

The Collection Development and Management Viewpoint: Reflections on the Strength of Our “Safety Net” and Possibilities for Collaboration

**Preserving America’s Printed Resources II: A North American Summit
University of California, Berkeley
Bloomington, IN
June 25, 2015**

Panel Remarks of Thomas H. Teper

As Bernie said, we were asked to reflect on the extent to which the current US and Canadian cooperative print archiving efforts, together, address the challenges of print serial collections stewardship.

Having read the CRL’s “Print Archiving and Shared Print in North America...” paper, I have to say that there was little in the findings that I found particularly surprising. The lack of consistency (or comprehensiveness) in cataloging records, the fact that most of the preserved materials are in English or come from the STEM fields, and the notion that many of the print preservation efforts are tied to broader efforts to rethink campus spaces are, frankly, to be expected. After all, volume does trump value when there is a tension between preservation and space management. One of these (space management) is a problem that we all need to address; the other (preservation) is a mandate that many of our institutions have assumed. That’s not to say that it is a mandate that we shouldn’t have assumed, but it is one that will lose out if it is put on a pedestal and considered outside of the broader context of managing our libraries. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we know that our storage facility consists of 10% duplicate general collections materials. When it comes right down to it, it is difficult to argue that we need millions of additional dollars in construction when we can locally or consortially engage in some cost avoidance strategies.

As a profession, we have often said that we need to look outside of the field of librarianship for examples to help us. And, in this case, the data in the report and the concerns that were raised within it led me to think about a couple examples from great strategists.

Helmuth von Moltke had said that “no plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy’s main strength.” This has often been shortened to say that “no plan survives contact with the enemy.” As I read through the document, I was struck by the number of times that phrases like “sound risk assessment,” “confidence,” “certainty,” and “assurance” were mentioned. The reality, given the bibliographic mess and lack of coverage for many areas detailed in this document as well as the well-documented “long-tail” of acquisitions (particularly in foreign language materials), is that the moment of absolute certainty never arrives. We have to take the information that we have at hand and make decisions.

The second strategist that we can look to is actually Fredrick the Great who noted that “he who defends everything, defends nothing.” When we think of preservation, we oftentimes think about it in a very simplistic terms. One of the first things that archivists learn about is the process of appraisal. Lots of material passed in the direction of an institutional archives is actually discarded. This means that primary source material is being weeded upon ingestion into an archives. Preservation administrators are taught that there are steps in repair and maintenance of library collections and that, in some cases,

materials might be sufficiently damaged that the most cost effective and appropriate treatment option is reformatting and/or withdrawal and replacement with a surrogate. If we believe that we are going to build a safety net that will preserve everything without some level of loss, we are going to be sorely disappointed. I believe that we need to identify our priorities and begin moving ahead. Otherwise, seeking to determine by which model we will preserve everything will lead to paralysis and, ultimately, failure.