

The Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries

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A crisis is a turning point, an urgent situation that prompts quick action. And yet for over two decades, research libraries in the United States have been facing “a crisis in foreign acquisitions.” The phrase was first used by Jutta Reed-Scott in 1989 and widely disseminated in her 1996 seminal book, *Scholarship, Research Libraries, and Global Publishing*.¹ The problems plaguing the collecting of international materials developed over some time, however, and earlier reports remind us of both the persistence of the issues and our collective inability to make systematic and enduring changes to improve the situation and resolve the crisis.

It is a way-too-familiar story, beginning in the 1970s. Print publishing worldwide is growing. Electronic resources are in demand, and escalating serials prices are putting serious pressure on library budgets, which are static or declining. Inflation and the relative strength of the dollar are unpredictable factors affecting libraries’ buying power. Researchers are exploring new areas of scholarship, many interdisciplinary or requiring new formats. The library profession is aging fast, and area studies librarians might be aging even faster, the pipeline is narrow and new, competent, highly skilled language and area specialists are in short supply. Perceived “low use” materials -- often code for foreign-language books and journals -- are increasingly under threat.

Of course the world of research libraries today is drastically different than it was a decade, or even five years ago, but when it comes to global collections, many of the same dynamics are still in play. So where does the story end? Is the ending a happy one? Are we making progress? Is there hope for a resolution to the crisis? And how long can a “crisis” still be one?

¹ Jutta Reed-Scott, *Scholarship, Research Libraries and Global Publishing* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1996).

Today, on the happy occasion of the inauguration of the re-established International and Area Studies Library at the University of Illinois, I would like to revisit some successful collaborative strategies that addressed the challenge of building strong and enduring collections of research materials published or produced outside the United States, and share my reflections on how the contemporary world both exacerbates the problems and opens up avenues for exploration and opportunity. Finally, I will share some questions and hope to hear your perspectives. On this special occasion, I hope to bring good news.

History. In 1992, three task forces that actively engaged university presidents in what had been considered to be “library issues” were created. The Task Force on the Acquisition and Distribution of Foreign Language and Area Studies Materials, and the other two, were a joint endeavor of the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and especially significant because they raised to the presidential level three complex issues that were seen at that time, twenty years ago, to have serious repercussions for scholarship and research universities. Presidents came together on the Task Force with area studies center directors, scholars, and librarians. The other two task forces, on “A National Strategy for Managing Scientific and Technological Information” and “Intellectual Property Rights in an Electronic Environment,” tackled the serials crisis and copyright, both, like foreign acquisitions, vexing issues still very much with us.

The Task Force worked for a year and their final recommendations underscored the shared concern that scholars were in danger of losing access to foreign-language materials, and that a strategy to expand research libraries’ collecting was sorely needed. Major North American universities, together with the Library of Congress and foreign national and research libraries, should organize a “distributed program for access to foreign acquisitions,” beginning with three demonstration projects. They emphasized that universities should “plan and fund the electronic infrastructure necessary to support the new avenues of access and delivery crucial to the success of a distributed North American collection,” and that university leaders and their research librarians should “articulate incentives to scholars and faculty for moving away from local and toward remote access, so that an individual institution’s library may develop in-depth collections in a few selected

areas, but provide remote access to many more in-depth collections.”² Easier said than done.

Soon after, the AAU/ARL Global Resources Program (GRP) was launched with generous support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and modest matching contributions from a respectable number of ARL libraries. The GRP was a collaborative response to the impact of static budgets and the rising costs of serials on the ability of research libraries to continue to collect broadly in international fields, following on the Task Force report.

This new program established different models based on the particular needs of scholars as well as on the unique characteristics of the publishing and distribution of materials in each region. All six initial Global Resources projects – from the first three “demonstration projects” on Germany, Japan, and Latin America to the South Asia, Southeast Asian, and African projects -- engaged scholars and specialists early on as partners in the development of parameters, emphases and strategies. Rather than adopting a single template or “one-size-fits-all” approach for regionally focused projects, the GRP encouraged and facilitated distinct models that addressed the most immediate challenges to access for each region. Collaboration has taken the form of reciprocal relationships for collection development, enhanced resource sharing, joint digital library development, and the formation of “buying clubs,” as well as cooperative cataloging and the preservation of grey literature. The importance of the efforts of individuals to the success of the projects cannot be over emphasized.

The GRP encouraged U. S. and Canadian libraries to build on local strengths, decrease collecting in areas well supported elsewhere and invest the funds in more specialized materials to deepen local collections. A promising strategy, this did not catch on for all regions. Although the GRP did not achieve the goal of a formally “distributed” or “federated” program with designated institutional assignments, it did lead to an expansion of the “commons,” the larger universe of research resources available to all researchers, and in some cases, recognition of de facto “lead institutions.” Studies of OCLC data in the past five years have demonstrated that there is a steady increase in the number of titles published outside the U. S. and acquired by our libraries but also a trend toward fewer copies of any given title,

² Association of American Universities Research Libraries Project, *Reports of the AAU Task Forces* (Washington, DC: ARL, May 1994), pp. 13-14.

indicating more explicit or implicit collaboration in collection development, and thus a broader “commons.”

In 2006, the Global Resources Program became a Network and moved to the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), whose strong cooperative foundation, longstanding international orientation, and support for the area microform projects makes it a logical base of operations. GRN has focused on primary materials and on cross-regional projects such as human rights and water resources, and on providing wider access to those materials – through acquisition, harvesting, digitization, and licensing.³

The Contemporary World. Although the GRP/GRN have made important strides, developed new models, and raised consciousness about the plight of area studies collecting, the goal of a coordinated network has eluded us. But is it realistic, necessary, or desirable? I no longer believe so; the sprawling domain of “area studies collections” is much too large, diverse, and dynamic and defies the kind of governance or structure that the AAU/ARL Task Force envisioned. At the same time, area studies collections of excellence exist across the country, many here at Illinois, and most serious researchers and area librarians know where those strong collections are for their fields. But can we count on those strengths into the future?

Contemporary challenges and new factors contribute to the persistence of the “crisis” and a nagging sense that we are falling behind, that area studies collections could be lost or eclipsed in the “transformation,” or the transition, to a digital world. There is some solid basis for this fear. The print world was a much simpler place. The unevenness in availability of full-text databases – whether they are being developed for, or in, all countries, on compatible platforms, and how they will be archived – is a factor. Faculty are turning to new kinds of resources, for example, new media and visual materials, and we wonder how to acquire or license and provide ongoing access to those sources, which are proving to be increasingly important to the broad field of cultural studies and beyond. Research and teaching interests have expanded greatly and interdisciplinary collaborations are also putting pressure on the ability of libraries to satisfy the broader and broader needs of scholars and students. How do we keep track of it all, identify the sources, and pay for everything? And of course there is the duality of our world, the continued

³ For complete information on the Global Resources Network, see: <http://www.crl.edu/grn/index.asp>.

acquisition of print even as a larger portion of our budgets each year is directed to digital.

At the same time, many dynamics currently at play in the library world -- space costs and constraints, the concept of patron-driven acquisitions, the consolidation of print repositories of “legacy” collections, more reliance on books and other resources in digital form, interest in newer sources such as datasets and websites, and the possibility of creating a “cloud library,” which would aim to eliminate duplication of print titles among university libraries – have implications for the provision of non-English research materials that have barely been broached, much less fully explored. In general, discussion of the “international” aspects of these dynamics has focused on Western Europe and the rest of the developed world.

But there is a new development that offers opportunities, as well as challenges.

A July 11, 2011 article in *Inside Higher Ed* entitled “Who is Global?” reports that university leaders at a meeting of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education agreed that “global issues have never been more central to their institutions.” The vice chancellor of the University of Bristol offered seven criteria to determine if an institution is a global university. On his list are “a level of ‘comprehensive excellence’ encompassing teaching and research,” and “‘innovative’ research on global topics,” as well as “a curriculum global in focus.” All three criteria imply the availability of “global” library collections as stimulus to the production of scholarship and support for research, teaching and curricular development.

A 2011 publication issued by NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, entitled *Comprehensive Internationalization*, defines that term as:

...a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all

academic service and support units. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility.⁴

As our universities go global, our libraries must be major actors – and yet they have received surprisingly little overt attention. Their critical role as collaborator in teaching, learning, and scholarship is obvious and yet, for example, the 42-page NAFSA report does not mention the word “library.” According to the author (responding to an email query), “global access to resources via the Web and...growth in global library interconnection” would be sufficient for ambitious institutional internationalization. Easier said than done.

I realize that this is a generalization and that many research libraries may be well integrated into their home institutions’ international initiatives and ambitions. But there is much more to do and we should capitalize on this moment to focus attention on libraries’ global collections and services and to underscore the urgency of collaboration to guarantee that as wide an array as possible of international publications, whether print or digital, remains accessible to all users. Enrollment in language classes is rising. More students are studying or engaging in community service abroad. The population of international students at our universities is growing fast, and we are seeking to educate “global citizens.” Our professional schools are often in the forefront of the university’s global initiatives. It is time for a fresh look at the role and nature of foreign-language library collections and services. It may well mean a reassessment of how we have supported area studies programs vs. how we support a more globalized university.

Into the Mainstream. In the days of the Global Resources Program my attempts to secure relatively small Mellon-matching contributions from a wide array of ARL libraries were often met with something like this: “We don’t have a lot of global programs,” or “we don’t really collect much in area studies.” This never failed to surprise and dismay me, since those very institutions, their faculty and students, rely on other libraries that *do* invest significantly in non-English-language materials. International and area studies collecting (and staffing) have been regarded over the years as tangential, not “core,” highly specialized, catering to a narrow set of users/clientele. And yet international collections are an integral part of our services and all research libraries should consider them as such. Just as all true research libraries are expected to have special collections, they should be

⁴John K. Hudzik, *Comprehensive Internationalization: From Concept to Action* (www.nafsa.org/cizn), *Executive Summary*, p. 1.

expected to have international collections and connections and to partner in providing access.

The Nature of Scholarship. We need to know much more about the nature of the demand for our collections and services. We also require more engagement and new kinds of outreach and collaboration with scholars, need their views on how they gain access to the materials they need, learn what they are seeking but not finding, in essence a demand-and-supply analysis for non-English resources. Area studies faculty, because they are used to scarcity, have a healthy regard for collaborative collection building. Many have also developed their own in-country networks to gain access to sources, particularly grey literature, and have worked effectively with libraries to secure the materials needed. They are willing, grateful partners, in my experience, some of our best. But our global collections increasingly support more than traditional area studies faculty and graduate students as cross-regional, interdisciplinary inquiry requires that researchers consult a wide variety of sources. Global health, human rights, comparative public policy, international business practices, cross-cultural gender roles.... the list goes on. Is our current staffing model responsive to these new fields?

The View from Abroad. We need more systematic study of the state of production and distribution of scholarly resources relevant to the humanities and social sciences in various regions, beyond the US. How prevalent, for example, are e-journals and e-books in the Middle East, in Africa, or in Latin America? What should U. S. libraries that wish to support scholarship and teaching on these areas and others be "collecting" in the coming decade? With enhanced focus on Asia's economy and new campuses springing up in the region, what will be expected of research libraries in supporting new scholarship and services, what formats will they collect, and what obstacles will they face? Beyond collecting traditional materials (books, journals), how are we approaching the challenges of preserving datasets, websites, news and social media, the new raw materials of international scholarship? What dynamics must inform our planning for the future with regard to creating access to (and preserving) materials published abroad? What is the view from beyond the U.S. and other first-world countries, particularly with regard to the speed of the transition to digital? What in-country or intra-regional collaborations are in place that could assist U. S. research libraries? What new forms can our traditional cooperative collection building take? What commonalities are there

among the areas from which we collect that might serve as the foundation for global collecting?

The New Dynamics of Collaboration. ARL hosted a forum in October 2013 with the subtitle “The Urgency of Collaboration,” and will soon issue a report on “21st Century Collections: Calibration of Investment and Collaborative Action,” The focus is on rethinking how to build access to collections in the new digital environment and how libraries can add value to the research process. It calls for “taking traditional collaboration to a higher level.” Libraries are transitioning from “institution-centric collections to a user-centric, networked world, [of]...distributed collections.” The shared vision espoused in this report stands to benefit the worldwide community of scholars.

I believe that we should seek to mainstream global collections and concerns, rather than viewing them as separate and different and subject to other forces. The elements of the ARL report offer a useful framework for consideration of international and area studies collection: budgetary issues will require coordination if we are to continue broadly based selection while acquiring and preserving unique materials locally; experimentation with collective action regarding exorbitant journal prices is encouraged, along with open access initiatives; local and shared investments in the management and preservation of digital assets – images, data, texts – are needed; shared print repositories offer opportunities for collaborative preservation and access.

The report and its “strategic discussion points” are intended to frame conversations with university administrators and faculty about the steadily shifting “landscape” for 21st century collections. The four elements – researchers, content, publishing, and infrastructure – are a useful organizing principle for some of the newest features of this landscape, and have direct relevance for international and area studies, which are not immune to these forces and can clearly be viewed through this lens.

Parting Questions

I would like to end with eight questions. I look forward to our discussion.

- How do library collections and services for area studies differ from those that support a globalized university?
- Where are the gaps in our shared collections – regions, countries, formats?

- What data would be most helpful in understanding the current landscape of international and area studies collecting?
- If we were free to outline a collective vision for international collection development equal to the challenges of globalized higher education, what would it look like?
- What new roles and services might there be for publishers to play in collection development and access?
- Is it desirable and plausible to attempt to decrease the duplication of English-language publications acquired and instead deepen and broaden our collections from beyond the U. S.? How could we do this?
- Succession planning is a significant concern in research libraries, from university librarians to managers at all levels, to specialists in many fields. Where will the next area studies librarians come from, and what skills will they bring? What skills *must* they bring? How are jobs changing? What impact, for example, do E-scholarship, digital projects, new forms of collaboration and new teaching models have on area studies specialists?
- What should a university librarian know about global collections? What messages would you have for ARL?