

## Guest Editorial

# Researching Library Support for International Studies: Successes to Celebrate, Goal Posts to Move



Our agendas for library services to support international and area studies are in flux. For one high-profile example, the following broad recommendations emerged from the “Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries: A Forum on the Future” that took place at Duke University in 2012:

- Aggressively pursue broad digital access to international information resources;
- Internationalize research library services and perspectives;
- Broaden and internationalize library collaborations.

These conclusions built upon background papers, research reports, presentations, and debates among area studies scholars, university administrators, bibliographers and library managers, and foundation officials who considered a series of shifts in the landscape. American higher education, for example, like society as a whole, is “globalizing” as more local students study abroad, foreign enrollments grow, and universities create outposts and entire campuses in other countries. Research and teaching in such fields as public health, science, technology, and public policy today encompass international perspectives: the traditional area studies focus on language, culture, and history is no longer sufficient. Events, experience, and scholarship are increasingly conveyed through digital media, which also undergird research and learning. Mandates for assessment and accountability require explicit attention to trade-offs among all campus and library activities.<sup>1</sup>

Library priorities are under their own microscopes. Collections comprise but one of many interdependent library services, all of which compete for limited financial resources. When the cribbed logic of return-on-investment is framed solely around the greatest local good for the greatest number, international and foreign language holdings are likely to fall short. While some libraries also insist on collections carve-outs for “distinctive” holdings or primary sources, area studies materials may prove an uneasy fit.

A third stream of analysis looks toward user expectations and behavior. Close “ethnographic” observations of (mostly) undergraduate learning practices inform many plans for library services and spaces. LibQUAL+ and other repeatable user surveys identify both local priorities and broader service trends. Organizations like Ithaka S+R are building longitudinal datasets that capture faculty attitudes over time. Ithaka and the University of California’s Center for Studies in Higher Education, among other groups, are also creating fine-grained accounts of research processes and information ecosystems within specific scholarly communities. A growing body of empirical data elucidates user needs and behaviors.

All of this research, assessment, and planning contrasts with the community’s slow engagement with Web content, social media, and other digital expression. Efforts to digitize books and journals in the public domain are certainly robust, and Open Access is slowly gaining ground as a model for scholarly communication. But we remain limited in identifying and then ensuring persistent access to Web-based resources. Successful action needs to go beyond any single institution, yet convincing collabora-

tive approaches are barely beginning to emerge. The challenges are organizational and cultural as well as technical. Well-crafted research will help things along.

This patchwork of inquiry and reflection, recommendations and action plans, and accomplishments and gaps suggests numerous launching points as we consider research concerning library support for area and international studies. A strong foundation is already in place, as exemplified by articles recently accepted for publication in *College and Research Libraries* (and currently available as pre-prints). The University of New Mexico study examines the sources used in local dissertations in order to highlight the role of the library's strong holdings of Spanish-language and especially Mexican imprints.<sup>2</sup> The University of Illinois analysis of interlibrary loan traffic for its international holdings suggests the significant impact of these resources beyond the campus itself. The library's specialized Slavic Reference Service, in particular, highlights the value of integrated initiatives that combine collections with other services including reference and discovery.<sup>3</sup>

Another noteworthy category of research on international collections delves into the size and diversity of foreign holdings among North American research libraries. Area studies librarians and some booksellers continue to compile reports on collections size and budgets. OCLC's WorldCat supports increasingly close (albeit at times methodologically daunting) analyses of overarching collections patterns and trends. The staff at OCLC Research, as well as independent analysts, are generating particularly imaginative reports.<sup>4</sup> Broader-gauged surveys correlate indicators of globalization (for example numbers of foreign-born residents or levels of international trade) with data on academic programs and trends (enrollments in foreign language courses, the distribution and size of area studies centers) and trends in worldwide publishing and library acquisitions.<sup>5</sup> A related effort tracks "internationalization" on university campuses, exemplified in the American Council on Education's recurrent surveys and an upcoming *C&RL* article that focuses on corresponding activities within research libraries.<sup>6</sup>

This severely simplified sketch of current research invites several reflections:

1. Library-specific studies of international collections and services provide useful and typically positive evidence for the value of these holdings. The approaches are broadly applicable to other libraries, and the conclusions often call for continued institutional support.
2. Aggregate analyses of the community's international collections reveal more inclusive and generally more complicated patterns of strength, weakness, and change. Most of these studies do not (yet) connect holdings with usage. Nor do they establish our overall success in supporting students and scholars. These analyses of collections coverage and holdings distribution can nonetheless inform strategies for shared print repositories, and also help us to imagine the shape and scale of community access to the vast record of scholarship and human expression.
3. Collections research often seeks to establish and then validate particular agendas. When a study shows that a library's collections serve local students and scholars, it not surprisingly concludes that the collections should grow. Where coverage lags local need, or some indicator of a country or area's publishing output, the obvious recommendation is to acquire more. But these research approaches can also foster an essentially conservative approach to collection development insofar as their frames of reference and conclusions are limited to the library under study or other pre-existing organizations, and then to familiar formats and practices. More open-ended insights may fall by the board.
4. Most collections research continues to focus on the hard-copy holdings of individual libraries or library groupings. The rise of digital resources calls this approach into question. Public domain books and journals are increasingly available through entities like HathiTrust and Google Books. E-books and e-journals

have a growing footprint. Perhaps most important, Internet resources—Web sites, embedded documents and files, e-mail, social media—may crowd out printed materials as sources for scholarship. Emphasizing print content as the centerpiece of collections, and collections-based research, may divert our attention from ever more urgent concerns related to the digital realm.

Research on library support for international studies might therefore look toward several new areas, as well as those that are already familiar:

- Efficient, unmediated mechanisms for expedited interlibrary loan reduce costs and speed delivery. Library consortia like BorrowDirect are therefore considering coordinated plans to increase collections coverage, minimize unnecessary duplication, and improve user service. While the logic seems compelling, the associated costs, benefits, and trade-offs are not yet clear. Fresh research could help to clarify optimal levels of duplication within library consortia, which will presumably vary by field, local academic programs, and categories of material. Cost models could suggest the economics of arrangements through which one library stewards unique or scarce materials on behalf of many potential partners. Differently focused studies could assess how the changing patterns of aggregate library demand (and therefore sales) resulting from coordinated collection development affect booksellers, including both their prices and their offerings. The role of locally built unique, special, and distinctive collections within multi-library frameworks needs also to be parsed.
- The increasing centrality of digital resources poses a host of research opportunities, some general and others more closely geared to international materials. The interplay between archival and use versions of print, digitized, and born-digital library materials is a matter of broad current concern. The dynamics of scholarly communication outside of North America and Europe warrant study as well, not least given the broad appeal of Open Access publishing in parts of the Southern Hemisphere. Ensuring long-term access to Web-based content is a multifaceted, enormous, and critical need—perhaps especially in international settings where sustaining a persistent digital presence can be difficult.
- Area and international collections have historically focused on language, history, and culture. Globalized scholarship and campuses are bringing new academic concerns to the fore that encompass a fuller range of disciplines. Datasets are increasingly essential, across the board. The profession is still early in the process of understanding this emergent universe of print and digital information. New research could more precisely identify the scope and nature of materials to which access is necessary, as well as costs, mechanisms, and strategies for action.
- New models for remote access and document delivery invite explorations of different ways to provide international resources to our users. In addition to optimizing information flows within local and national consortia, discussed above, we need to explore potential synergies with foreign partners. For example, might national libraries in countries with strong legal deposit serve as a reliable vehicle for both short-term and enduring access? Simply understanding the full scale and nature of global publishing and information flows would improve our strategies for access and preservation.

Upcoming studies in *College and Research Libraries*, and others as well, demonstrate that research into international and area studies collections is thriving. We also enjoy many new areas that invite inquiries of their own as we build a global system of libraries, collections, and services to support our students and scholars.

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### Notes

1. Center for Research Libraries, "The Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries: A Forum on the Future," accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.crl.edu/events/8478>.
2. Suzanne M. Schadl and Marina Todeschini, "Cite Globally, Analyze Locally: Citation Analysis from a Local Latin American Studies Perspective," *College & Research Libraries* (in press), accessed June 2, 2014, <http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2014/03/03/crl13-442.full.pdf+html>.
3. Joe Lenkart, et al., "Measuring and Sustaining the Impact of Less Commonly Taught Language Collections in a Research Library," *College & Research Libraries* (in press), accessed June 2, 2014, <http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2014/04/29/crl14-613.full.pdf+html>.
4. Lorcan Dempsey, et al., *Understanding the Collective Collection: Toward a System-wide Perspective on Library Print Collections* (Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2013), accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2013/2013-09r.html>; Brian Lavoie, *Not Scotch But Rum: The Scope and Diffusion of the Scottish Presence in the Published Record* (Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2013), accessed June 3, 2014, <http://oclc.org/research/publications/library/2013/2013-07r.html>.
5. College of William & Mary, Reeves Center for International Studies, "Internationalization of U.S. Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Future of International and Foreign Language Studies. A Research Conference on National Needs and Policy Implications, April 11–13 2014," accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.wm.edu/offices/reescenter/internationalization/description%20/index.php>.
6. Steven Witt, Laurie Kutner, and Elizabeth Cooper, "Mapping Academic Library Contributions to Campus Internationalization," *College & Research Libraries* (in press), accessed June 2, 2014.