

The Use and Abuse of Cooperative Collection Development in a Digital Age.
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Is there any concept in librarianship more reasonable, self-evident and appealing than cooperative collection building? And yet the efforts of libraries, especially larger academic research libraries, to put cooperative collecting programs in place have met in recent decades with only the most modest success. Even though some of the best minds in the library profession have devoted substantial quantities of time, energy, and ingenuity to the design of cooperative programs, very little cooperation on a broad and routine scale has in fact been achieved. Why has this happened? What are the underlying political and cultural values that have discouraged cooperation, and what are the real implications of the research library community's apparent inability to coordinate the building of research collections more effectively?

As we move now into an increasingly digital environment, in which many of the rules of engagement among institutions and individual scholars are changing, we need to review again exactly what cooperation is, how it can be done, and why we should (or should not) want to do it. We never did agree on the answers to these questions very well in the traditional environment, which may have been part of the problem. We need now therefore to use the transition to the new environment as an opportunity to tear down old concepts and to build a new theoretical basis for cooperation that will have some practical application in the new reality.

The aim of this presentation will be to examine and define again the prerequisites and motivations for cooperation, and to consider whether cooperative knowledge management can succeed where cooperative collection development has failed. Will cooperation indeed be possible at all in the new information economy that is currently forming—and if so, what is it exactly that libraries will or should be trying to share? Some thought will also be devoted to the question of whether different cooperative strategies should be devised for primary and secondary literature.