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Good Things Come in Small Packages: Getting the Most From Shared Print Retention and Cooperative Collection Development With a Small Group of Libraries

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Abstract

In June 2013, the Central Iowa Collaborative Collections Initiative (CI-CCI), inspired by a Charleston preconference on data-driven shared print collections, was established. CI-CCI went from being just an idea to a formal, MOU-governed organization in just six months. It is consists of a group of five mid and small central Iowa private academic libraries. Members are Central College, Drake University, Grand View University, Grinnell College, and Simpson College.

Unlike other collaborations of this nature, the initial primary focus of the group was identification of titles for retention, as opposed to identification of weeding candidates. Because retention was of major concern to the group, each library did a retention verification project. Each assigned retention title was physically verified on the shelf and marked as a retention title. A web application was built, using MySQL, to facilitate the retention verification process.

The second primary focus of the collaborative is the development of the "shared collection" approach via prospective collection development. The group is beginning to turn its attention to this phase of the project. It will be challenging due to the fact that we do not currently share a common catalog or vendor. Nor do we currently have the same level of interest and utilization of e-books or DDA.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of a collaborative of a small group of libraries, which are discussed in this paper as well as tips for beginning such a collaboration.

Project Background

Two academic librarians in Des Moines, Pam Rees, Library Director at Grand View University, and Teri Koch, Collection Development Coordinator at Drake University, initiated the collaboration. While Iowa libraries have a long history of collaboration, there had not been a shared print monograph collaboration involving private academic libraries. The following academic libraries from central Iowa agreed to participate: Central College, Drake University, Grand View University, Grinnell College, and Simpson College. To initiate the process, Pam Rees and Teri Koch developed a set of guiding principles for the proposed collaboration which was shared with and agreed upon in principle by the group:

1. Evaluate shared print monograph collections.

2. Decisions would be data driven.

3. 24-hour delivery of materials.

4. Coordinate acquisitions to eliminate all but the most critical duplications and maximize local budgets.

5. Secure commitment by senior administration at each institution to the project.

The next step was to iron out the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which was largely modeled after the Michigan Shared Print Initiative (MI-SPI) version. The group created two addenda to deal with specific and unique issues related to ILL and acquisitions/collection development. The MOU was signed just six months after the project was initiated. It was signed by the Library Director and the Chief Academic Officer/Provost of each

institution in order to insure institutional commitment to the project.

CI-CCI Group Characteristics

1. Fairly homogenous (in size, location, mission). FTEs range from 1388 to 4400.

2. Long-standing history of cooperation (all are members of the Iowa Private Academic Libraries Consortium) and mutual trust.

3. Strong commitment to project goals and the importance of decisions to mutually benefit all group members.

4. No project manager.

5. No outside funding.

6. No shared catalog.

7. Once-per-month agenda-driven conference calls.

8. Governance is by directors (with involvement of some of their librarians).

9. Web site was created by Drake for key project documents, including MOU: https://ci-cci.org/

Project Phase I: Data Analysis/Retention Verification Project

After the MOU was signed, the collaborative hired Sustainable Collections Services (SCS) to analyze the data for the group. The group's combined holdings were slightly over 1 million records. About one-half of those titles were unique within the group.

CI-CCI members were in agreement that the data analysis should initially focus on retaining and preserving items rather than on identifying withdrawal candidates. This may seem like a distinction without much difference, but in fact, it turned out to be a significant factor in the analysis.

The group considered multiple factors (usually referred to as "scenarios") in developing the list of preservation/withdrawal candidates. The scenario ultimately chosen by the CI-CCI group used the following criteria:

- Published before 1991.

- Zero (0) recorded uses since 2005.

- At least 1 non-CI-CCI library in Iowa also holds a copy.

- Retain 1 title-holding within CI-CCI.

Given the group's desire to focus on retention/preservation we decided early on that the only way to truly accomplish this would be to do an actual "Retention Verification" project.

The retention verification project involved several elements:

- Verifying the physical location of each assigned title.

- Inspecting the physical condition of each assigned title.

- Assigning a status to the item (more on that below).

- Stamping each book with "CI-CCI 2013" to indicate that the book was a retention title and should not be withdrawn.

- Modifying the item's bibliographic record to indicate that it was a retention title (as of this writing, this step has yet to be completed).

CI-CCI ended up with 143,294 retention titles as a group. SCS attempted to, as much as possible, evenly distribute those among the group members relative to collection size. We all agreed that we would not begin looking at potential weeding candidates until the verification process was accomplished by each institution.

Project Phase I: Data Analysis/Retention Verification Project: Web App Design

Drake decided early on to employ the skills of its Library Applications Developer to build a web application to facilitate the verification process. The collection data from SCS was imported into a database, to be used by the web application, and care had to be taken to account for minor differences in the data between institutions. Due to the amount of data involved, proper indexing and table design were critical to achieving good

performance. The data is stored in a MySQL database—a common product for projects like this—and freely available. The applications developer paid particular attention to the creation of indexes, which improved database performance time.

The front-end web application was designed with one purpose: making it easy to record the verification at the shelves. For this it was essential that the user interface be responsive. In other words, it had to function effectively on any device with any size screen-from phones, to tablets, to laptops on carts. There was no way to know what devices users at the member institutions would use, and putting any restriction on what they could use would run counter to the idea of making verification easy. The responsive design was made simpler by using a freely available CSS and JavaScript-based user interface library called "Bootstrap," which was designed with these features in mind.
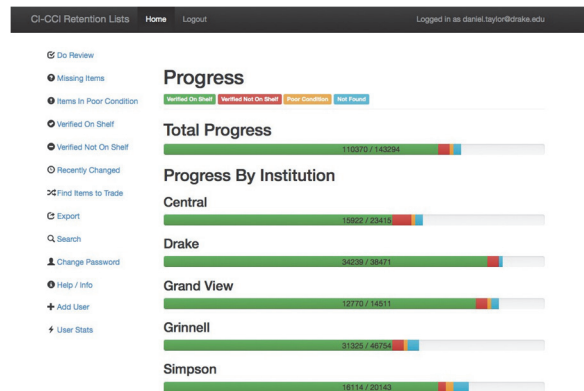

Figure 1. Display of web application used to facilitate retention verification project.

Most of the group members had student employees perform the verification process. At Drake, students went into the stacks with netbooks on carts. Using a dropdown menu in the web app, students assigned each item a status:

- *Verified On Shelf* if the item was found on the shelf.

- *Poor Condition* if the item was found but needed repair.

- *Missing.*

"Verified on Shelf" was the category into which the majority of the items fell. The "Missing" and "Poor Condition" categories were transitory categories. Each school investigated the titles on these lists to determine their true status. Each school investigated "Missing" titles to determine whether they might be checked out or misshelved, and many were eventually located and marked "Verified On Shelf." "Poor Condition" titles were, for the most part, repaired sufficiently to move to "Verified On Shelf." Ultimately, every title needed a status of either "Verified On Shelf" or "Verified Not On Shelf." The web app showed real time information regarding how many titles were in each category for the institution.

Reclaiming Project ("Horse Trading")

As with any project such as this, not every title assigned to an institution for retention is able to be retained by that institution. Some of these title are in poor condition, but most are just missing. Thus, these titles need to be reassigned to a different institution within the group so they end up being retained. We often hear this process referred to as "horse trading" whereby each institution claims titles for retention that were not originally assigned to them. There were a total of 2,601 such titles (2%) across all institutions in the CI-CCI group.

It was important to all that the smaller libraries have a chance to "pull their weight" in this process; thus the group decided to proceed with each institution attempting to claim at least the same number of items that it had marked "Verified Not On Shelf." For one of the libraries, that was not possible, and the other libraries have claimed more. The reclaiming project proceeded with the smaller libraries claiming first, followed by the larger libraries.

Drake's applications developer extended the functionality of the existing web app to provide a reclaiming mechanism. This primarily involved the identification of availability at institutions other than the original assigned institution, which was among the data SCS originally provided. He also added a feature that showed each institution's items that were unclaimed from other institutions and that were only held at their institution. This

became the logical place for each institution to start the reclaiming project.

In the screen shot below, Central College was the original institution to which this title was assigned. Drake is the only other institution that has it, so if we can locate it we will claim this title for our retention list by scanning the bar code into the web app.
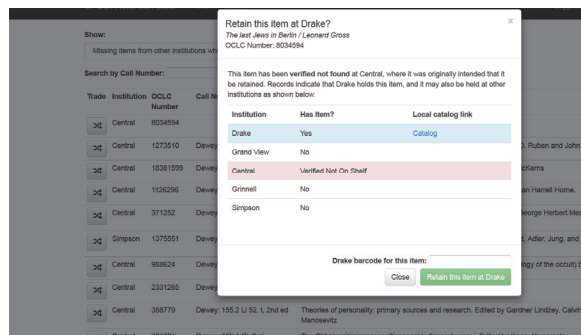

Figure 2. Display of web application used to facilitate retention title "horse trading" process.

One issue that came up during the claiming process involved call number agreement; three of the libraries in the group use LCC and two use DDC. This created some extra work for each institution during the reclaiming project since it required looking up the catalog record in the web app to determine shelf location for those titles in the classification system not used. For example, if one library uses DDC they had to look up the catalog record for the shelf location of any unclaimed LCC titles. The same was true for libraries that use LCC; they had to look up shelf locations for unclaimed DDC titles. This caused some concerns about back-and-forth in the stacks, but ultimately the group proceeded. As of this writing, the group is in the process of wrapping up this project after another (hopefully final) round of claiming.

CI-CCI: The Simpson College Experience

Dunn Library at Simpson College had a program review in 2011 and a vision study with concept design document completed in 2012. Some of the renovation plans relied on compacted collections. Due to building engineering, we cannot use compact shelving. So how do we gain more student learning space without losing materials

needed by the academic community at Simpson and beyond? The call from Teri and Pam came at just the right time for us.

The five institutions in CI-CCI, by way of over a year's worth of emails, conference calls, and coming to consensus, have formed a true collaboration. All had input to the MOU, the addendums and the website. All participants continue to be prompt in responding to any issues that arise. All of our decisions to date have been data-driven and not based on speculation.

Signing of the MOU by a chief academic officer made it a true institutional commitment. The cost for data analysis and use of staff time are well-worth the data-driven results we are seeing. Faculty members have responded favorably to each phase of the collaboration. They are pleased about proposed 48 hour turnaround of interlibrary loans and extended loan periods. For acquisition of new monographs, staff is now checking OCLC. If two members own the requested item, we check back with faculty to see if it is required to own in-house.

Through the verification and reclaiming projects, we found several perks to physically verifying titles. Students went to the shelves using printed lists from the Drake database; these lists were useful for follow up. Staff then updated the database. In the process of this impromptu shelf-reading, we found misshelved items, identified additional missing items, and repaired or replaced books in poor condition. Soon we will withdraw long missing or never-used items.

I have truly appreciated the openness, humor and professionalism among higher ed "competitors" in Iowa.

Project Phase II: Prospective Collection Development

Prospective collection development has been a primary objective of the collaborative since the outset. It has been well understood that this is where the future payoff will be for us as a group, as well as potentially collaborating on other big picture issues such as technology. The CI-CCI MOU directly addresses this as one of the key project

goals: "to coordinate acquisitions with the goal of developing a 'shared collection' among the participants to reduce duplication, leverage acquisition funds, and to reduce the frequency for the necessity to do data refresh."

The Acquisitions Addendum to the MOU spells out how this is to work initially: "Ultimately, the intention of this agreement is to have a shared vendor for acquisitions to enable efficient coordination of future purchases. In fiscal 2013-2014 the group will employ the following procedures: Prior to ordering a title each participating library will check OCLC for CI-CCI holdings. If 2 or more CI-CCI libraries already own the title, the others will not purchase it unless it is specifically required onsite."

Several of the smaller CI-CCI libraries have begun employing this method. Some have not yet begun doing so because of concerns expressed by faculty. Most of the concerns relate largely to the guaranteed turnaround on a loan request. When the collaborative was in its infancy the "24 hour" weekday turnaround was one of the "guiding principles." This is not currently being achieved due largely to the difference in carriers. CI-CCI is currently exploring ways to ensure faster delivery times, including potentially working with the regent institutions. Additional concerns about the shared acquisitions approach include length of checkout for faculty. This issue has already been addressed and the loan period has been extended from 10 weeks to 120 days.

As the collaborative transitions to the collection development phase of the project, we are considering whether to merely coordinate our acquisitions so as to minimize duplication, or to go a step beyond and actually develop our collections in a coordinated manner whereby institutions develop subject specialties. The subject specialty approach seemed to be of particular interest to some of our faculty.

CI-CCI currently has two task forces that are looking at some of these issues. One task force is looking at print acquisitions. They are surveying vendors to inquire about their ability to provide accessible, real-time order data, including circulation notes, as well as experience with

PDA/DDA and print-on-demand. Vendor demos and an RFI will follow.

The second taskforce is looking at ebooks. This group has administered a survey to CI-CCI participants to gather information on how each schools acquires ebooks and makes them available as a precursor to seeking options for a potential shared ebook package or purchase agreement.

The group realizes that prospective collection development will be a challenging endeavor given the differences in budgets and subject specialties. The varying degree of adoption of ebooks and patron driven acquisitions is also a factor in our considerations. We hope to come up with an approach that will meet the needs (to varying degrees) of all of the participants.

Project Next Steps

1. Implement a common vendor for print monograph acquisitions. We will invite presentations from key vendors. This is the first step in furthering the goal of coordination of acquisitions.

2. Determine next steps for sharing collection development efforts (shared purchases, subject emphasis by school, etc.).

3. Work to improve ILL delivery time between CI-CCI schools. This is a key component if we wish to improve faculty buy-in to the philosophy of the "shared collection."

4. The University of Northern Iowa has announced plans to join the collaborative this fall. UNI is one of the three state regent institutions, they have an FTE of approximately 11,000 (which is more than double that of Drake). The group must decide how to incorporate a new member into an existing group who is already well along in the process. UNI is employing SCS (as CI-CCI did), and will have a stand-alone data set since incorporating it with the CI-CCI data would require a data refresh by the entire group (and subsequent costs). Despite

the challenges, the CI-CCI group is thrilled at the prospect of bringing in a larger regent institution especially as we begin to look at prospective collection development.

5. Each school must decide how/if to approach weeding at their institution. At Drake we will consider whether to incorporate a condition survey into the process. That is, a physical inspection of books prior to weeding looking for any contextual information that may preclude weeding (such as note margins in literature, etc.).

6. Implementation of an OCLC Shared Print Symbol to record the retention titles in OCLC. We are currently in the process of implementing this.

7. Updating of MOU to reflect current practices and new members.

8. Long-term management of collaborative. This potentially includes formulating a plan to develop a budget, grant opportunities, and perhaps a project manager.

Advantages of a small collaboration:

1. Geographically close; within 30-mile radius.

2. Fairly homogenous (in size, location, mission). FTE range of 1388 to 4400.

3. Long-standing history of cooperation (all are members of the Iowa Private Academic Libraries Consortium) and mutual trust.

4. Strong commitment to project goals and the importance of decisions to mutually benefit all group members; flexibility key

5. Once-a-month agenda-driven conference calls.

6. Governance by Directors and by consensus (with involvement of some of their librarians).

Disadvantages of a small collaboration:

1. Not grant funded; budgeting is an issue.

2. When and how will we do "data refresh" given budget constraints.

3. Disparity in member budgets results in different priorities when it comes to prospective collection development.

4. No project manager.

5. Need better method for determining group leadership roles.

6. Group shared holdings are limited in number.

Tips for starting a similar type of collaboration:

1. Work within existing collaborative structure (if it exists).

2. Determine need and interest via personal contact.

3. Get a philosophical commitment before attempting a formal agreement.

4. Survey the literature and internet for documentation (including MOUs) on similar collaborative projects. No need to reinvent the wheel for common elements.

5. If possible, secure the support of the Provost/Chief Academic Officer for each participating school (and have them sign the MOU).

6. If possible, determine the leadership roles of group members early in the process.