primary example, providing for membership as either Archive Holders or Archive Builders. This approach is highly programmatic and detailed. It affords even the smallest libraries opportunity to participate in shared print, avoid being a free rider, and benefit from the political cover provided by situating local collection management in a regional cooperative program.

### B. Scope of Shared Collections

1. *Last copy agreements:* Last Copy Policies (e.g., UGA, UW, CARLI, VALE, etc.) were all written before 2009 and are antecedents to shared print. They focus on one central function of a shared print policy: ensuring retention of at least one copy among the members. The primary purpose of these MOUs appears to be a safety net for achieving short-term space-savings goals. They do not address the requirements for long-term collection management and governance mechanisms development to support a permanent shared print program.

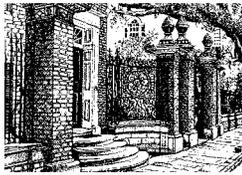
3. *Journals only:* Shared print for journals is further along in development and tends to be programmatic (vs. "project") in conception, usually including strong governance provisions. The MOUs focusing (at least for now) on journals only (WEST, PALCI, IA/WI, ASERL, and CIC) tend to include considerably more policy and collection management detail than MOUs for monographs. Their members tend to be research libraries, and their MOUs tend to reflect considerable rigor and long-range thinking in terms of preservation/collection management guidelines.

4. *Monographs only:* Shared print programs focusing only on monographs (at least so far) are in the early stages of development.

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5. *Multiple types of materials:* About half of the MOUs analyzed were written to anticipate both monographs and journals (and in a few cases an even broader scope of materials), but at this early stage very few, if any, consortia are actually working on more than one genre of materials.

### Differences of Purpose and Approach

The considerable differences among the 13 MOUs analyzed result from the autonomous culture of American higher education, the grass roots and early stage nature of the movement, and differing consortial cultures and goals. As we gradually link disparate programs into a coordinated network, following are areas in which MOU policies and guidelines will likely be harmonized over time.

**Goals** — All MOUs cite both preservation and access as goals, and many also cite reallocation of space as a key goal. Very broadly, those giving greatest weight to reducing collection footprint tend to take a pragmatic approach to their MOUs, viewing them as flexible documents and apparently intending to address the details as they arise. Those MOUs giving greater weight to goals of preservation and access tend to produce detailed documents designed to serve as long-term road maps for providing surety over generations. Differences may be driven by differing views of shared print. Some anticipate that shared print will ultimately be the responsibility of the large research libraries and others will play ancillary roles. Others think that the nascent monograph “projects”, which are very pragmatic and local in their focus today, may represent “a local service-oriented solution morphing into a contribution to a broader archival solution.”<sup>3</sup> And some librarians view shared print as a form of temporizing that will be abandoned in favor of digital preservation and access solutions.

**Level of Detail** — Some MOUs are highly detailed (CIC, OCA, others) while others are very brief (ASERL). There are pros and cons on both sides and over time I expect we will develop standards and best practices that can be referred to in MOUs. The level of detail to include

in a trust agreement, and what is best left to development of separate documents will depend in part on consortial culture.

**Retention Commitments** — Currently retention commitments range from 5 years to permanent, with 15 and 25 years as the most common choices. Many MOUs temper these essential specific duration commitments with a broader goal of retention “for as long as reasonably necessary.” Eventually we will settle on some commonly agreed commitment periods, likely calibrated to risk levels of different categories of materials.

**Storage Models (light/dark)** — Shared print programs employ a range of storage approaches, but only one (PALCI) has dark archives. Security concerns rise as the number of original copies dwindles, and the complexities, costs, and differences in approach to shared print (e.g. validation, bibliographic control, etc.) will make errors in the system unavoidable. On this **Rick Lugg** has been something of a lone voice (though I agree with **Rick**), in calling for an operational distinction between “archive copies” and “service copies.” He suggests a reconsideration of “the conflation of archiving and service functions,” and advocates use of dark and light archives to achieve these very different aims.<sup>4</sup> Each program will need to determine the weight it will accord the twin values of preservation and access, and make risk management assessments of its procedures accordingly. However, in a national trust network, risk management calculations must ultimately be made on a system level and be reflected in the MOU provisions of all participants.

**Collection Management** — Some MOUs include detailed specifications (i.e., physical handling, marking, inventory, replacements, withdrawals, and storage conditions), while others use language such as “follow usual workflows and procedures” and “make a good faith effort.” A requirement to offer materials for which one has made a retention commitment to other members before withdrawing them is not always specified. I believe such guidelines ultimately need to be uniform across participant collections and lend themselves to the development of network standards.

**Validation** — Validation of the existence (e.g., via visual inspection), completeness, bibliographic match, and condition of works being retained is an expensive, but, in my view, essential component of ensuring long-

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term preservation. Currently MOUs are highly variable in addressing these considerations. What level of mistakes and uncertainty should we tolerate in fashioning the national safety net? For example, recently a library found that .4% of the monograph titles they committed to retain (without checking the shelves) are actually missing from their collection. Is this worth worrying about? Over time more data will be gathered to determine the cost/benefit of various approaches and to inform standards development.

**Minimum Number of Titles Retained** — Less than half of the MOUs actually state a minimum number of copies to be retained, and very few have an explicit last copy policy. The minimum or optimum number of copies to retain will vary with the type of storage (e.g., light vs. dark, distributed vs. centralized) and materials, and will be useful when determined not only for localities and regions, but nationally. Future aggregation of bibliographic records of titles retained nationally and risk management calculations should inform standards development. This will be essential in successfully linking shared print programs.

**Bibliographic Control/Disclosure** — Complete and consistent disclosure by all consortia of 583 field components is a fundamental prerequisite for a nationally coordinated network. The development of the protocol for use of the 583 field for print archives disclosure by an OCLC task force was a huge step forward and an example of what needs to be done in other areas. While this standard emerged too late to be incorporated in most existing MOUs, in future it will be a standard feature.

**Access/Service Model** — That current MOUs do not include preferential lending restrictions is a testament to the strong commitment of librarians to democratic access to a reduced number of copies. Current shared print programs are cost-effectively building on existing service infrastructure, including use of regular ILL channels. **Emily Stambaugh** has called for a new service vision and business model for shared print monographs.<sup>5</sup> Implementation of a nationally coordinated service layer will move us from a patchwork quilt of local and regional agreements and infrastructure to a seamless system of discovery and delivery of print and digital versions of our collective collections. This nascent system will be reflected in future MOUs.

**Business Models and Costs** — A majority of current business models are based on each library bearing its own costs attendant to identifying, processing, retaining, and maintaining titles. **Lizanne Payne** and **Emily Stambaugh** emphasize the need to acknowledge and plan up front for the fact that some sort of ongoing management will be needed, whether it is paid or volunteered, by member institutions. Appointing a host institution for the program and including cost-sharing formulae are features of the MOUs of the most mature programs. Mechanisms for support of group-level functions that will likely need to be included in future MOUs include: ongoing collection analysis and development, subsidy for archive holders and/or central storage facilities, service functions, and digitization.

**Level of Formality/Legality** — A very large majority of the MOUs are formal, detailed, and clearly written to convey a sense of legal authority. A few MOUs, such as ASERL and MI-SPI, are relatively short and only convey the essentials. As with the question of level of detail, there are pros and cons to both approaches, and choices will generally reflect institutional culture. The key is to provide both sufficient detail to engender trust that retention commitments are “persistent,” and sufficient gravity to insulate these agreements from arbitrary and unilateral mandates by future boards of trustees or presidents that a library must withdraw from its consortial commitments. If a library leaves the consortium, does the retention commitment survive a departure? What obligations does the withdrawing institution have to the members? Current MOUs are highly variable on these questions and also on the matter of what constitutes institutional commitment, e.g., who, if anyone, signs the document on behalf of the institution.

### Suggestions for Further Work

Collectively, these columns on MOUs are a partial update of **Constance Malpas’** 2009 “Shared Print Policy Review Report.”<sup>6</sup> Much work remains to be done in taking stock of the shared print cooperative agreements that are gradually giving shape and substance to the national movement towards collective collections.

A national network will develop organically through the efforts of the growing shared print community. As they emerge, advances in the field must be incorporated into future generations of MOUs. It may be helpful for **CRL** and/or **OCLC** to constitute a working group to monitor shared print developments and formulate suggested language options for MOUs. Following are areas in which further work is needed to inform the development of the next generation of MOUs.

1. Continued analysis of MOUs that builds on the work of **Constance Malpas** and colleagues<sup>7</sup>; see “suggestions for further work” on p. 17 her report.
2. Ongoing updating of model MOUs, such as **CRLs**, to support synchronization across programs.
3. Ongoing development of shared print guidelines that can be referenced in MOUs. These include collection management, including minimum number of titles and validation, and should be based on professional risk management analyses.
4. Recommendations for Storage Facilities and Last Copy Programs: how do these antecedents programs fit in and how can they be transformed into shared print programs?
5. Studying MOUs outside North America and what we can learn from them.
6. Identifying shared print governance structures that prove effective in supporting routinized activity over a range of genres, and helping move “projects” into “programs.”
7. Develop a certification program for shared print programs, including audit of efficacy of MOUs as guarantors of persistent access and reliable preservation.
8. Assessing the policy and operational frameworks of the Farmington Plan and other significant cooperative collections programs to identify strategies that worked well and didn’t, and what parts of them that persist to this day.
9. Exploring how best to join efforts to cooperatively manage legacy collections with prospective collection development initiatives.
10. At the appropriate time, convening national conversations that engage a broad spectrum of librarians, scholars, and academic administrators to raise awareness of shared print nationally. Soliciting input from outside the profession on how we can best address the challenges we face in simultaneously developing a national trust network and fulfilling both our local and societal missions. 🌍

### Endnotes

1. This is the third of three successive columns on MOUs. Note: I strongly recommend reading this column in conjunction with the second in the series (**ATG**, v.26#2, April 2014, p.87-88), both because it provides essential background analysis and because it provides the key to the consortial abbreviations used here.
2. I am grateful to **Rick Lugg**, **Lizanne Payne**, and **Emily Stambaugh** for advice and perspective as I worked on this column, and for their thoughtful work in advancing the field.
3. **Lugg, Rick**, “Shared Print Monographs: the question of scale” in his blog *Sample and Hold*: <http://sampleandhold-r2.blogspot.com/2014/01/shared-print-monographs-question-of.html>.
4. “Library Logistics: Archiving and Servicing Shared Print Monographs,” **Against the Grain**, v.24#3, June 2012, p.80+, and “Collection Security and Surplus Copies,” blog entry May 2013, <http://sustainablecollections.com/weed-feed/2013/5/8/collection-security-surplus-copies.html>.
5. **Stambaugh, Emily**. 2013. “Reinventing Shared Print: A Dynamic Service Vision for Shared Print Monographs in a Digital World”, **Against the Grain**, v.24#4, September 2013, p.68-70.
6. **Malpas, Constance**. 2009. Shared Print Policy Review Report. OCLC Research. [www.oclc.org/programs/reports/2009-03.pdf](http://www.oclc.org/programs/reports/2009-03.pdf)
7. **Malpas**. 2009. op cit, see “Suggestions for further work,” p.13.