

Midwest Inter-Library Center: Acquisition Policy and Program, 1950-1953^{*}

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THE PROBLEM

SCHOLARSHIP requires access to the recorded knowledge of mankind. The bulk of recorded knowledge and information is expanding with no end in sight. The Library of Congress has ten million volumes and acquires a quarter million new ones every year. Harvard and Yale each spend close to half a million dollars a year for books and periodicals. Yet these three institutions are among the American libraries which, in recent years, have accepted the fact that they cannot individually provide all the materials required by their own clientele.

No institution has or will have the resources in money, space, or staff to acquire and house the material to which its scholars are likely to require access.

COOPERATION

In the light of this situation one of the inevitable steps is to explore cooperative access to library materials. Cooperative use cannot work in the case of a book that is frequently consulted, but it is a fact that many of the books in a large library are seldom used. In the Stanford University

* The Midwest Inter-Library Center in Chicago has recently reviewed its direct acquisitions program and has issued the following brief statement describing it. The Editors of *C&RL* feel that the acquisitions program of MILC is the Center's history-making feature, and for this reason, believe the statement should have a wide audience among librarians.

bookstacks, 52 per cent of the books are not consulted once in ten years. Yet little-used books are not unimportant books; when needed, a dust-covered, mimeographed report can be very important indeed.

The "little use" characteristic of the bulk of research library materials makes it possible for institutions to have access to many items without owning them individually. This can be accomplished through sharing use under a cooperative arrangement.

THE MIDWEST INTER-LIBRARY CENTER

For cooperative access to be successful there are certain essential conditions which must be met: access must be assured, convenient, and fast. These conditions the Midwest Inter-Library Center is uniquely able to meet with respect to certain infrequently used materials. The universities in the area have no better prospect of adding this kind of essential library resource at so little cost.

Two facts should be kept in mind:

1. *Cost.* In providing library service, the first costs of acquisition are the least. The subsequent costs of processing, binding, and storing indefinitely are impressive, and if these costs can be reduced through cooperative access, the benefits are substantial; and
2. *Types of material.* It is not appropriate for middle western universities to share access to such items as the *Congressional Record*, the important scholarly journals, or books which are "rare" in the book-

trade sense. These are core materials which must be in each institution's own library. Cooperative access is concerned with such items as these:

- Mimeographed press releases of the British Ministry of Information (20 to 45 volumes per year)
- Italian, Portuguese, Pakistan (etc.) parliamentary proceedings (i. e., debates)
- Newspapers of Burma, Spain, Alaska, Chile, etc.
- College catalogs
- German university dissertations
- Fraternity periodicals
- Official journals of minor missionary societies
- Journals of local (county) history societies of Sweden, Ireland, etc.

THE ACQUISITION POLICY

The acquisitions program of the Midwest Inter-Library Center is based upon a concept of sharing in the use of those library items which the individual member libraries do not wish to acquire because the total cost of individual ownership cannot be justified. The Center is trying to develop a service operation, not a book collection as such. The book collection will always be conspicuously useless by itself; it is a service adjunct to the basic research collections which always will be located at the member institutions.

To insure adherence to these basic principles, and to maintain the program as a service operation, extraordinary safeguards have been established to guide the Center. Items which the Center acquires are selected in accordance with clearly-stated criteria, and all member librarians participate in the selection process. The following rules were established at a 1950 meeting of the librarians:

Guiding Principles: Purchases

1. The Center purchases an item or a collection, provided:
 - a. It does not exist or is not readily

available in one of its participating libraries.

- b. It has value in terms of the research purposes of the region.
- c. It is little used.
2. In acquiring material by purchase, the Center will avoid duplicating fields of specialization that may exist anywhere in the country, but especially those within the region.
3. In the case of expensive items and large collections, the Center will normally avoid duplicating material readily available (by inter-library loan or on microfilm) outside the region, unless there is an indication that the material will be used relatively frequently by the participating libraries or their patrons.
4. The Center enters subscriptions upon the authority of the Advisory Committee, except in cases where an immediate subscription is necessary to prevent gaps. Such emergency subscriptions are tentative and subject to review by the Advisory Committee.
5. If an item seems clearly to belong to a recognized special collection, the Center defers purchase in favor of the library having that special field.

The selection of material for the Center to acquire is in the hands of the participating librarians. The usual method of selecting items is as follows:

1. A member librarian recommends an item.
2. The Center sends a Recommended Acquisition card to all member librarians.
3. Member librarians return the card, indicating:
 - a. If they own a copy
 - b. If they approve of Center acquisition
 - c. If they disapprove of Center acquisition
4. If no library already owns a copy and if no one objects to Center acquisition, the Center proceeds to acquire.

Some items require variations in the selecting procedure, but the principle of non-duplication, no competition, and near-unanimous consent governs all acquisitions. Whenever mail-voting is inconclusive, the

item in question is referred to the next meeting of all the librarians, where full discussion has always led to unanimous decisions. It is inconceivable that the Center would acquire an item to which any one member library was vigorously opposed. The general outlines of the developing acquisitions program are reported to the Board of Directors at each meeting, and details are reported each month in the Center's *Newsletter*.

A summary of material which the Center has acquired or is acquiring appears below.

At a meeting on February 3, 1953, which was attended by 14 of the member librarians, a decision was reached, without a dissenting vote, that the Center should inaugurate as soon as possible a program for "transferring subscriptions." Such a program holds promise of important savings for each member institution, since most of the libraries subscribe to thousands of periodicals, many of which are rarely consulted. (Periodical titles currently received, 1951-52: Illinois 17,200; Indiana 10,300; Iowa 8,200.) Subscription prices have, on the average, doubled during the last five years, and many new titles are being requested by the faculties.

When a program for transferring subscriptions is inaugurated, each library will be able to review its periodical subscription list for the purpose of dropping those rarely-consulted items which the Center would agree to acquire. A typical member library could trim its list by 10 to 20 per cent without impairing its service in any serious way. The direct and immediate savings are obvious and should be recognized as recurring annually. While not all of the libraries may be able to drop *all* of the subscriptions to be picked up by the Center, where they do not have access now to such subscriptions the program will represent a net increase in their resources.

MIDWEST INTER-LIBRARY CENTER Summary of Acquisitions (as of May, 1953)

SERIALS

- Current subscriptions to 53 less-used foreign newspapers (e.g., *Sydney Herald*, *Iraq Times*, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, *Vienna Arbeiter Zeitung*, *Cairo Gazette*). Being maintained on microfilm. Annual cost, \$4,284.
 - Current subscriptions to 20 less-used United States newspapers (e.g., *Birmingham News*, *Juneau Empire*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Dallas News*, *Atlanta Constitution*, *Pacific Stars and Stripes*). Being maintained on microfilm. Annual cost, \$2,564.
 - Current gift subscriptions to 70 foreign language newspapers published in the United States; 26 languages represented include: Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Slovenian, Yiddish. Gift.
 - Current output of official and semi-official publications of the forty-eight states (e.g., house and senate journals, departmental annual reports, governor's messages, conservation bulletins, mines regulations, agricultural bulletins). (Total annual output is unknown; about 10,000 get listed.) With minor exceptions, gift.
 - Current gift subscriptions to about 40 foreign government English language information bulletins (e.g., *News from Turkey*, *This Week in Free China*, *Latvian Information Bulletin*, *Report on Indonesia*). Gift.
 - Current gift subscriptions to a selected list of foreign government gazettes (e.g., *Israel Official Gazette*, individual governments in the Malayan Federation). Gift.
 - Current output of United States federal documents that are not distributed to libraries under the federal depository program (usually mimeographed, etc.). Includes mimeographed daily releases of State Department monitored foreign broadcasts, English language scripts of Voice of America, broadcasts, Department of Agriculture branch office commodity-price reports, etc. Total annual output estimated at 20,000 items. Obtained through membership in the national Documents Expediting Project and, for certain microprint copies, through subscription. Annual cost, \$1,100.
 - Current subscriptions to the briefs and records of five federal Courts of Appeal and of one state supreme court. Fills 25 shelves per year. Annual cost about \$60.
 - Current gift subscriptions to some 750 house
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TABLE III
Catalog Reorganization: Expenditures for Activities Involved

Activity	Hours	Percentage of Time	Cost	Percentage of Cost
1. Planning and supervision	18	5.6	\$ 39.36	9.2
2. Measuring size of catalog	20	6.2	21.32	5.0
3. Determining tray divisions	80	24.9	118.98	28.1
4. Shifting cards to new trays	90.5	28.2	140.97	33.1
5. Labeling trays	44.75	13.8	44.80	10.5
6. Renumbering trays	68.5	21.3	60.30	14.1
Totals	321.75	100.0%	\$425.73	100.0%

of costs by types of activity. Costs were determined by multiplying the amount of time spent by each person engaged in the operation by his determined hourly rate of pay.

It is evident from these figures that if typed labels could have been used to number the trays of the new catalog, costs might have been reduced by 12 to 15 per cent, assuming that the preparation of the number labels would require about as much time as the preparation of the contents labels.

SUMMARY

In this article an attempt has been made to suggest the nature of costs involved in the reorganization and shifting of a large library catalog through an accounting of the costs of the recent expansion of the Duke University Library Catalog. While variable local factors will affect actual costs of a particular operation, these figures may be helpful to the administrator planning a catalog reorganization in suggesting suitable bases for preparing cost estimates.

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organs, published by commercial and financial firms. Gift.

Current output of theses of all universities in France. 256 received in 1952. Annual cost, \$306.

Current output of college catalogs issued by American universities. Gift.

Current subscriptions to 11 Latin-American medical journals. Received on exchange for subscriptions to its medical journal supplied by a member university.

Current subscriptions to a few miscellaneous periodicals, e.g.:

Economic Reports of the Bank of Taiwan. Gift.

Mathematische-Physicalische Semesterberichte. \$2.50.

Kyoto University Engineering Research Institute *Bulletin*. Gift.

Prometheus (in modern Greek). \$10.

Acta Biologica Venezuelica.

NON-SERIAL ITEMS

During its first year and a half, the Center has purchased about ten nonserial or noncontinuing items which member librarians have asked for. Examples are:

Institut (Paris). Sciences Section. 44 volumes. \$226.

Italy. Two Sicilies. *Annali civili del regno delle Due Sicilie*. Volumes 1-42. \$68.

Three Nineteenth Century German immigrant newspapers on microfilm. Complete files. \$158.

Opyt Sovetskoi Meditsiny (Medical encyclopedia of experiences during the war, 1941-45). 35 volumes. \$350.

Pravda, March 18, 1917 through June 1938, on microfilm. \$500.

Yank (U.S. Army weekly). New York and overseas editions, 1942-45, on microfilm. \$250.