

Demand and Supply: The Critical Role of Research Libraries in International Education

Panel Summary Report and Recommendations

This session both built upon and moved substantially beyond the terms of library analysis and angst that have characterized previous discussions of international and area studies collections and services. The conversation was anchored by a paper presented by Dr. Deborah Jakubs, Vice Provost for Library Affairs at Duke University, which carried the same title as the session itself. Three follow-on presentations by Prof. Charles Hale, Director of the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies and the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Austin; Prof. Charles Kurzman, from the Sociology Department at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; and Constance Malpas, Program Officer at OCLC Research, provided counterpoint and nuance. The session closed with an animated discussion among the presenters and participants.

This summary recapitulates main themes from the presentations, and then lists the session's principal reflections and recommendations. More complete versions of the papers and presentations are available on the conference website.

1. Deborah Jakubs, *Demand and Supply: The Critical Role of Research Libraries in International Education*. This presentation rehearsed the long history of studies, entreaties, and jeremiads associated with an enduring sense of decline in research library collections for area and international studies. On one hand, these alarms have helped to galvanize new initiatives like the Global Resources Program (now Network), launched with joint sponsorship from the Association of American Universities and Association of Research Libraries, and currently affiliated with the Center for Research Libraries. TICFIA, Technological Innovation and Cooperation for Foreign Information Access, was another imaginative program, in this case with federal funding, to promote the use of digital technologies in cooperative international partnerships to increase access to sources for cross-national scholarship. Unfortunately, this initiative was abandoned after about fifteen years of activity.

The evolving contexts for research libraries now require new conceptual and programmatic approaches. Universities are becoming more global in terms of their student bodies and associated programs. Scholarly agendas increasingly focus on global phenomena that range from epidemics to immigration, and from climate change to water resources. Scholarly communication and human expression are moving toward digital modalities, as "big data" and new research methodologies reshape the scholarly landscape. These challenges have provoked a series of meetings and debates. The Mellon-sponsored "Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries: A Forum on the Future," organized by Duke University and the Center for Research Libraries late in 2012, has emerged as one defining event. (For more detail see the winter 2014 *Focus on Global Resources* at: <http://www.crl.edu/focus> .)

The Duke Forum resulted in three general recommendations for the research library community as it anticipates and addresses today's environment:

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

All three recommendations reflect continuing trends that need to be reinforced and extended. A concerted effort to track and promote best practices, and also to experiment with innovations and new approaches, is likewise critical.

2. Prof. Charles Hale, *Post-Custodial Archiving, Digital Scholarship, and the Remaking (Once Again) of Latin American Studies*. This paper built from an initial reflection on the Latin Americanist community's deliberate pursuit of ever-wider scholarly agendas, viewpoints, and participation. The Latin American Studies Association, the field's premier scholarly society, has thus fostered broad participation from all parts of the world, particularly including deep links with the region itself; the "horizontal" entailed in engaged and equitable scholarly relations; and innovative agendas for research and action. Prof. Hale's role in directing both a major National Resource Center in Latin American Studies and also the country's premier Latin American library has strengthened the opportunities for cross-cutting, inclusive programs that energize faculty-library collaborations.

These principles and trends, in conjunction with new technological capabilities, allow innovative programs and approaches. The "post-custodial archiving" referenced in Prof. Hale's title entails our increasing ability to digitize off-site sources, thereby preserving the content and making it broadly available to the community as a whole without compromising relationships of ownership, location, and context. A prime example is Guatemala's National Police Archives, discovered several years ago in Guatemala City, which includes unique (and often devastating) documentation related to that country's enduring civil and ethnic strife. The digitized documents are available via the University of Texas, while the original materials remain in Guatemala. A broadly similar initiative is taking shape around the rubric "Archiving the Central American Revolution," which entails an inclusive approach to documentation about the region's many armed conflicts during and beyond the 1980s. Prof. Hale's examples epitomize concrete responses to the more general challenges posed by Dr. Jakubs. They demonstrate imaginative scholarly and librarian collaborations to build a deep, technologically informed infrastructure that also draws upon protagonists in historical processes and events.

3. Prof. Charles Kurzman, *The Weak Internationalization of American Social Science*. This presentation deployed both traditional and innovative methodologies to analyze multiple data points in a nuanced characterization of our rapidly evolving international environment. Some broadly familiar information documented the increasingly international dimensions of American life and society through trend lines that, for example, tracked the role of foreign trade in GDP, and foreign-born residents and citizens. Imaginative content analysis and data mining then provided evidence for the academy's tepid response. The representation of international topics in scholarly articles in the social sciences (with notable variations across different disciplines), the geographic focus of recent books as represented in bibliographic databases, and dissertation topics all suggest a disturbingly distracted—or indifferent?—academic community.

Prof. Kurzman further analyzed the world regions enjoying the highest levels of scholarly attention, using the metrics mentioned above and also such criteria as language enrollments. Western Europe remains a principal focus, with Latin America and other historically strong regions following behind. The patterns of activity and interest fluctuate more dramatically among some other world areas, with Eastern Europe in decline and regions like the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa less easy to track. The overall message is nonetheless clear: we are lagging in our programmatic recognition of and response to a rapidly evolving global environment. Emergent trends in the production of knowledge and the dissemination of information resources, as well as more traditional gauges of academic vitality, suggest how much needs to be done.

4. Constance Malpas, *Global Resources: A System-Wide View*. This presentation drew upon analyses of the OCLC bibliographic database, which includes hundreds of millions of records for unique books and journals from all parts of the world as represented by more than two billion library holdings. These data reveal collecting patterns and possibilities across research libraries and academic institutions. American libraries hold only partial collections of publications from other parts of the world, and the gap has become increasingly apparent as national libraries and other foreign collections add their records to the OCLC database. Collections within the United States also show sometimes unexpected clusters of strength. Libraries that serve universities with National Resource Centers comprise one such node, though the individual and collective holdings of other libraries can be stronger. New shared digital collections like HathiTrust and Google Books today reflect an additional center of strength.

These detailed explorations of the overall strength and dispersion of America's international library holdings lead inexorably to a broader assessment of organizational shortcomings and possibilities. More closely coordinated arrangements for selection and acquisitions, based on careful analytics, would allow fuller coverage of the world's output of scholarly materials and human expression. International collaborations would further enhance the results. A more effective logistical infrastructure for libraries, including better means to identify and locate materials not held locally, and then to gain access to them, would ensure that more comprehensive holdings were effectively leveraged in service of the scholarly community. Digital technologies have fundamental roles to play as we develop and implement these kinds of measures.

The session generated four reflections on broad themes that arose repeatedly during the conference, and four more specific recommendations:

1. Many conference participants called for improved understanding of the "infrastructure," "reservoir," "capacity,"—the collective resources and support—that undergird our shared area and international studies endeavor. This mandate applies directly and immediately to the library and information resources that afford a continuing record of processes and events. This is also an arena in which the library community has a great deal to offer.

2. The practical and conceptual roles of “networks,” “nodes and flows,” “distributed expertise,” and the like was another recurrent theme. The research library community, which has for many decades focused on collaborative solutions in order to meet demands that surpass any institution’s capacity, is well positioned to contribute to these conversations. One critical element, too often overlooked, is that successful cooperative arrangements require ongoing investment and support. Even the most compelling shared program will fail without explicit measures to ensure sustainability.
3. The conference benefited immensely from its juxtaposition of many different constituencies concerned with international and area studies. In the breakout sessions and at other moments, however, each constituency or tribe often closed in on itself. This was perhaps inevitable and in many ways appropriate, but it may also have limited some of the cross-fertilization that might have occurred.
4. Many vital and engaging international initiatives may be limited insofar as internal and external support is typically channeled in accordance with existing institutional structures and categories that turn upon specific languages, disciplines, world areas, or kinds of activity (e.g. study abroad, internships, etc.). Globalization demands cross-cutting initiatives that our current frameworks may not adequately support. The terms of some funding programs can also hinder critical research agendas, for example by ruling diaspora studies out of bounds for National Resource Centers.

The group’s four recommendations flow more directly from the research libraries session:

1. Academic libraries are increasingly guided by return-on-investment criteria that privilege short-term local benefits. The Title VI emphasis on support for less commonly taught languages and underrepresented world areas has by design sought to bypass these greatest good/great number metrics. Continuing external funds are ever more essential for these critical though sometimes marginalized initiatives, especially as scholarly activities increasingly encompass collaborative efforts across different disciplines, world areas, and institutions.
2. The data that would demonstrate the roles of international information and the impact of external support are dispersed and difficult to compile. Data analysis, based on traditional approaches and new methodologies as well, is critical as we devise and refine grounded programs to measurably enhance our shared international capacity. The record of Title VI support and results provides a solid starting point for analysis, which might best be framed as an activity distinct from center-based NRC grants.
3. External support for international research library collections and services has typically been structured around local, hardcopy acquisitions that would bolster local centers and programs while also strengthening the overall national collection of materials in specific languages or about particular countries and regions. This kind of support was logically channeled through participating institutions’ Title VI center(s). However, the rise of Internet resources, social media, and “big data” requires a larger scale of action and response. Identifying, capturing, and providing persistent access to these digital resources are beyond the capacity of any single area studies center, or indeed any single university. Coordinated cooperative initiatives are essential. This need might be addressed through special mandates or invitations for existing/prospective National Resource Centers to assume new, community-wide responsibilities for coordinated programs and services.

Organizations like the Center for Research Libraries, which are already structured to address community needs to support area and international studies, might more plausibly take the lead. (See: <http://www.crl.edu> .)

4. Continuing support for library and information services in the international context should specifically encourage innovation. Experiments and innovations need not be built around a special program initiative, but rather could result from explicit provisions in application and evaluation instructions for NRCs. Changes in research and teaching, scholarly communication, and our globalizing world all require new strategies as well as more familiar approaches.

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