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# Curating Collective Collections--Collaborating to Build: Using Consortial Collection Analysis to Inform Collection Development

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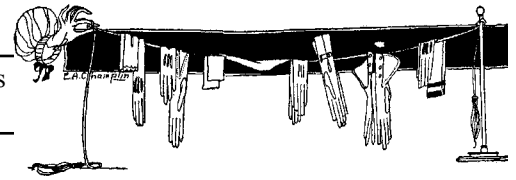
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# Curating Collective Collections — Collaborating to Build: Using Consortial Collection Analysis to Inform Collection Development

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**Column Editor’s Note:** Readers of this column and participants in CRL’s *Print Archive Network Forum (PAN)* at *ALA Midwinter and Annual* will be familiar with the many collection analysis projects undertaken by *Sustainable Collections Services* from Maine to California, sea to shining sea, and the many lakes and rivers in between. As **Genya O’Gara** and **Anne Osterman** point out in this case study from the *Virtual Library of Virginia*, those analyses have focused on individual library and consortial efforts to identify copies of older, less used monographs as candidates for potential deaccessioning or retention in shared print agreements. VIVA’s case is different in that they undertook their analysis in order to identify opportunities for collaboration on collection building with both electronic and print monographs in English. Like the *Orbis Cascade Alliance*, they also looked at the collective composition and use of their monograph collection in order to establish a guideline number for new copies adequate to meeting reader demand and preventing unnecessary duplication among VIVA’s 72 members. Heretofore, such proactive collection management strategies have been launched successfully among such small groups of proximate libraries as the *TriCollege Consortium of Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges* and the *CBB Consortium of Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin Colleges*, or in such larger groups as the *Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries* or *Orbis Cascade* with an emphasis on eBooks. VIVA’s experience over the next several years will be instructive for the shared collections community in terms of how the collections grow and the effects of the copy threshold guideline on resource-sharing services and on the number of copies jointly held. In the latter case, one of the hotter topics in the shared collections community is gauging the right size of the collective inventory for meeting reader demand over time as more text is available in electronic form and more readers choose to work with electronic text, not to mention how that inventory is distributed, housed, and delivered. VIVA will contribute important BTUs to the discussion. — **BK**

In the current competitive and dynamic higher education environment, academic libraries know they must develop new, collaborative approaches to building collections. Budgets are flat or deflating, and users’ needs

for flexible and collaborative spaces are growing. Simultaneously, academic libraries face a networked environment in which the proliferation of new formats and evolving modes of scholarly communication are shifting how collections are developed. In order to remain integral intellectual hubs on campus, academic libraries must innovate and work together more closely than ever before.

At a consortial level, the collaboration conversation around monographs often focuses on shared print repositories and weeding projects, aimed at freeing up space in overcrowded libraries. In 2013, the *Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA)* consortium embarked on a collection analysis project that allowed us to take a different approach: VIVA focused on development rather than deaccessioning, illuminating new paths for building collaborative monographic collections.

VIVA is a consortium of seventy-two non-profit, academic libraries in Virginia. VIVA members are geographically distributed across Virginia and represent public and private colleges and universities both large and small, as well as community colleges. Traditionally, VIVA has focused on coordinated collection development of electronic resources and resource sharing. Until this project, VIVA had no history of collaboration with print monographs outside of resource sharing and had explored only limited approaches to purchasing and licensing eBooks.

In 2012, the VIVA Steering Committee expressed a desire to better understand the bigger picture of the collective collection of the member libraries. Lacking a consortial union catalog, there was no clear sense of gaps, overlaps, uniqueness, or strengths among the libraries, and the overall makeup of the large circulating monographic collections was unknown. In response, a small working group formed to investigate and recommend an approach forward for VIVA that would provide a holistic view of the monographic holdings of the member libraries.

The working group recommended *Sustainable Collections Services (SCS)*<sup>1</sup> for an initial cross-institutional title-level analysis of the holdings of a representative group of libraries. VIVA member libraries were polled for their interest in participating in the collection analysis and willingness to contribute a local project manager to a task force who would work on the SCS analysis. Twelve libraries<sup>2</sup> were then selected for a pilot group representing the broad

spectrum of VIVA institutions, including public, private, and community colleges.

SCS, now part of OCLC, offers a suite of services and tools that support libraries in de-accessioning and storage projects, including providing detailed reports that place libraries’ print monograph holdings in the larger context of other libraries and the national collection. SCS worked with each pilot library to ingest item, holding, and bibliographic records from various ILS systems and returned reports to the project task force that combined local circulation and item data with *WorldCat* holdings and other comparison data points.

The task force established four primary goals in its first year:

- pilot a coordinated, consortial approach to collection assessment;
- use the data and analysis to inform future collaborative collection development;
- identify scarcely-held titles in need of protection; and
- begin a conversation about reducing unnecessary duplication in the state.

Although other groups of libraries had raised the issue of collaborative collection development, SCS’s analyses had typically emphasized collaborative weeding, preservation, or shifting materials to shared repositories. For VIVA, however, the initial, central goal was to determine how to use the analysis to inform future collection development. In order to support truly effective cooperative purchasing, VIVA’s team believed that the data itself should drive the mapping of future projects.

The task force therefore specified data parameters that would enable better understanding of the circulating monographic collections of the participating libraries by focusing on the kinds of books they were most likely to hold. With this goal in mind, excluded from the analysis were special collections, medical and law collections, government documents, foreign language materials, serials, and anything not within the *Library of Congress* classification system. Included were all circulating English language print monographs from the institutions’ main libraries — approximately six million records analyzed across the twelve pilot institutions. The libraries’ holdings were compared with one another, the consortium, the state, and the United States, as well as with *HathiTrust*, the *Internet Archive*, and selected peer library groups.

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SCS provided the task force with a wealth of initial data based on the parameters outlined above. The task force then had to determine the questions to ask of the data. As VIVA wanted to use the data to inform decisions about the purchase of eBooks that might bring the most value across the consortium, the group looked for any obvious patterns in widely held and highly and recently circulated titles as well as relative shelf life by subject and publisher. The group also attempted to identify local disciplinary strengths based on distributed holdings by subject.

“Widely held and highly and recently used,” for the purpose of this analysis, meant titles that were owned by ten or more VIVA libraries, had more than ten recorded uses at the owning library, and had a last charge date of 2007 or later. Although it was acknowledged that this level of circulation would bias the titles selected toward the larger institutions and that an average circulation level across similar title holdings might be a more accurate marker of general usefulness, this approach was determined to be satisfactory and had the appeal of being clear and easy to explain and implement. In addition, although the initial selection had been based on at least ten recorded uses at the owning library, the average total recorded uses for these books across the pilot libraries was seventy-eight, demonstrating substantial usage at multiple libraries.

With this list of widely held and highly and recently used titles, the task force was able to identify titles and products that might be broadly useful to the consortium in e-format using ProQuest’s Title Matching Fast Service. Using an in-house ISBN-to-publisher match, we were able to identify the top publishers at the intersection of the three parameters of holdings and usage. As shown in Chart 1, although many publishers were represented, there were only a few publishers with significant presence in this listing.

This examination of key publishers extended to analyses by publisher of the historical number and usage of copies held within VIVA. Graphing this data allowed for quick visualization of the historical holding and usage trends relative to the total number of titles held by publisher throughout the consortium (shown by example in Chart 2). This data was then used to inform future e-purchasing options and cost negotiations.

The analysis also examined the shelf life of the identified titles, or how long after publication a title would be considered useful to patrons. In order to estimate this, the task force looked at the average number of years between publication date and the last charge date for selected call number ranges. The working group thought that taking this approach might inform future decisions about leasing versus purchasing eBooks, both by publisher and subject, or aid the management of a shared demand-driven acquisition program.

Finally, the task force wanted to understand local subject strengths among the pilot libraries. Using the data provided by SCS, the task

Chart 1

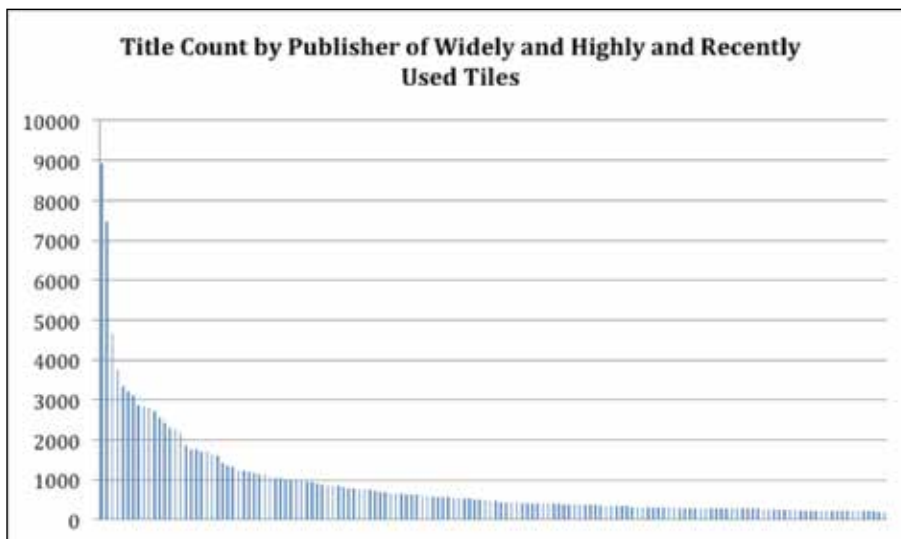


Chart 2

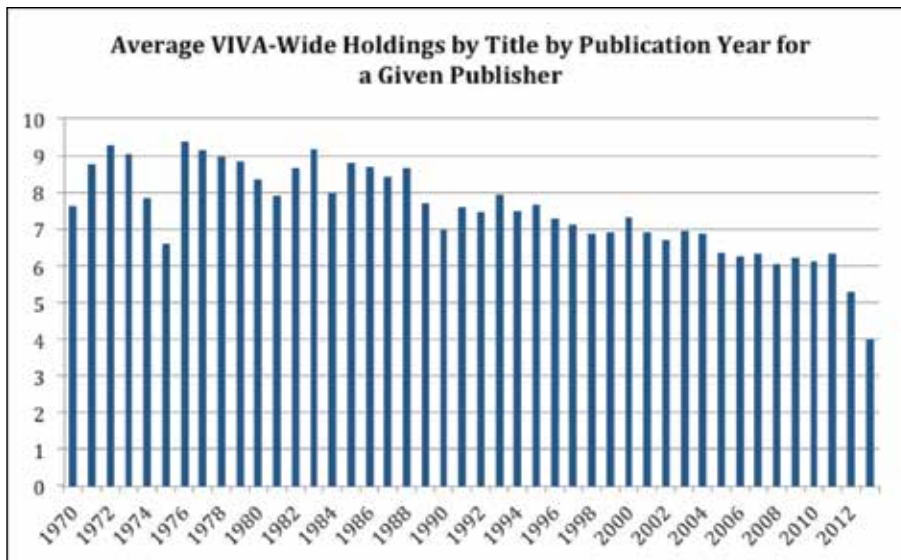
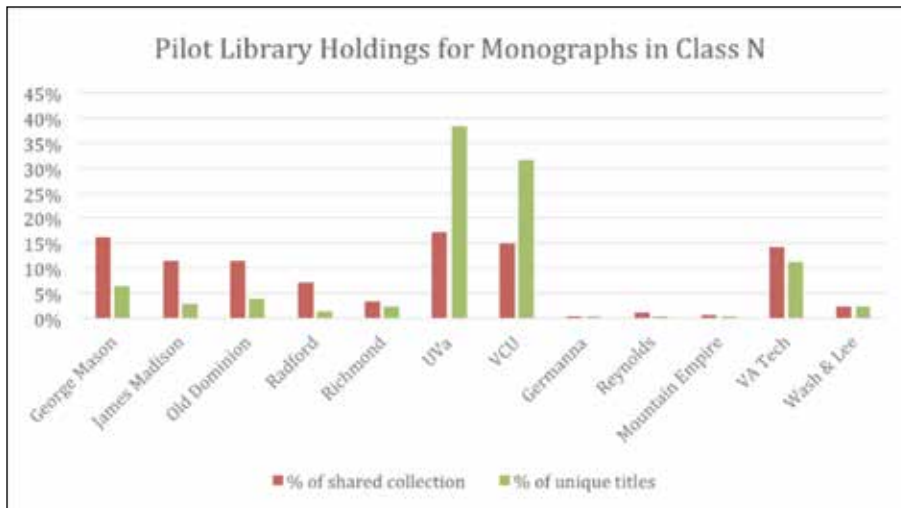
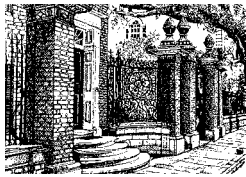


Chart 3



continued on page 69



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force compared the distribution of both subject collection size, presumed to demonstrate broad holdings, and titles unique to Virginia, presumed to demonstrate deep holdings. An example of this approach applied to a specific LC class, Class N, can be seen in Chart 3. This analysis revealed some clear local subject strengths, some anticipated and some more unexpected, and it provided a starting place for discussions about how a subject-based, distributed monographic repository might look within the consortium. It also allows VIVA to begin to imagine how the consortium might move forward in integrating as "one" collection with distributed strengths.

These analyses, among others done by the task force, resulted in four implementable initiatives. Two deal with prospective collection development: VIVA shared eBook acquisitions for publishers of widely distributed, highly circulated, and recently used print titles (one shared eBook purchase based on this data has already been made, and others are currently being explored), and the establishment of a voluntary recommended threshold of four copies within the consortium (not just the pilot libraries) for new print monograph purchases, with the potential to organically distribute the holdings by identified areas of subject strength. This threshold was set based on a review of the average holdings across VIVA for titles in the project, an examination of thresholds set by other consortia, in particular the Orbis Cascade

Alliance, and robust discussions with the consortium's Resource Sharing Committee.

The other two initiatives are more along the traditional lines of an SCS project: a Memorandum of Understanding to protect the unique and rare titles identified by the collection analysis (defined as held by one institution in Virginia and by fewer than ten libraries nationwide), and a Memorandum of Understanding for the cooperative retention of widely-held monographs, allowing for safe de-duplication within the consortium. The MOU for unique and rare materials is currently in operation, with institutions at varying stages of analyzing their titles or marking records with a retention note. The MOU for widely-held monographs has been agreed to, and the next step will be a title-level allocation by SCS.

There are still some large challenges that cannot be discounted. Most significant is the time pressure to move forward using this data, since its lifespan is limited. The impact of adopting new purchasing practices across the pilot libraries will also present its own challenges — down the road, VIVA members will need to determine the feasibility of a shared discovery layer if the consortium wants to shift to a truly shared, findable collection. VIVA will also need to do outreach and training to ensure consistency in implementation across the consortium, and the long-term impacts on ILL and campus delivery services will be an area to watch in the upcoming years.

This project has also highlighted some major strengths within the consortium, in particular the

culture of trust that has allowed the creation of flexible agreements and understandings with low barriers to entry. This trust has allowed the data to drive collection development in new areas and has given VIVA the opportunity to visualize current collections and future directions with an open mind. It has also resulted in clearly defined, actionable initiatives, which have been key to building support for the longer-term projects.

Most importantly, this project has initiated a cultural shift, encouraging participants to think of VIVA as one collection with individual and local personalities. Within this shift, the task force has been able to delineate data-driven areas for future consortial collection development. Challenges remain, but VIVA can point to a clear strategy directing how and where we would like to build collaboratively in the coming years. 🐘

### Endnotes

1. <http://www.sustainablecollections.com/>
2. The pilot libraries included: **George Mason University, Old Dominion University, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, James Madison University, Radford University, Germanna Community College, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Mountain Empire Community College, University of Richmond, and Washington & Lee University. The College of William & Mary** also joined the project in late 2014.