

Making the Common Uncommon? Examining Consortial Approval Plan Cooperation

Kim Armstrong
Program Officer, Triangle Research
Libraries Network

Bob Nardini
Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP

Abstract

Many libraries have entered into cooperative or consortial agreements to reap the cost benefits of electronic purchases, to share a library system vendor, or to divide collection-building responsibilities. However, among such cooperating libraries the formal coordination of approval plan profiles has seldom been attempted. Many questions need to be answered before a group of libraries could enter into a cooperative approval plan. Would the political and administrative costs of designing and maintaining a cooperative profile be sufficiently offset by a broadened overall collection among cooperating libraries? To what degree do libraries acting independently achieve the same approval plan results that a formal coordination of profiles would generate?

The Triangle Research Libraries Network (Duke University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) is comprised of four geographically-close institutions that have been building cooperative collections for more than 50 years. Some of their agreements have been quite formal and others have been quite informal.

This study looks at the degree of approval plan overlap among TRLN libraries; at circulation data for these overlapping titles; and at lists of titles not acquired within the consortium. The results may inform the question of whether separate, uncoordinated approval plans already meet the need of the TRLN consortium, or if consortial approval plan cooperation might benefit the group.

An examination of monographs in four selected Library of Congress classes supplied to the TRLN libraries by Yankee Book Peddler over a six month period in 1997 provided data to examine issues surrounding a consortial approval plan. The degree of overlap among the four institutions was defined, and circulation statistics showed whether books acquired by multiple libraries had a high level of use. A list of YBP titles not acquired by any of the libraries during the same time period was also analyzed, to examine whether formal cooperation might have usefully broadened the overall collection.

Introduction

Approval plans and cooperative collection development, as topics in the library literature, are like two long parallel lines. They are long lines, because librarians have been writing about these topics for decades. And they are parallel, because the lines do not cross. This is odd, because the literature of approval plans, after an early debate about whether

they would or should survive, has since the 1980s largely been an exploration of how to make what has become for libraries a successful and widespread practice, yet more successful and widespread.¹

In contrast, the literature of cooperative collection development, as one survey of the field put it, has by and large taken a “skeptical if not cynical perspective,” with the relatively few success stories to be found in high-profile national, state, or regional projects.² According to a 1998 ARL SPEC Kit on collaborative collections management, electronic resources, serials, and area studies materials all were far more active areas of cooperation than were domestic monographs.³

Why haven't libraries attempted cooperative approval plans? In some ways the two ideas would seem an ideal marriage. Every approval plan has a formal written profile, a statement of subject interests that might help to blueprint a coordinated arrangement. Vendor databases, the best of which ten years ago were available only as microfiche sets, have grown in sophistication to the point that librarians today could use them in tandem with their own integrated library systems, bibliographic utilities, World Wide Web resources, and e-mail, to have at their desktops a good system for the day-to-day, title-level and macro-level management of a cooperative approval plan. Many consortia already have in place efficient document delivery mechanisms, another necessary prerequisite for the sharing of monographs.

The incentives to cooperate are difficult to ignore, as serials inflation has continued to erode monographs budgets, and as the problem of housing growing collections has made space a major issue for many ARL and other libraries. Two or more libraries attempting to pool money, staff, and other resources in order to run a single, shared approval plan would, of course, encounter significant resistance on a variety of fronts. But the mere coordination of separate approval plans would seem a simpler, far more achievable organizational feat.

Would it make sense for TRLN libraries to receive fewer approval plan titles in common, and so to make their respective collections more uncommon?

The Triangle Research Libraries Network

The Triangle Research Libraries Network is a cooperative endeavor of four geographically-close institutions and their libraries.⁴ The consortium has its beginnings in 1935 when Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill issued “A Program of Cooperation,” intended to be a framework for building coordinated library collections at the two universities. In 1977 North Carolina State University formally joined the group, then known as the Triangle Universities Library Cooperation Committee. North Carolina Central University joined in 1994, when a revised Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the chancellors/presidents of the four institutions.

Duke University, North Carolina State University, and UNC Chapel Hill are all Research I universities and members of the Association of Research Libraries. Collectively the TRLN libraries annually spend approximately \$27 million on library materials.

The consortium operates, historically and currently, under the principle of using available library resources in a coordinated approach to increase the research material available to library users at participating institutions. The four libraries have collection agreements in place that cover area studies, government documents, newspapers, major microform sets, serials, and southern Americana, and other areas. Recent cooperative efforts have expanded to purchases in the electronic environment and the licensing of online access. Cooperative collection development is reviewed and advanced through formal and informal means. A committee structure exists within TRLN, charged with planning and coordinating activity in information resources. Perhaps equally important is the day-by-day informal collaboration that occurs among TRLN bibliographers.

Approval Plans of TRLN Members

Three of the four members of TRLN have major domestic approval plans in place with Yankee Book Peddler (YBP), a vendor located in Contoocook, New Hampshire. Duke University's YBP approval plan includes all libraries on campus except Business, Medical Center, and Law. North Carolina State University's approval plan, during the period of time included in this study, covered the main library and the branch Design library, but not Veterinary Science. The approval plan at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill included all major libraries at UNC-CH except Health Sciences and Law. North Carolina Central University has no approval plans in place with YBP or any other vendor.

During the 1997-1998 YBP fiscal year, when the company's total universe of approval plan titles was 45,671, the volume of automatic approval plan shipments was similar for the three libraries, 8,835 for one, 10,583 for another, and 10,961 for the third. Duke, NCSU, and UNC-CH have never coordinated their approval plans. Each has always operated independently of the others.

The three approval plans all developed in a similar way. Each was begun in the mid-to-late 1970s or early 1980s, when many large academic libraries across the country either started approval plans for the first time or began approval plans with a new vendor following the demise of the Richard Abel Company in 1974. Duke, NCSU, and UNC-CH, as was often the pattern with peer libraries, all began approval plans which included coverage for university presses but not for other types of publishers. Subject scope, in all three cases, was very broad.

While the details have been different, the pattern of change over the years in these three approval plans has been the same. Each institution, while maintaining coverage of university presses, has gradually but steadily added approval plan coverage for other types of publishers.

Duke proceeded subject area by subject area, beginning with history and religion. Other areas of the social sciences and humanities followed, and science and engineering coverage followed next. As each new subject area joined the expanded approval plan, appropriate publisher coverage was added for trade, commercial scholarly, sci/tech, small press, and other publishers beyond the original university press base. In comparison to Duke's very broad university press subject profile, however, the newer coverage for other publisher types has often been more restrictive.

NCSU, reflecting the institution's historic strength, first supplemented its university press coverage with a select group of publishers primarily active in science and engineering. Publishers to support social science and humanities programs were added later, along with more sci/tech publishers. NCSU, unlike Duke, has chosen to maintain the same subject profile for all publisher types. The NCSU profile, for both university presses and other publishers, restricts some subject areas within the social sciences and humanities, but is quite open in the sciences and engineering.

UNC-CH expanded its university press base first with a small group of museum publishers; followed by a select group of leading commercial social science publishers; then a list of significant association publishers; next a much broadened social science publisher base, alongside new coverage in the humanities for a wide base of publishers; and separate additional coverage for a select list of commercial publishers of books in music. The subject profiles established for trade and other publishers at UNC-CH have been somewhat more restrictive than the library's broad university press coverage. The UNC-CH approval plan, in comparison to Duke and NCSU, is much more restrictive toward science and engineering, subject areas where UNC-CH coverage has remained focused only upon university presses.

While the overall pattern of development for these three TRLN libraries has been similar, the components of approval plan structure have been quite various. Not only in subject emphasis, but also in the extent of supplementary notification slip coverage; in the treatment of continuation titles and titles in series; in specifications for country of origin, binding preference, and other non-subject parameters for categories like list price, conference proceedings, textbooks, reference works, and translations; in the configuration of subject sub-profiles and billing and shipping sub-accounts; and in arrangements for electronic cataloging and other records, the approval plans at Duke, NCSU, and UNC-CH reflect in a hundred ways the unique histories and organizations of these three TRLN institutions, as well as the personal preferences of the many librarians who have been involved with these three approval plans.

The Study

The following questions formed the basis of this study:

- How much overlap in approval plan shipments did TRLN libraries experience?
- Were the titles not acquired on approval acquired by other methods?
- What level of use, as measured by circulation, did all of the titles acquired receive?
- Could low-circulation titles be placed in working categories?

- What savings might the libraries have achieved if their approval plan profiles had been formally coordinated?
- How many titles not acquired by any partner library would have been valuable additions to the shared TRLN universe of titles?

Questions about Cooperation

All of the familiar barriers to cooperative collection development in general have played their part in preventing libraries from cooperating on approval plans: institutional politics and competition; lack of confidence and trust between potential partners; the difficulties of coordinating and managing a distance arrangement; and the powerful barriers of culture and inertia.

Other barriers are more specific to an approval plan environment. One of the oldest arguments in favor of approval plans has been that they make it easier to acquire core materials. If approval plans indeed focus on a “core,” then sharing would seem out of the question. Would it make any sense to devise a cooperative arrangement for titles known to be in high demand by local users at each cooperating library?

Next, why add a layer of complexity to an already complex process? Don’t libraries working independently of one another establish approval plan profiles that in fact achieve a measure of coordination anyway, simply by reflecting the libraries’ respective strengths and priorities?

However the most important question would be—what to share? The assumption in any cooperative approval plan would be that individual libraries would agree not to own certain titles that they otherwise would have acquired. Two possible benefits, which could be achieved independently or in combination with one another, would justify the sacrifice. One would be to broaden the overall universe of titles, with partners bypassing some titles for their own collection, but buying others that normally wouldn’t have been acquired by any cooperating library. The other would be to divert money away from the approval plan, toward other lines in the materials budget or other library budget.

In order to realize either of these benefits, partners must first identify groups of monographs where it would make sense to allocate primary responsibility to one partner library. Necessarily working within the vendor’s approval plan system of categories, could librarians implement their own definitions of which titles would be “core,” desirable for multiple locations to own, and which would be peripheral, and so allocated to one location or another?

Finally, what of the vendor? When partnerships between libraries are difficult to establish and maintain in the first place, would this new party be competent enough and stable enough to carry out library specifications? Is it in the vendor’s interest to carry them out in the first place? A successful shared arrangement for purchasing new books might, after all, lower the libraries’ overall level of book purchasing. If that did not happen, what would instead likely occur is the overall purchase of fewer copies per title

of a greater number of unique book titles, a less attractive profit equation for the vendor than the uncoordinated purchase of more copies of fewer unique titles.

Even if all problems were solved and all questions answered, the value of jointly owning more peripheral books would then have to be weighed against the effort of maintaining a cooperative program. That, obviously, would not be an easy question to answer. This paper doesn't attempt to answer it; nor do we think, as vendor and consortium program officer, that we have the standing even to try. Instead, we hope that our data and analysis will provide a framework to make it possible for librarians to approach and perhaps answer it from their own points of view.

Data Gathering

This study is based upon eight lists of titles. A YBP bibliographer queried the company's system to produce lists of titles shipped on approval to the three TRLN libraries with approval plans in four subject areas during the six-month period January 1997 through June 1997. The four subject lists showed whether each title was shipped on approval to one, to two, or to all three TRLN libraries during these months. The lists were sorted alphabetically by title, so that simultaneously published hardcover/paperback editions were listed consecutively and so could be accounted for as one bibliographic entity. The lists recorded automatic approval shipments only. Firm orders, notification slip orders, and standing orders were ignored.

The four subject areas were defined by four Library of Congress classification system classes and subclasses: F History, HD Economics, PN Literature, and QD Chemistry. These four areas were chosen because they are covered by virtually all academic library approval plan profiles, and represent the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. In comparison to many other LC subclasses, they also contain a variety of discrete subject areas that often result in more detailed approval plan profiles.

(The profiles for all three TRLN libraries are written under the LC system, although Duke's collection is organized under the Dewey Decimal classification system).

The remaining four lists showed titles offered by YBP's approval plan program during these six months in the four subject areas, but shipped on approval to none of the TRLN libraries.

Data Handling

With the data in hand, TRLN sought to answer three questions. How much overlap was there on the approval titles? How often did overlapping titles circulate? Did YBP treat other titles that would be candidates for purchase with money saved from any reduced duplication?

To determine the amount of overlap, the four lists of titles shipped on approval to TRLN libraries were searched in the online catalogs of each institution. TRLN libraries all use the DRA system. The searches yielded a clearer picture of actual title duplication, since copies acquired through YBP slip, firm, or standing orders, or from other vendors or

through gifts, were added to the list. The lists were merged and a comprehensive list of duplicate titles in the libraries created for each of the four subject lists from YBP.

The next step was to determine circulation activity. Circulation counts were a combination of first-time circulation, renewals, and reserve uses. Using the CIRCLE (Circulation subsystem of DRA) records for the institutions, each title was searched and the number of circulations recorded. The potential circulation period for each title would be somewhat different, because they were shipped by YBP at weekly intervals during the January-June 1997 period, and then cataloged and entered into the online catalogs under the differing work cycles of the three institutions. TRLN searching took place during the March and April 1999, so all titles had a period of at least 19 months and as many as 27 months in which to circulate.

The last step for TRLN was to review the lists provided by YBP of titles offered between January and June 1997 but not shipped to any TRLN library. All of these titles were also searched in the DRA catalogs and in GobiTween, a feature of YBP's GOBI database (Global Online Bibliographic Information). GobiTween allows librarians at separate institutions to view activity on a given title between YBP and the library's consortial partners. Some activity was reflected in GobiTween before becoming accessible in the online catalogs of the libraries, such as records for books shipped by YBP but not yet received by the library, and books ordered by a library but not yet shipped by YBP.

TRLN then eliminated from the "not shipped" list any titles that had subsequently been purchased by TRLN libraries. The remaining titles were analyzed as candidates for purchase.

Findings

Table 1
Overlap among Titles Shipped on Approval to TRLN Libraries

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles shipped to 1 library	68 (38%)	257 (60%)	124 (37%)	76 (72%)	525 (50%)
Titles shipped to 2 libraries	111 (62%)	134 (31%)	103 (31%)	25 (23%)	373 (36%)
Titles shipped to 3 libraries	0 (0%)	38 (9%)	106 (32%)	5 (5%)	149 (14%)
Total titles shipped	179	429	333	106	1,047

How much overlap did TRLN libraries see in their YBP approval plan shipments?

Table 1 shows that automatic approval plan shipments across the four subject areas resulted in modest levels of overlap among the three TRLN members. Only 14% of approval titles shipped to any TRLN library were also shipped to all three, with the highest percentage in PN Literature, where 32% of titles shipped fell into that category. Three-library overlap for the other subject areas ranged from 0% in F History to 9% in HD Economics, and only 149 titles in all were shipped automatically to Duke, NCSU, and UNC-CH. The highest percentage of titles shipped to two libraries was 62%, the result in F History, with the other subject areas ranging from 23% to 31%. The percentage of titles shipped to two libraries, 36%, was well below that for titles shipped to only one, 50%.⁵ The percentage of titles shipped to only one library showed a high of 72% in QD Chemistry and a low of 37% in PN Literature.

Table 2
Modified TRLN Overlap
(After slip orders, firm orders, standing orders, gifts)

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles in 1 library	17 (10%)	45 (10%)	28 (8%)	27 (25%)	117 (11%)
Titles in 2 libraries	33 (18%)	124 (29%)	69 (21%)	36 (34%)	262 (25%)
Titles in 3 libraries	129 (72%)	260 (61%)	236 (71%)	43 (41%)	668 (64%)
Total titles shipped	179	429	333	106	1,047

What effect did subsequent purchases have on the overlap resulting from approval plans?

The overlap pattern shown in Table 2, where notification slip orders, firm orders, standing orders, and gifts are considered, reverses the pattern of Table 1. The percentage of titles held by only one library, 50% following approval plan shipments, fell to 11% after other types of purchases. Titles held by all three TRLN libraries, 14% due to approval plan shipments, rose to 64%. The change is most dramatic in F History, where approval plan shipments placed no titles in all three libraries. Yet Table 2 shows that all three libraries in fact acquired 72% of the titles in F, while only 10% were held in the end by just one TRLN library. The pattern was similar in the other three subject areas, with QD Chemistry showing the lowest amount of overlap, with 41% of the titles in all three libraries, 34% in two, and 25% in only one library.

These results run contrary to the opinion held by some librarians, that is, that approval plans homogenize library collections.⁶ In the case of the TRLN libraries, the relative uniqueness resulting from approval plan shipments in fact was largely erased by discretionary purchases.

Table 3
Circulation Activity

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles with no circulation in any library	31 (17%)	86 (20%)	61 (18%)	3 (3%)	181 (17%)
Titles with circulation in only 1 library	64 (36%)	165 (39%)	114 (34%)	44 (42%)	387 (37%)
Titles with circulation in 2 libraries	51 (29%)	121 (28%)	87 (27%)	36 (33%)	295 (28%)
Titles with circulation in all 3 libraries	33 (18%)	57 (13%)	71 (21%)	23 (22%)	184 (18%)
Total titles	179	429	333	106	1,047

How frequently did approval plan titles circulate in the three TRLN libraries?

Table 3 shows that 83% of the titles circulated at least once, while 17% did not circulate. TRLN users placed the highest demands upon QD Chemistry titles, where only 3% did not circulate and 22% circulated in all three TRLN libraries. Patterns for the other subject areas were quite similar to one another, with titles circulating in one library ranging between 34% to 36%, titles circulating in two libraries between 27% and 29%, and titles circulating in all three libraries between 13% and 21%. All in all, 46% of the approval titles circulated in two or three TRLN libraries, while 54% circulated either once or not at all.

Table 4
High-Circulation Titles

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles with at least 3 circulations in each library	4 (2%)	22 (5%)	9 (3%)	10 (9%)	45 (4%)

A small number of titles, 4% of the whole, circulated at a very high rate, three times or more in each of the three TRLN libraries.

It was no surprise that some of these titles focused on popular culture, such as *Architects of the Web: 1,000 Days that Built the Future of Business* (Wiley), and *Gen X TV: The Brady Bunch to Melrose Place* (Syracuse). Or, that certain titles in southern history were in high demand, for example, *Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (Oxford), and *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (Simon & Schuster).

High circulation for two others titles, though, suggested that study and research was taking place throughout TRLN in an area which might on its own seem esoteric: *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Harvard), and *Open-Economy Politics: The Political Economy of the World Coffee Trade* (Princeton). Among QD Chemistry titles, where 9% circulated heavily, Oxford was the predominant publisher, with titles such as *Circular Dichroism* and *Linear Dichroism* and *Introduction to Hydrogen Bonding*.

Table 5
Overlap Titles with Low Circulation

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles acquired by 2 or 3 libraries	162	384	305	79	930
And, circulating in 0 or 1 library	38 (23%)	78 (20%)	62 (20%)	5 (6%)	183 (20%)

How many titles acquired by TRLN members, if they had not been purchased, would have had little effect on use?

Table 5 shows that of the 930 titles acquired by two or by three TRLN members, 183 titles, or 20%, circulated once or not at all. If holding one copy of these titles within TRLN would have been sufficient, rather than two or three copies, then at least 183 copies might have been left un-purchased with little effect on use.

(This seemed a better approach than simply to focus on all titles without circulation, and to assume that a non-circulating title held by even a single library was expendable, a dubious assumption for a research library, let alone for a group of them. Our approach assumes that holding one copy within TRLN is always desirable, but that that one copy will sometimes be sufficient. We understand, as well, that not every user seeking a lone copy not held on their own campus would take the steps necessary to acquire it, so in this sense our figures overstate the case.)

It's possible to give a very rough estimate of the savings TRLN members might have realized against these 183 titles, by using YBP's average list price in each of the four subject areas for the six-month period.⁷ That total adds up to \$8,589, which doubled for twelve months equals \$17,178. Since these four subject areas accounted for 8.4% of all titles treated by YBP on approval during the time period, savings across all subject areas—if their respective overlap and circulation patterns would have been at all the similar to the four studied here—might have been in the neighborhood of \$200,000 for twelve months for the three TRLN libraries combined. This is, again, a very rough estimate, and we consider it no more than a starting point for, perhaps, useful speculation.

(Greater savings might be possible, of course, if the libraries were willing to accept a greater effect on users than we have assumed here).

In order to realize these savings, however, TRLN libraries at the point of potential purchase would have had to be able to isolate these 183 titles from the rest of the 930 titles that generated more user demand. This would have meant placing them into categories that could be identified and manipulated by YBP's approval plan system and by TRLN selectors as they considered subsequent slip orders and firm orders for YBP approval plan titles.

By no means do we claim to have performed a highly systematic comparative analysis of the low-circulating and higher-circulating titles. Even a single title can be placed in a dozen or more bibliographic categories, and the work necessary to any rigorous comparison would be considerable, not to say daunting. Neither would we overestimate the promise of such an analysis; nor underestimate the role of chance, uncategorizable bibliographic qualities, and subjective user behavior in the bibliographic lottery where the prize is circulation. Why, for example, did *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* (Arizona) circulate a total of 13 times in two TRLN libraries, while *In Shadow of the Eagles: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato* (California) did not draw the eye of a single user?

Even so, our informal but informed review of the two circulation groups did suggest that some categories might be used to identify titles likely to fall into the low-circulation group. TRLN libraries might then assign primary responsibility to one member or another for these categories, and so avoid purchasing a certain number of copies of titles likely to circulate lightly or not at all.

Some formats seemed over-represented in the low-circulation group. Titles based upon conferences were one such category, which included books like *Unionizing the Jungles: Labor and Community in the Twentieth-Century Meatpacking Industry* (Iowa), and *Water Marketing: The Next Generation* (Rowman & Littlefield), a pair which circulated once between them, although purchased by all three TRLN libraries. Titles based upon dissertations, likewise, turned up regularly in the low-circulation group. *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge), was one of these, circulating once while held by all three TRLN members; another was *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940* (Praeger), held but not borrowed in all three libraries.

Publisher was another category with some potential to separate the two circulation groups. McFarland, for example, a publisher active in film and television studies, placed a disproportionate number of titles in the low-circulation group and might have offered one place to look for savings. Yet a few users would surely have come away the poorer if McFarland had been treated in more restrictive fashion. As an illustration of the whimsy users display (with every right to do so!), what model could have predicted that Mc Farland's *Following 'The Fugitive': An Episode Guide and Handbook* would lay untouched on the shelf, while *Booking 'Hawaii Five-O': An Episode Guide and Critical History*, would be borrowed a total of seven times in two TRLN libraries?

A few subjects in these four Library of Congress areas, finally, might be candidates for coordinated buying. One example is presented by a string of specialized labor studies. None of the following titles circulated at all, despite holdings in all three TRLN libraries: *Entangling Net: Alaska's Commercial Fishing Women Tell Their Lives* (Illinois), *The Filipino Piecemeal Sugar Strike of 1924-25* (Hawaii), *Militant Labor in the Philippines* (Temple), *The Polish Coal Miners' Union and the German Labor Movement in the Ruhr, 1902-1934* (Berg), *We Paid Our Dues: Women Trade Union Leaders of the Caribbean* (Howard). One last reminder, however, of the imperfect results librarians should expect from categorical predictions of use is provided by *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41* (Illinois), a title which circulated in all three TRLN libraries, a total of eleven times.

To summarize, it would have been impossible for TRLN libraries to devise bibliographic categories as predictors of circulation that would have permitted the group to enjoy the entire sum of \$200,000 in potential savings identified above. Instead, the savings that seem possible without effect on use would appear to be more modest.

Table 6
Titles Not Shipped on Approval to TRLN

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Total titles treated by YBP	466	885	721	228	2,300
Titles shipped to at least 1 TRLN library	179 (38%)	429 (48%)	333 (46%)	106 (46%)	1047 (46%)
Titles shipped to 0 libraries	287 (62%)	456 (52%)	388 (54%)	122 (54%)	1,253 (54%)

If savings had been achieved, could they have been put to use within the YBP approval plan universe, in order to broaden the shared TRLN collection?

The top row in Table 6 shows totals across the four subject areas for all titles treated by YBP on its approval plan program from January 1997 through June 1997. The next row shows the number of these titles shipped on approval to at least one TRLN library. The third row shows the remainder, titles shipped on approval to none of the three TRLN libraries. In each of the four subject areas, under half of YBP's approval title universe was shipped to at least one TRLN library. That total was lowest for F History, where only 38% of YBP's approval titles were shipped to TRLN, and was highest in HD Economics, where titles shipped amounted to 48% of the YBP universe. Of the 2,300 titles treated by YBP in these subject areas during the months under study, a total of 1,253, or 54% were not shipped on approval to TRLN libraries.

Table 7
Analysis of Titles Not Shipped on Approval to TRLN

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles shipped to 0 libraries	287	456	388	122	1,253
Of these, titles in restrictive categories	244 (85%)	352 (77%)	267 (69%)	102 (84%)	965 (77%)

The totals in Table 6 might seem alarming. Why would such a low percentage of available titles be shipped on approval to the TRLN libraries?

Table 7 shows that among titles not shipped, most fell into categories where library approval plan profiles usually are restrictive (that is, calling for title notification, rather than shipment, or for outright exclusion). These include titles such as reprints, popular titles, foreign language titles, annuals and other serials, CD-ROMs, textbooks, laboratory manuals, and workbooks.

In F History, for example, where 62% of all available titles were not shipped to TRLN, 85% of these fell into one or more of the categories which libraries normally restrict on their approval plan profiles. Two examples were, *Fun Places to Go with Children in Southern California* (Chronicle), a title rated as popular by YBP, and the *WPA Guide to Kentucky* (Kentucky), a reprint. Practically-oriented business guidebooks, often popular or semi-popular, are another common library approval plan restriction. In HD, where 77% of titles not shipped fell into categories often restricted, one representative title not shipped to TRLN was, *For Team Members Only: Making Your Workplace Team Productive and Hassle-Free* (AMACOM). In PN, where 69% of titles not shipped were in restrictive categories, *Roman Soldiers Don't Wear Watches: 333 Film Flubs* (Citadel) was an example of a popular title. Restrictive categories accounted for 84% of titles not shipped in QD, where *Equilibria and Dynamics of Gas Adsorption on Heterogeneous Solid Surfaces* (Elsevier) was an expensive title, at \$359 list price, and *Introduction to Modern Inorganic Chemistry* (Blackie) was a textbook.

Table 8
 Modified Titles Not Shipped
 (After slip orders, firm orders, standing orders, gifts)

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles shipped to 0 libraries	191 (41%)	177 (20%)	135(19%)	39 (17%)	542 (24%)
Titles shipped to at least 1 TRLN library	275 (59%)	708 (80%)	586 (81%)	189 (83%)	1,758 (76%)

Table 8 shows that with other methods of acquiring books considered, as was true with Table 2, totals again look very different from the totals after approval plan shipments alone. When notification slip orders, firm orders, standing orders, and gifts are taken into account, the total number of YBP approval plan titles not acquired by TRLN was 542, or 24% of the YBP universe, accounting for most of the 1,253 titles not shipped on approval to TRLN shown in Table 7.

Table 9
Analysis of Modified Titles Not Shipped

	F History	HD Economics	PN Literature	QD Chemistry	Total
Titles shipped to 0 libraries	191	177	135	39	542
Of these, titles in restrictive categories	179(94%)	166(94%)	117(87%)	38 (97%)	500(92%)
Other, potentially more desirable titles	12(6%)	11(6%)	18 (13%)	1 (3%)	42(8%)

Among the 542 titles in the YBP approval plan universe not acquired by any means, then, how many might have been desirable purchases for the TRLN member libraries?

Table 9 shows that relatively few titles would have been of clear benefit to TRLN. Only 42 of the 542 did not fall into the categories which libraries usually buy on a limited basis. In HD, for example, *Power, Profit and Urban Land: Landownership in Medieval and Early Modern Northern European Towns* (Scholar) would have been a specialized monograph probably of interest somewhere within TRLN. Among titles not acquired in QD, only one, *Thermodynamic Properties of Cryogenic Fluids* (Plenum) was not a textbook, laboratory manual, CD-ROM, or some other category which academic libraries buy selectively.

Finding ways to act cooperatively so that these 42 titles might have been held within TRLN would have called for only modest levels of coordination and financial commitment. The remaining 500 titles not acquired might raise more interesting questions. When individual libraries make the same negative categorical decision on a title, does the shared collection lose strength?

In fact categorical decisions usually added up to what looks like collective wisdom within these four subject areas. TRLN members, for example, purchased travel guidebooks very selectively. Quite a few guidebooks treated Los Angeles alone, to take one geographical destination, and TRLN passed altogether on most, including such a title as *L.A. Bizarro: The Insider's*

Guide to the Obscure, the Absurd and the Perverse in Los Angeles (St. Martin's). The same was true of the many dozens of management guidebooks and textbooks in HD, which TRLN purchased selectively. In QD, however, where the percentages of circulating titles were the highest among the four subject areas, several conference proceedings such as *Gels* (Steinkopff), *Physical Supramolecular Chemistry* (Kluwer), or *Use of Recovery Factors in Trace Analysis* (Royal Society of Chemistry) might have been worth the work of coordination to bring them into the shared collection.

Summary and Discussion

Our findings showed that YBP approval plan shipments to TRLN members Duke, North Carolina State, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, resulted in only 50% of all titles shipped being sent to more than one of the three libraries. This figure would suggest that the three libraries do in fact achieve a high degree of informal or *de facto* coordination in the design of their approval plan profiles.

Two or three library overlap rose to 89% of all titles shipped, however, after notification slip orders, firm orders, standing orders, and gifts were accounted for. These findings suggest several questions. Was the original degree of approval plan uniqueness a desirable thing? If so, why did discretionary purchases eliminate most of that uniqueness? If not, should the approval plan shipments have been broader, delivering a higher percentage of the titles subsequently purchased by other means?

Circulation data revealed that among all titles acquired, 83% circulated at least once, while only 17% did not circulate. Approximately half of the titles acquired, 46%, circulated in two or three of the TRLN libraries, and 54% circulated in one library or not at all. Among these low-circulation titles, however, only 20% had been acquired by more than one of the three libraries. Analysis of this group of titles suggests that TRLN libraries would be able to categorize them in such a way as to gain modest savings, by not purchasing some copies that would likely be unused.

Over half of all titles in the YBP approval plan title universe, 54%, were not shipped on approval to the three TRLN libraries; but after discretionary purchases are considered, only 24% of the YBP universe was not purchased. Among these titles, only a small portion, 8%, would seem to be clearly desirable TRLN purchases, meaning that any savings realized against approval plan shipments might need to be applied in other areas of the libraries' materials budgets.

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¹ A 1997 ARL SPEC Kit, for example, found that 93% of respondents used approval plans, and that the average annual expenditure on approval plans, which had become a favored defense against funding shortfalls, had grown 77% from the 1988 survey, from \$310,000 to \$565,000. Susan Flood, comp., *Evolution & Status of Approval Plans: A SPEC Kit*, SPEC Kit, 221 (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services, 1997).

² Patricia L. Bril, "Cooperative Collection Development: Progress from Apotheosis to Reality," in *Collection Management in Academic Libraries*, ed. Clare Jenkins and Mary Morley (Aldershot: Gower, 1991), 235.

³ George J. Soete, comp., *Collaborative Collections Management Programs in ARL Libraries: A SPEC Kit*, SPEC Kit, 235 (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services, 1998).

⁴ The history of TRLN cooperation is traced in, Patricia Buck Dominguez and Luke Swindler, "Cooperative Collection Development at the Research Triangle University Libraries: A Model for the Nation," *College & Research Libraries* 54 (November 1992): 470-495.

⁵ This 50% uniqueness in approval plan shipments was a result similar to an earlier study which found 51% overlap in the approval plan shipments of two other ARL libraries: Robert F. Nardini, Charles M. Getchell, and Thomas E. Cheever, "Approval Plan Overlap: A Study of Four Libraries," *Acquisitions Librarian* 16 (1996): 82.

⁶ See for example, Milton T. Wolf and Marjorie E. Bloss, "Without Walls Means Collaboration," *Information Technology and Libraries* (December 1998), 213.

⁷ Those prices were: \$28.67 (F), \$55.40 (HD), \$39.15 (PN), \$150.32 (QD).