

Future possibilities for CRL Collections

Talk given at the CRL Annual Meeting, April, 2000

As you have heard, I am here today as a pinch-hitter, or maybe a relief hitter (one who feels like he hasn't had enough Spring Training). As a result, both my observations, and certainly my organization and delivery, may be half-baked—perhaps not even that. As I understand my role, I am setting the stage for consideration of some possible futures by talking about CRL's existing collection strengths and focus. My perspective is that of a collection development administrator in one institution and as a member of CSAP. I will be speaking from that perspective, of course, and that will be the context in which I raise some questions about how we continue to support these collections and speculate about how to approach the discussion and the decision. Let me start by emphasizing that you'll be hearing a description of the elephant from one visually challenged CDO—I don't even claim to speak for all CDO's much less all the other stakeholders in the future of CRL.

I'll be dealing today mostly about the status quo, and so will be talking a great deal about traditional collections--print on paper or microform surrogates for print. As I do that, I expect to keep hearing in the background the maxim that purportedly resided on the home page of Greg Crane, the classicist who was one of the leading developers of Perseus: "If it's not online, it's not information." There is a sense in which that is both profoundly true, and profoundly misleading.

I have the impression that part of my expected purpose today is to serve as the voice of memory, reminding us of the investment made so far, and admonishing us not to turn our backs on it too cavalierly. This function puts me in a somewhat more retrograde and curmudgeonly role than I would like. At the same time I want to acknowledge the importance of this perspective, and feel an obligation to wear the mantle, if only for the moment.

The founders of CRL inhabited an environment on the edge of the information explosion; one in which library collections were synonymous with print and microfilm. They were seeking relief from crowded stacks, and looking for an efficient way to preserve and deliver little-used materials of continuing research value. The fact that so many of us have been willing to pay \$30-50,000 a year to maintain and increase this collection means one of two things. Either the founders and their successors made some astute decisions about what kinds of things the Center should collect; or we librarians are exceptionally prone to inertia. I don't know if the phrase cost avoidance was current then or not, but cost avoidance was clearly in their minds at the inception of CRL. Now, of course, there are even more costs to avoid.

I would like to assume that everyone in the room is intimately familiar with the current collecting focus of CRL, but I know from my own ignorance how easy it is to forget about or overlook parts of the collection for one reason or another. So

for the next few minutes I will offer a brief primer on what's here (here being CRL), what's used, and where the collection money goes. Like any overview, this one is oversimplified and misleading.

If you go to the Center's web site, you'll find a taxonomy of the collections broken down as follows:

- Global Newspapers
- Scholarly Journals
- International Doctoral Dissertations
- Subject Collections
- Area Studies

I will take a slightly different approach to describing the collections by using the budget categories in the collection budget—on the principle of “follow the money” if you want to see where priorities are. Using the budget categories, we have the following groupings:

1. Serials: The Center actively collects 3 kinds of rarely-held serials
 - a. foreign science and technology periodicals, mostly east European and Japanese
 - b. SA and SE Asian serials through the LC For. Acq. Program

More than 10,000 titles costing around \$300,000 per year, about 38% of the collection budget, and accounting for 43% of requests.

A serials review project with the intent of canceling titles from So. and SE Asia received by a predefined no. of member libraries is underway.

2. Newspapers, in three categories:

- a. domestic, including microfiche subscriptions to general, ethnic papers.
- b. foreign, including current subscriptions on both film and newsprint, some of them filmed by CRL.
- c. newspapers on demand, in which CRL will acquire backfiles of currently subscribed to papers on request.

Cost is around \$215,000 per year, around 27% of the collection budget, accounting for 17% of all requests.

Subscriptions to US general circulation titles--titles like Boston Globe and Denver Post--are being suspended for FY 2001.

3. Retrospective collections, including the following categories:

- a. New and continuing major microform sets acquired through the purchase proposal process.
- b. SA and SE Asian microfiche of research titles made by the LC field offices

- c. Demand archives--archival material from national governments acquired in response to patron request.

Cost is around \$190,000 per year, or 24% of the collection budget, and it accounts for 17.5% of requests.

Last year for budget reasons the purchase proposal program was suspended, though it is one that my bibliographers, at least, find to be a very useful safety valve.

4. Monographs. The Center has a collection of more than 330,000 monographs, mostly in the history of science, medicine and technology, or coming from South and SE Asia between 1965 and 1984. Most new titles come through exchange, so there is no budget figure associated with this category. It accounts for 15% of requests.
5. Area studies microform projects. These include the familiar AMPs, CAMP, LAMP, MEMP, SEEMP, SAMP and SEAM. These are funded by special fees paid by participating libraries--Iowa for example participates in three of them. Two of the projects--CAMP and SEEMP--have opened their holdings to all CRL members. Their budgets total \$--,---- and they account for 2.5% of requests.

6. Foreign dissertations. CRL tries to provide comprehensive access to doctoral dissertations submitted to institutions outside the US and Canada, and will buy individual dissertations to fulfill patron needs if the title isn't received via deposit or exchange. Cost is around \$70,000 annually, around 9% of the collection budget, and they account for 5% of requests.

7. Special collections, nearly all acquired through deposit, including college and university catalogs, US state docs through 1950, foreign official gazettes, etc. Accounts for less than 1% of requests.

One thing that should emerge from this outline is that area studies materials, information resources that come from outside the US (and to a large degree, western Europe) comprise a vital, a crucial part of the CRL collection. While the area studies model as an intellectual approach is undergoing transformation, the pressure to support growing programs in international or global studies continues. And we are experiencing increasing demand for information from outside the US, often very different kinds of information from what was deemed critical 20 or 30 years ago. If you look at the categories of material mentioned above, each of them contains an area studies element, or consists entirely of area studies material. I come from an institution with a relatively short history of support for area studies. I have found the Center over the years to be an extraordinarily valuable supplement to our limited resources, and this seems to be well understood by faculty in those areas. Whenever I have tried to involve

Iowa faculty in meetings about CRL, it is the area studies faculty who show up. My view may be the outgrowth of Iowa's particular situation with regard to international collections, but I have found similar attitudes among library staff from institutions with far richer resources than ours.

But clearly the information environment is changing dramatically, and I still hear Greg Crane whispering "If it's not online, it's not information."

Let me raise some questions now that arise naturally from the encounter between CRL's current collecting focus and this changing information environment.

Global newspapers: Online access to newspapers, both domestic and international, has become commonplace. What effect should this have on the way CRL collects and preserves newspaper content? How should we deal with the question of material that appears in print version (and their microfiche surrogates), but not online? Or vice-versa? What about preservation—archiving—of the digital version? Are the answers to these questions the same or different depending on whether the newspaper is domestic or foreign? Or ethnic?

One of the criteria applied to purchase proposals is that when five members own a title and are willing to lend it, it becomes ineligible for purchase. Should the rule of five apply to newspaper subscriptions?

Serials: A number of current serials from South and SE Asia are under review with the intent to cancel a significant number based on some variation of the rule of 5. Should a criteria like this be applied broadly to CRL's current serials list?

What should CRL's role be in collecting current serials, and maintaining backfiles, in the light of the continued reduction of current serials in most of our libraries. KS and TC in their published research have clearly shown that much of what is disappearing from our serials collections are less-widely held titles. And what is CRL's role in archiving e-journals, or in helping to preserve digital backfiles.

Microfilm sets acquired through purchase proposal: How is the pressure on our budgets caused by rising costs of STM and rising demand for digital material affecting our collective behavior in buying microform? Certainly this is one collection component that can have a dramatic impact in terms of cost avoidance—I even have some faculty who have learned to think first of CRL when they see ads for expensive microfilm sets. In recent months the Board and CSAP have talked about a number of suggestions to modify and expand the purchase proposal program. For example, soliciting funds for collective purchase by a group, as was done with the Sanborn maps in the 80s. Or a combination of CRL funds and contributed funds. Or deposit of a purchase made collectively by

a group of members. Might one of these approaches be beneficial for other kinds of acquisitions?

The area microfilm projects--CAMP, LAMP and their siblings--might also offer a model for funding cooperative acquisitions.

CRL was initially founded to help relieve overcrowded stacks among a group of Midwestern Libraries. Much of the collection of 5 million plus volumes came from deposits from member libraries over the years. While deposits from members still occur to some degree, under limited conditions, it is no longer a primary means of collection growth. Even in an increasingly digital world, managing our print collections will continue to be a serious challenge. Should CRL once again help libraries manage this problem, either by accepting deposits (and if so, under what terms) or by serving a clearinghouse or coordinating function among member libraries and their own storage facilities? Or both?

All of these questions assume that we should base our future direction on the foundation of the past and the present. The founders of CRL were limited by the constraints of geography and communication in sharing the lesser-used research materials they were interested in preserving and making available. Another approach to re-engineering CRL's collecting focus is to try to imagine what kind of institution we would invent if we were creating CRL today. How would our

thinking be affected by potential of digital information to eliminate distance and the permit many researchers to use resources simultaneously?

While I don't have time today to pursue that thought, I would like to close with a few comments on things to consider in trying to reach a decision about future directions. One of the hallmarks of CRL since the beginning has been the involvement of faculty at our home institutions in the governance of the Center. It is always difficult to engage the attention of faculty—I expect, given the economics of attention today, that it's even more difficult now than it was in 1949. Still, I have some confidence that we would benefit from the advice of faculty and other academic administrators as we talk about ways to refocus the collections and mission of CRL. How to get that input, how we weigh it and reconcile the doubtless conflicting input, will be challenging, but in the end very worthwhile.

It will be equally important to engage in the conversation the librarians at our institutions who support those who are, or might become, the primary users of CRL's collections. These include not only bibliographers, but also ILL and public service staff, among others. This is another tall order, but important if we are serious about getting a wide range of views, and buy-in for the outcome.

Edward Shreeves

University of Iowa