

# ***The Persistence of Print in a Digital World: Three ARL Libraries Confront an Enduring Issue***

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As libraries become more digital, electronic collection development inevitably preoccupies us. Paradoxically, managing print collections becomes more important as we dedicate increased financial resources to electronic materials. Considerable ingenuity is required to purchase and store print as the electronic portion of the budget grows, and as library buildings approach capacity.

The libraries of the University of Kentucky and the University of Tennessee formed the Information Alliance in 1994, and Vanderbilt University joined the group in 1998. The libraries, located in Lexington, KY, Knoxville, TN, and Nashville, TN, form a geographic axis of 200 miles. The Information Alliance enhances information access and services through innovative approaches to cooperation, and is testing approaches to managing print collections through its IRIS (Information Resources for Interinstitutional Sharing) project. A partnership intended to strengthen access to regional resources, IRIS is a work-in-progress that effectively seeks to form one print-based library in three locations. Our goals to make the most efficient

use of limited funds and finite space are ambitious. Similar projects have stalled or failed. Yet, the risk has a potentially high payoff, even if we fall short of complete success.

Combined holdings of the three ARL libraries total more than six million volumes. Students and faculty may search the holdings of all three catalogs simultaneously and borrow materials through expedited document delivery. The three-library collection moves well beyond traditional "on-demand" resource sharing offered through interlibrary loan. Our objective to build collections in a coordinated fashion will increase the chance for library users to find the most essential materials at their home library and pertinent research resources in at least one of the IRIS libraries. Each library will become a primary collector in narrowly defined subdisciplines, enabling the others to reduce their acquisition of highly specialized monographs in these areas. The result will be a joint collection with less duplication encompassing a broader range of research level resources. All three libraries will continue to acquire core titles.

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**Access**

Can three research libraries effectively merge their print collections? The Information Alliance formed IRIS to offer one tripartite collection, built and managed cooperatively, readily accessible to users at all three institutions. Through coordinated collection development we intend to employ our combined financial resources more efficiently to build an aggregate collection of more breadth and depth than any of us could possibly build individually.

IRIS was not conceived as an exercise in saving money. A 1998 vision statement clearly posits that "in no way should this agreement be seen as a means by which any member library can lower its level of financial support for collections." The objective is not economy, but enriched service. We expect to reduce significantly the duplication of print materials outside the core and develop a resource-sharing component to move them quickly from one library to another upon request.

Once the libraries committed to creating IRIS, our challenge was to form one library out of three—or at least make it appear as such to the user. How could we create a virtual library experience that could bridge the 200 miles separating us and replicate the experience of using one library collection? Before we could embark on cooperative collection development, we had to accomplish two primary tasks: one, make it possible for users to identify resources at all three libraries as easily as they could identify them at their home institution; and two, deliver the materials requested as quickly and cost effectively as possible.

First we needed to establish a high level of patron and bibliographer confidence that the system could work to their benefit. Staff and users needed to see that drawing on each other's resources offered a clear advantage, and that the combined collection could better serve our clientele than an individual collection supplemented by interlibrary loan. Otherwise we would not be able to garner support for further initiatives such as cooperative collection building.

To accomplish the first task, identification of resources, we chose SiteSearch, an OCLC product that integrates Z39.50-accessible resources under a common Web interface. Each institution runs its own SiteSearch server. The IRIS catalog extracts data from the OPAC of each institution, presenting the results in a merged form. The combined catalog also contains records of Center for Research Libraries holdings since all three IRIS libraries are members.

The user can search the OPACs together or separately. Simple searches can be entered on author, title, subject headings, or keyword. An advanced search feature permits more

options. Search results present brief and full catalog records with library holdings information. Each record includes an interlibrary loan button. Here the user can add personal information to a bibliographic citation and submit the entire file for processing. The patron-initiated ILL request goes to the OCLC ILL Direct Request file. Currently, interlibrary loan borrowing staff mediate requests, but the option exists to configure ILL Direct Request so that requests go directly to the lending library.

Use of the catalog has grown steadily. At Vanderbilt from April 1998 through June 1999 logins per month averaged 185. From July 1999 through June 2000 the average was 618. Though these numbers are small fractions of the usage of our OPAC, we have learned that usage can be heavily influenced by placement of the IRIS link on our homepage. Numbers of logins spiked immediately after an IRIS link—and a brief explanation—were placed next to the link for the OPAC. IRIS is open to everyone at the institutions, but it was conceived as a research tool for a limited audience, primarily faculty and graduate students. While promotional efforts may produce further gradual increases in usage, it is probably unrealistic to expect high volume, at least in the short term. For the long term we will have to consider whether we can reasonably expect our patrons to continue using multiple catalogs. As IRIS grows, the catalog, in more robust form than SiteSearch can now provide, could become each institution's sole OPAC. How soon we manage this transition may be a measure of our success.

**Delivery**

Accomplishing the second part of the IRIS charge, document delivery, called for participation by interlibrary loan units and the identification of a fast, dependable, efficient and cost-effective way to transport materials among the libraries. ILL representatives agreed that IRIS libraries would be each other's lenders of first resort. We treat all ILL borrowing requests as IRIS requests, whether patrons submit them through the IRIS catalog or not, if the material is held at an IRIS library. We have also agreed that as lenders we will give IRIS borrowing requests first priority. And we set ourselves a goal of delivering IRIS materials to requestors no later than three to four days after they submit their requests.

Another initial decision was to limit IRIS requests to returnable materials in the early phase of the project. Dealing only with returnables would provide a smaller group of requests for the trial period. We already used Ariel for rapid transmission of articles. And, importantly, the

SiteSearch ILL form is designed to accommodate bibliographic information for books only. Recently we have begun to request articles on the same expedited basis as books.

After considering document delivery options, we determined that a ground-based courier service offered the best prospect for affordable service whose cost would not necessarily grow at the same rate as the growth in document delivery activity. Air express services charge by item or by the pound. Our ground-based courier charged a per-shipment fee regardless of size, which promised to lower the cost per book as volume grew. In addition ILL staff could use bags and tubs to hold multiple books and avoid packaging each book separately. We contracted with a commercial courier to provide service to all three locations every business day.

By the end of 1999–2000, the libraries had achieved three-to-four day turnaround for returnables requested by patrons through the IRIS catalog. Libraries shipped 3,891 items to each other in 1999–2000. Based on total courier charges, the cost to ship each book was \$16.44. We expect this cost to diminish as usage of the service increases. By contrast, the average purchase cost of a book at the IRIS libraries was approximately \$50, much of it for books that might circulate once, twice or not at all. Loans are not split evenly among the three libraries. Vanderbilt is by far the biggest lender; lending more than the other two libraries combined. This was not unexpected since Tennessee and Kentucky both have significantly larger user populations. But the imbalance in no way diminishes the value of the service to Vanderbilt. The three libraries continue to split document delivery costs evenly.

Our next step is to use the OCLC ILL Direct Request system to send patron-initiated requests directly to the lending library, eliminating the need for mediation by ILL staff at the borrowing library. We would like to see each transaction become, insofar as possible, a transaction between the borrowing patron and the lending library. Growth in use of the service would be desirable, but that will be a direct result of success in coordinating collection development.

### **Collection Development: Monographs**

IRIS charter documents envisioned a robust unified collection with minimal unnecessary duplication, freeing funds to achieve a joint collection richer and deeper than any single institution could achieve. Collaboration would enable us to optimize monograph collection funding and to more effectively manage the limited storage and growth space available to each institution.

Compelling fiscal realities underscore the necessity to pursue cooperation. Primary among these is cost. ARL reported in June 2000 that the average monograph unit cost is \$47.40 and that the typical library expenditure of \$1.5 million buys only slightly over 24,000 books. Moreover, monograph prices increase at an annual rate of 3.9%, while average monographic expenditures increase by around 2.3%, leading to an annual average deficit of monographs purchased of –2.3%. If these trends continue, the picture will become even bleaker over the next 20 years. By 2020, ARL projects the monographic unit cost will have increased 272% over 1986, and that even though monographic expenditures will have climbed by 117%, the gap in the number of monographs purchased will have reached a dismal –54%.

If libraries individually lack the resources to comprehensively collect monographs, what positive alternatives are there? Because cooperative monograph acquisition is a concrete, measurable step toward addressing an issue that can overwhelm individual institutions, it became a primary project of IRIS. The Information Alliance sponsored a two-day workshop on collaborative collection development in 1996 for some forty participants. Even though charter documents proposed close collaboration, the nuts and bolts of implementing that vision meant relying on the good will and ingenuity of a sometimes skeptical group of professionals, many of whom had seen such cooperative efforts come and go.

The workshop helped to clarify key assumptions about the collaborative enterprise. Among these were that resource sharing is not just for crisis situations, but is in fact the next frontier in collection management. The workshop underscored the usefulness of viewing the whole consortium as a single resource and organizing for complementarity across institutional lines. Included was a review of those factors that could be used to measure success: reduced cost, reallocation of funds to enhance specific segments of the collection, and reduced duplication.

A core goal of IRIS is that the holdings of the three libraries be used by patrons at the three institutions as if they were one collection. One of the means of achieving this goal is through the joint purchase of microform sets. For example, IRIS libraries have used end-of-year funds to acquire complementary sections of the *Princeton Latin American Pamphlet Series* collection and different states of the Southern Region Education Board documents. Recently, IRIS libraries agreed to divide collecting responsibility for the papers of the NAACP.

In the years since the founding of the Information Alliance, collection development heads at the partner libraries have organized annual meetings of subject counterparts to focus on specific components of the respective collections. The meetings foster an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, enabling bibliographers to share information about the programs at their institutions and examine the collections they build and maintain to support these programs. Ideally, bibliographers will begin to work toward identifying areas within their disciplines where one of the libraries could build a strong monographic collection rich in highly specialized materials. To date, librarians in the areas of anthropology, education, English, geology, German, history, music, psychology, and the sciences have met and exchanged information about their respective user populations, collections, and institutions. They have shared crucial data about their respective institutions, focus points, plans for the future, budgets, and much more. Several projects have grown out of the counterpart meetings and are currently in various stages of development.

The German contemporary authors project serves as an example of collaborative monograph acquisition. During their first meeting in 1998 German language and literature selectors discovered that while all three libraries held fairly extensive collections of the works of a core group of major contemporary German-language authors, none of the three libraries collected systematically beyond the top tier of best-known authors. From the discovery grew the idea of dividing a list of contemporary authors produced by German book vendor, Otto Harrassowitz. This comprehensive list contains over 1,400 living or recently deceased authors from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The sheer number of authors involved made it virtually impossible for any one of the IRIS libraries to collect exhaustively from the list.

The selectors realized that the chances of building a richer and more representative sampling of the authors would improve dramatically if collecting responsibility were divided among the three institutions. To this end, they conducted a through analysis of their library holdings of the writers. The results of this analysis will serve both as a point of departure and a baseline for measuring the interim progress and final outcome of the project. First, selectors created a spreadsheet listing all the contemporary authors on the Harrassowitz list. Next, OPAC searches showed which libraries held which authors. The OPAC search results also served to identify the 30–35 core authors that all three libraries had collected and would continue to collect. The IRIS holdings for these top authors were next compared to

the titles in *Verzeichnis lieferbarer Bücher*, the German *Books in Print*, to evaluate the comprehensiveness of IRIS holdings of these authors.

From the OPAC searches, the German selectors generated a series of differentiated lists showing the number of titles held by each institution. Searches revealed that there were already collecting focal points at the respective libraries, and that some authors were collected extensively by just one of the three libraries. This helped determine which library should assume primary collecting responsibility for a particular author. A numeric code was assigned to each institution and the comprehensive list was then sorted by code to generate a list of authors for which each library would assume collecting responsibility. This list was manually adjusted to reflect existing collecting strengths. The German selectors at the respective IRIS libraries will carry out the project over the next three-to-five years.

The German contemporary authors project illustrates the major principles of developing a joint monograph collection. Each institution builds on existing strengths by collecting core materials. All three libraries will continue to collect the top 35 authors that form the core collection of modern German literature. Even within this core group, the option to rely on a partner library to collect selected authors exists, and thus provides greater flexibility in the use of funds at each institution. On the other hand, the distribution of collecting responsibility for specific authors not in the core group will yield a more diverse, richer joint collection as the economic burden of building a combined collection is spread over the German allocations of the three libraries.

How can IRIS sustain current momentum for collaborative development of the print collections? Heads of collection development have considered allocating special funds to support projects proposed by counterparts. Making travel arrangements for groups of counterparts and providing frequent opportunities for subject librarians to work together can overcome persistent barriers to collaboration. As subject librarians and bibliographers become better acquainted with one another and their collections, it is likely that they will identify new ways to collaborate in making the total collection stronger.

#### **Collection Development: Serials**

Each of the IRIS libraries struggles with the serials issues facing the entire academic community, including inflated prices and inadequate storage space. IRIS can reduce some pressures of serials collection development and help with

space management. When librarians consider new requests for serial titles they check the holdings of partner libraries in the IRIS catalog. If another IRIS library holds a requested title, the librarian may ask the requestor if a local subscription is essential. This practice helps promote the existence and benefits of the Alliance, and some faculty are, in fact, satisfied with regional access to a journal title. Another collection development initiative, the purchase of consortial subscriptions to electronic resources, has generated savings of nearly \$5,000 that can be applied to other purchases.

While finding the resources to purchase serials is a persistent challenge for the academy, we also contend with creating adequate space to house collections. The IRIS Serials Archive helps member libraries make the best use of collection space. All three libraries have created storage collections for low-use materials. Through a planned approach to retention, the Serials Archive enables the partners to reduce low-use duplicate journal backfiles with the assurance that the materials will be retained by one of the libraries. One IRIS library assumes responsibility for maintaining and providing access to selected journal backfiles so that the other IRIS libraries may discard duplicates. Willingness to retain backfiles does not commit a library to holding a current subscription, although the existing Library of Record generally accepts a title because it is of greater importance to its collection than to that of its counterparts. The goal of the Serials Archive is to assure that one of the three partners will maintain the backfile on behalf of the other libraries. Given that the title is already low-use at one or more locations, current subscriptions are not a significant issue. The Archive now contains nearly 50 titles.

To establish the Serials Archive, heads of collection development compiled lists of serial titles for consideration. These were derived from local storage lists, recent cancellations, and cessations. We prepared a spreadsheet of possibilities that contained columns for title, call number, library, and holdings. Additional columns recorded decisions about library of record, backfiles to be transferred to fill gaps, and notes. We discussed the process with subject librarians and bibliographers to garner their support. Meanwhile, the heads of collection development selected titles from an initial list of more than 1,000 low-use titles, and consulted with individual librarians who agreed to adopt more than a dozen titles at one or more of the IRIS libraries. A catalog note, "<name of library> retains backfiles for Information Alliance libraries", is made in the 590 local MARC record of the library that accepts responsibility for retaining the

backfile. This note is to remind the local librarian not to discard the title; users do not see the message because the IRIS catalog will tell them the location of available backfiles.

Although heads of collection development identified initial titles to test IRIS Serials Archive premises and procedures, we envision that subject librarians and bibliographers will add titles to the Archive routinely. Using criteria such as use data, relevance to collection scope, and current status of the subscription, librarians will put forward titles for the Archive much as they now seek colleagues' opinions about proposed withdrawals. Suggested titles will go on a desiderata list maintained by the IRIS heads of collection development. Recommendations may include nominations for withdrawals, as well as for Library of Record titles. After the list is reviewed at the local library, heads of collection development make decisions about titles to add to the Archive. Titles are added to the Serials Archive spreadsheet, volumes transferred to an IRIS library are withdrawn, and the online catalog is updated. Librarians will consider IRIS Serials Archive holdings when making collection management decisions, and, with their counterparts, will review Serials Archive goals and evaluate progress annually.

Several factors affect the potential success of the IRIS Serials Archive. Subject librarians and bibliographers must be confident, or at least willing to take the risk, that the Information Alliance is a long-term relationship. Viability of a shared archive relies on a materials delivery service that provides easy and fast access to materials. IRIS delivery service users receive speedy turnaround on requests whether a needed item is across campus or in a partner library, and the participants continue to make improvements. The IRIS delivery service must prove over time that it can get needed items to users quickly and easily. Heads of collection development must make the Serials Archive a priority for visibility and discussion among bibliographers and subject librarians. Effective record keeping, with files easily accessible to all, will underpin the intellectual work of the librarians. Procedures for making nominations and decisions about Serials Archive titles must be incorporated into local collection management practices. The long-term benefit of the IRIS Serials Archive is promising, but considerable effort will be required to reach the payoff.

### **Conclusion**

As IRIS enters its fourth year, a self-assessment would conclude that it has, on balance, been a success. We have to acknowledge, however, that it has not yet proven itself in every respect. Our shared catalog, coupled with courier ser-

vice and Ariel transmission, has proven to be a highly workable and efficient access and document delivery tool. It has, in fact, been expanded to include nine other university libraries in the Southeast. The serials archive, though time-consuming to implement, offers our libraries an opportunity to conserve valuable shelf space and shows promise for expansion.

The collection development component dwarfs access and delivery activities in its procedural and psychological complexity, and in fairness, it is still too early to pass judgment on it. While the Germanists have worked well together and produced a viable plan of action, cooperation in other disciplines has been slow to non-existent. We sometimes have to measure progress in agonizingly small increments.

When consortia purchase electronic databases, every purchase is win-win. Print-based consortial collection de-

velopment, by contrast, requires an element of trust that builds very gradually if at all. The standard of success is exceedingly high: we do not attain our goal until we become dependent on another library to build collections important to our library. The risk, frequently cited by bibliographers, is that a selector at the other library may fail to acquire what we need, or worse, that a library on which we have come to depend will withdraw from the consortium. But we need to remember that there is a risk in the way we build collections now. As long as we continue to practice independent collection development, we will each independently acquire a decreasing segment of the universe of scholarly publication with each succeeding year. While cooperative collection development is a difficult venture into the unknown, business as usual will increasingly be a model for failure.