

# Cooperation, Collection Management, and Scientific Journals

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*Libraries have found it necessary to cooperate in their cancellation and retention policies in order to maximize the number of scientific journals available within a region. This article describes several existing cooperative serials purchase and deselection agreements, focusing on a recently instituted plan between two land grant libraries.*



Washington State University (WSU) and the University of Idaho (UI) were founded as land grant universities in 1890 and 1889. They are located eight miles apart in the middle of a rich agricultural area known as the Palouse. Combined, these libraries constitute the largest collection of books and journals between Vancouver to the north, Salt Lake City to the south, Minneapolis to the east, and Seattle to the west—an area of over one million square miles. WSU has approximately 16,500 students and a library budget close to \$6 million; UI has about 9,000 students and a library budget of \$2.5 million.

While informal cooperation between the UI and WSU libraries has existed for years, the two institutions had never formalized a method of assigning responsibility for retaining journal subscriptions until the spring of 1986. Similar institutional goals have led to a significant overlap in their library needs. This very similarity, however, presents opportunities for cooperation.

In the selection and deselection of scientific journals, the two universities have found a simple method of cooperation that promises to significantly increase the

number of titles available to the research community of the area and to save money in the process.

## COOPERATIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARIES

Cooperation between libraries is in vogue, but many elaborate plans have borne little result. There are, however, possibilities for effective cooperation. As Michael Gorman states in his 1986 article, "Laying Siege to the 'Fortress Library'":

Two kinds of cooperative endeavor have arisen in most libraries. The first I would call "painless cooperation" in which the amount of time and effort devoted is small and the benefits commensurately unimportant. Such cooperation can be found in joint acquisitions schemes that concentrate on the likes of Norwegian periodicals. [An example of] . . . the other type is the OCLC shared cataloging program.<sup>1</sup>

One area that cries out for cooperation is the acquisition and cancellation of scientific journals. The number of scientific journals has increased by a factor of ten every fifty years and has doubled every fifteen years.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, prices have skyrocketed. Science librarians are all too familiar with the phenomenon of chemistry and physics journals, which from 1977 to

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1985 rose 144.1 percent to an average price of \$228.90.<sup>3</sup> The only consolation for science librarians is the news that the rate of increase in the cost of science journals was surpassed only by labor and industrial relations journals, whose inflation rate of 165.1 percent represented an average price increase from \$11.24 to \$29.87.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most alarming statistics is from John McCredie, who points out that books and journals in scientific fields have increased in price faster than the overall cost of living.<sup>4</sup> If the percentage of the university budget dedicated to library costs increased fast enough to maintain a constant level of library acquisitions, the library budget would consume 5.2 percent of the total university budget after ten years; 9 percent after twenty years, and 27 percent after forty years.

Science librarians are familiar with the adage that 80 percent of a library's circulation results from 20 percent of its collection.<sup>5</sup> Applied to scientific journals, this means that to serve users adequately a library must subscribe to the heavily used titles, but it can also enter into cooperative agreements regarding the retention and cancellation of less-used and expensive titles.

Criteria and techniques for journal cancellation projects are well documented.<sup>6</sup> According to Herbert S. White, when faced with skyrocketing journal prices during the 1970s, academic libraries froze the periodicals budget and drastically reduced the number of new orders, cancelled duplicate subscriptions, and cancelled foreign titles. And what did they not do? They did *not* cancel based on availability of journals at other institutions, nor did they cancel because of price.

White predicted in 1981 that future cancellations would be of single subscriptions (unique titles), not duplicate titles, and that librarians, not clientele, must choose them; that librarians must begin to distinguish between those titles that should be immediately accessible in the library and those titles that can be made available on demand within twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

Stephen J. Bensman maintains that we must begin to identify seldom-used parts of the collection. In academic journal col-

lections we can no longer aim at comprehensiveness; we must shift our effort to "developing and maintaining a relatively small, multi-disciplinary core of heavily used titles that rank high in the formation and social system of scholarship."<sup>3</sup> Once the less-used titles in a journal collection have been identified, the stage is set for area libraries to join together to maximize resources available to researchers.

### COOPERATIVE SERIALS AGREEMENTS

A number of cooperative ventures have proved successful, and several others are in the planning stage.<sup>8</sup> Notable among the existing arrangements are the following.

#### *Pittsburgh Regional Library Center*

This center includes the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, Carnegie-Mellon University, and Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. OCLC serves as the communications vehicle for informing cooperating libraries when one library decides to cancel a title. The agreement reached with OCLC is to record the cancellation decisions as a note in the holdings field. The reporting process consists of two steps—first, when an institution decides to cancel a title and again when issues are no longer received and the holdings are closed. For reasons of quality control and monitoring, inputting was done centrally at the Pittsburgh Regional Library.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Holder of Record*

Each of six Veteran's Administration medical center libraries in California and Nevada has responsibility for certain titles in a pre-existing union list. The holder of record maintains these subscriptions, fills in gaps, and acts as an interlibrary loan source. This agreement was signed by the head librarians to assure compliance.

A union list indicating responsible libraries and holdings is available to all participants. Representatives of the libraries meet annually to consider reassigning title responsibilities, to review interlibrary borrowing records, and to make decisions on new titles.

This project reduced space requirements and subscription costs and in-

creased the number of collective titles from 609 in 1976 to 818 in 1980.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Inter-University Council of North Texas Area*

This plan, which involved fifteen academic libraries, coordinates the cancellation of expensive duplicate titles and the cooperative acquisition of new titles. The libraries were already linked by a courier service. The feasibility of establishing a cooperative library center (physically separated from any existing library) was explored and rejected because of cost. Each member library is assessed 1 percent of its total materials budget, to be used for a coordinator's salary, office communications costs, the acquisition of journals not previously held in the area, and, if necessary, the subsidizing of existing subscriptions. Holding libraries send copies of tables of contents to the other cooperating libraries. Journals are not selected centrally, but instead are chosen by individual institutions according to local needs. Funds are available in direct proportion to the institutional contribution to the cooperative journal program. This project resulted in the cancellation of 662 duplicate titles with a net gain of \$86,885 after deducting \$38,276 in overhead costs. Of 212 new journals cooperatively purchased, 183 were new to the region. Work has begun on an OCLC-based union list of serials.<sup>11</sup>

#### *NEOMAL*

NEOMAL (Northeastern Ohio Major Academic Libraries) developed a cost-effective shared cancellation program. The first step was a study of journal use to identify candidates for cancellation. Instead of developing a union list, members exchanged individual serials lists. Each library notifies all other members whenever it wants to cancel a title. Within 48 hours cooperating libraries wire their approval or disapproval. If a cancellation is not unanimously approved, the question is discussed until a unanimous decision is reached. A machine-readable listing of cooperative decisions is collected on the University of Akron's computer system, and bimonthly cumulative reports are produced.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Miami (Ohio) Valley Association of Health Sciences Libraries*

In order to provide in-depth resources to the Miami, Ohio, area each library (8 hospitals, 2 small research organizations, a school of allied health, and a recently chartered school of medicine) pledged to collect both monographs and serials in a particular subject area, using the Brandon list as a basis.<sup>13</sup> Each library attempts to acquire a ten-year back file in its assigned subjects. An existing union list provides bibliographic control. If a library wants to cancel a title that is considered important for the region, another library will pick it up. Annually, ILL borrowing from outside the region is examined; if there are four or more requests for a journal not available locally, one of the libraries volunteers to subscribe.<sup>14</sup>

#### *SCRML*

By examining TALON, a union list of the area, the eleven resource libraries of the SCRML (South Central Regional Medical Library) are able to determine the extent of subscription overlap. Representatives of each library bring lists of seldom-used journals to a meeting. Decisions on cancellations are made and one resource library in the region commits itself to retaining the subscription and the back file. Back runs from other participating libraries are transferred to that institution. A list of important serial titles not in the region is generated, and libraries that cancelled other journals are encouraged to add these new titles, thereby increasing the number of journals available locally. Any library agreeing to subscribe to one of these has first option on any back files available. As a result of this project, 306 periodical subscriptions were dropped.<sup>15</sup>

#### **WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO: A HISTORY OF COOPERATION**

The cooperation between WSU and UI libraries has been typical of the "painless" variety. For example, UI has colleges in forestry and mining, and WSU does not. This has meant that librarians at WSU saw no reason to collect esoteric journals in forestry and mining. WSU has a larger mate-

rials budget than does UI, so if the former subscribed to an expensive index or journal, UI librarians were able to assure their faculty that the title was accessible nearby.

Other types of both formal and informal cooperation between the two library systems take place routinely, for example: reciprocal borrowing privileges, an occasional joint purchase of a large and expensive microform collection, relying on a Chinese-speaking librarian from one library to address Chinese visitors at the other, exchanging memos and publications, sharing expenses for visiting speakers, a daily delivery service for books and photocopies, staggering the binding of science serials, and sharing COM catalogs and serials lists. The most ambitious cooperative project so far is a union list of serials produced in 1963. This union list, while helpful for many years, is of little use today because budgetary restrictions have prevented its updating.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE COOPERATIVE SERIALS PROJECT

In the past, when either of the two library systems was considering cancelling a journal, one consideration was whether the other subscribed to the same title. But without a formal agreement, there was no assurance that the other library would not cancel the journal. To eliminate this weakness and to regularize the cooperative aspects of the process, the science libraries of the two universities have recently concluded a joint journal retention/cancellation agreement policy. The policy is designed to prevent erosion of the area's journal resources by insuring that the last copy of a journal subscription will not be cancelled without the concurrence of staff at both libraries: When both institutions hold a science journal being considered for cancellation by one or both of them, the science librarians jointly decide which library should cancel and which should retain the title. The retaining library agrees not to cancel the title without prior consultation.

Although the present agreement specifically treats only cancellation decisions, consultation on the purchase of both serials and expensive monographs and the

possibility of joint ownership are envisioned. It can thus serve as a basis for expanding cooperation.

Three things are essential to insure the success of a cooperative program: full trust and cooperation between the institutions involved, an effective and rapid method of delivering library material from one institution to the other, and easy access to holdings information. WSU and UI have a long history of institutional cooperation. They are also fortunate to have an excellent delivery system. If an item held by one library is requested by the other before 11 a.m., it will normally be delivered by 7 p.m. the same day. Holdings information is available through serials lists and computer access to holdings files. When in doubt, library staff or users can telephone the sister institution for confirmation.

#### ANTICIPATED RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM

Through this agreement, we expect to increase the total number of unique scientific journal titles in the area. This will be accomplished by redirecting our materials budgets away from duplicates and less-used journals and toward the unique titles heretofore not held in the area. Thus, by cancelling duplicate titles, the addition of new titles without a corresponding increase in our materials budgets has been possible. Since this cooperative scheme is based on a binding agreement between the two institutions, it eliminates the risk of unilateral decisions by one library that would damage the other.

Both institutions are committed to maintaining daily courier service between libraries. By exchanging tables of contents and displaying them among the journals currently received, we are assuring that patrons know what is accessible at the other library, and the delivery service assures that those articles are available within twenty-four hours. This is almost as good as being on site.

Rather than being viewed as two competing institutions, the libraries are being thought of as one extended system. Thus, there is everything to gain and nothing to lose.



## CONCLUSION

Libraries, as they cancel unique titles, have finally reached a point the publishers have dreaded. Local *availability* must replace local *ownership*—not a new idea, but one that has finally come of age.

By signing journal retention agreements, institutions with similar missions,

located in close proximity and with rapid and reliable delivery systems, can significantly increase the number of less-used research journals available to faculty and students in the area. Such an agreement assures both institutions that a title will be available when it is needed.

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