

## **Back to the Future:**

### **Building the Florida Library Research Consortium**

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In 1996, library directors from the University of Florida, Florida State University, and the University of South Florida (Florida's largest state universities) proposed a cooperative collection development initiative. The libraries of the State University System had experienced successful cooperative projects for over a decade, all enabled by improved technology. These cooperative projects started most notably with the 1987 Florida Center for Library Automation's implementation of LUIS. This NOTIS based online catalog gave the state's widely dispersed universities instant access to one another's collection holdings for the first time. This capability gradually enabled a major change in how Florida libraries could build their research collections.

Improved telecommunications, including e-mail, conference calls, fax and Ariel networks, provided an infrastructure to greatly facilitate interlibrary cooperation. More recent examples of State University System initiatives facilitated by technology are the migration of LUIS to a web-based format and the coordinated selection of jointly purchased electronic resources. The combination of these experiences provided a context that makes a more cooperative collection development of research materials seem feasible.

The library directors from Florida, Florida State, and South Florida appointed representatives to develop and implement a proposal for an even more expansive cooperative collection development among the three libraries. A literature search quickly identified a model and inspiration: the North Carolina Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN), which over its fifty year history has developed one of the richest collections of research material in the nation. (Patricia Buck Dominguez and Luke Swindler, "Cooperative Collection Development at the Research Triangle University Libraries: A Model for the Nation," *College & Research Libraries* [Nov. 1993] 470-496). Unfortunately the "Florida triangle" faces problems that the TRLN does not: Tallahassee, Tampa, and Gainesville are separated by distances of from 129 to 246 miles, a large triangle indeed. In addition, the TRLN consortium builds on strong preexisting institutional commitments to collaboration.

The Florida planning team therefore had three major tasks: 1) to develop a structure and operating procedures for the organization. 2) to develop and implement significant improvements to the ILL system linking the universities. 3) to select and foster subject teams for a pilot cooperative collection development effort.

- 1) Structure and operating procedures: The planning team recommended to the library directors that team members become the advisory board of the newly named Florida Library Research Consortium (FLRC) that would link the general university libraries of Florida, Florida State and South Florida, while making provision for other state universities to participate when appropriate. The Advisory Board members agreed to work with cataloging and ILL departments in expanding cooperative functions, to establish and mentor

subject teams, and to report regularly to the library directors. It agreed to restrict cooperative proposals to Conspectus levels 4 and 5 materials.

Materials would be purchased and housed by the individual libraries, but loans across campuses of any materials would be encouraged.

- 2) Improvements to the ILL system linking the universities: All state university libraries had participated, since the early 1980s, in the Florida Library Information Network (FLIN), an interlibrary loan network. Although services were free to state university students, FLIN prescribed the usual restrictions on interlibrary loans: no reference books, journal issues, media, microform, or other special format material would be lent, and loan periods would be brief (two or three weeks). Advisory Board members quickly realized that these strictures would seriously limit cooperation. If research level materials were to be jointly selected, access should be provided to each university's graduate students and faculty whenever possible regardless of the material's format. In addition, borrowers were to be treated uniformly across universities, with the same borrowing privileges available to FLRC researchers as would be available to the home university's equivalents. The University of South Florida, a metropolitan university with three regional campuses, advertises itself as "one university, regionally dispersed." FLRC borrowed the concept and resolved to become, as much as possible, "one library, regionally dispersed."
- 3) Subject teams: The Advisory Board selected 4 subject teams in areas where each university offered advanced degrees with complementary specialties.

Theater, marine science, anthropology, and French studies teams were designated. The Advisory Board requested that team members attend a workshop in Gainesville to meet one another and plan for their year's activities. Patricia Dominguez of the University of North Carolina, one of the authors of the article on the TLRN, agreed to attend and act as facilitator to the teams. Teams were given basic tasks: 1: to evaluate academic programs at each university to determine current and future research needs. 2: to evaluate current collections and evaluate strengths and weaknesses and to develop a working definition for research level materials. 3: to determine primary collecting and selection responsibilities. 4: to select and encumber approximately \$15,000 of research materials, divided among all three libraries. Each university contributed a special allocation of \$20,000 so that the 4 subject teams would have both an incentive to participate and a reasonable deadline for their tasks. In future years, it was expected that cooperation would become institutionalized so that special allocations would not be necessary.

In the three years since its inception, the Florida Library Research Cooperative has worked hard to establish a program that benefits each of the participating libraries. The FLRC has grown slowly but deliberately to the point where it now includes seven subject teams. Anthropology, theater, and marine science continue from the original four teams, joined by religious studies, British history, art, and music. Each of these has agreed on joint collection building policies, closely related to local research needs, that

detail the areas in which each library will focus. The subject teams have been actively building collections based on these policies over the last two years. Over 1200 jointly selected items have been purchased, including microform, media, periodical subscriptions and back files, and monographs. For example, marine science librarians agreed to select various journal subscriptions and back files not currently available in Florida libraries. The theater team purchased play scripts and specialized performance videos in both English and foreign languages. Anthropology divided responsibility for dissertations, selected microform collections, and ethnographic videotapes. Subject specialists are encouraged to spend departmental funds as much as possible with an eye towards the other cooperating libraries' collections, so the 1200 specially purchased FLRC items greatly underestimates the impact of the program.

In 1998, "Guidelines for Shared Resources" were approved and implemented. These guidelines expand on traditional interlibrary lending practices and are based on the premise that the participating libraries are committed to sharing their research holdings as much as possible. The guiding principle in developing these policies was 'default to yes,' unless requested materials are too fragile, valuable, or heavily used to transport off site. Since media, microforms, and journal back files have been popular purchases for our subject teams, traditional state university system lending policies have been adapted to make these formats available to all FLRC faculty and graduate students. Special Collections and Reference departments are also encouraged to think creatively to provide needed research materials across campuses, taking advantage of fax or scanning to provide desired materials within fair use copyright limits. Materials may also be lent department to department for on site consultation. Happily, the ten Florida state

university system libraries are also working together to provide a new and speedier courier service among all the libraries.

## **Lessons Learned:**

*Respect your elders:* The North Carolina Research Triangle libraries' experience over the past fifty years provides valuable guidance. Patricia Dominguez's advice to the original FLRC organizational meeting participants stressed the importance of voluntary agreements that serve the institutional interests of each participant. She suggested division of collecting responsibilities by easily understood objective concepts such as geography or format whenever possible. To date, the advisory board has found that traditional humanities or social science subjects are most amenable to cooperative agreements. Marine science, in which the collection development team was able to allocate subject specialty by geography, has been the only science program undertaken. Ms. Dominguez also advised restricting agreements to research level materials and integrating cooperative collection development with regular collection building as much as possible, making it an integral part of collection development rather than an expendable 'frill.' Appropriate subjects, in Ms. Dominguez's experience, can be neither too central (since passions run highest) or too marginal (since continuing support may be vulnerable) to the libraries' missions. The Advisory Group has followed these guidelines as much as possible as it identifies and mentors new subject groups.

*The more things change, the more they stay the same:* In spite of the radical changes that technology has brought to our libraries, cooperative collection development has focuses on fairly traditional materials. With the exception of theater and anthropology videotapes, faculty groups consulted by our subject teams were quite traditional in their requests for materials. Retrospective collection building of serials and

monographs was the overwhelming faculty preference. In the few cases in which faculty were interested in electronic sources, licensing agreements and the small size of our purchasing pool made cooperative savings virtually impossible. Requests were referred to the State University System electronic collections committee instead. In addition to collection preferences, participants revealed a strong need for face to face communication in addition to e-mail and conference calls. Without exception, teams were unable to build trust and creatively brainstorm unless they got to know one another in person. Although long-distance communication was able to facilitate discrete decisions, the relationships essential to successful collaboration inevitably required getting together with the FLRC advisory board to kick start the teams' activities.

*You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink:* Even with the vision of the library directors and a solid program infrastructure, the FLRC participants are finding that the key to the program's success is the commitment of the subject staff involved. The collaboration required for cooperative collection building is ultimately dependent on the commitment of the staff and the quality of their relationships. The FLRC libraries, UF, USF and FSU, are all organized quite differently. Funding for library materials and the materials selection process are handled differently in each of these institutions. This has simply meant that each of the subject team representatives operates from a unique environment with different incentives and types of assignments. In spite of strong and consistent administrative support, subject teams experienced widely varying outcomes. In subject areas where the FLRC program has been most successful, the team members have defined their own common purpose and where their efforts can best complement one another. These teams have used the Advisory Group for support, not for

management. The teams that have not coalesced have, for various reasons, been unable to see the mutual benefit of the program and sometimes negatively reacted to a sense that the overall program is managed too heavily from the top down. To enhance the program further and to add subject teams, the Program Committee must continue to provide very supportive direction and incentives. Additional subject staff will need to be assigned and they will need assurance of resource support for the program, in terms of their own time and the funding resources to build the research collections. Ideally, each library participant would be trained in bibliography and responsible for selection in his or her subject areas.

**Next steps:**

Having built a structure and an infrastructure for FLRC, the participating libraries face additional hurdles. The extended research collections of the three libraries must be integrated with local collections so effectively that FLRC is transparent to library staff and users. Eventually, it is hoped, patrons will be able to search the three library catalogs simultaneously. Staff at all levels should be aware and committed to look beyond their local collections to exploit the expanded resources available to them. Both the opportunities available and the responsibilities required from FLRC must be part of staff members' daily routines. Second, the FLRC will work on coordinating digital resources. A web site and discussion list for staff and a public web site for researchers are currently in the planning states. Cooperative digital special collections and preservation initiatives are also anticipated. As more unique research resources appear in digital form and the means of sharing print materials through scanning becomes increasingly common and available, the librarians who make cooperative programs work will be the ones shaping

the future of access to research materials. Third, subject teams should be nurtured and expanded. In the Florida Board of Regents' recent classification of the Florida state supported universities, Florida State University, University of Florida, and University of South Florida were designated as Research I universities. This distinction confirms a strategic priority for these universities to develop and further build their doctoral and research programs. The FLRC has established itself as a research library cooperative to support this renewed direction for the universities. The FLRC must continue to build a strong core group of successful programs is essential to develop the track record necessary for additional funding opportunities, a major possibility for enhancing Florida research collections.

The FLRC experience has proven that although technological innovations make cooperation a possibility, very traditional library values, realities and competencies, including interpersonal skills, subject knowledge, and bibliographical expertise, are essential to make cooperation a reality. Furthermore, scholarly commitment to traditional print collections has so far made retrospective monographs, microform collections, dissertations, and journal back files the typical selections of subject teams. Libraries undertaking cooperative collection development projects, just as in their planning for assimilation of electronic information, are challenged to think beyond the boundaries of their physical buildings and collections without abandoning the values and strengths of current practice. Cooperative collection development, it appears, leads back to the future.

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