

International Collaborations in Support of Enhanced Global Resources

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U.S. research libraries must establish more expansive international collaborations if they are to succeed in their mission of enhancing global resources for scholarship. Adequately collecting, preserving, and providing access to materials supporting academics is impossible without engaging partners in the world regions being studied and collaborators in Europe.

Government support in other countries

It is fortunate that some countries in the developing world are demonstrating both the capacity and the will to support academic engagement with their countries and regions. For example, India recently endowed chairs in Indian studies in the U.S. and increased the number of fellowships for U.S. academics conducting research in India.

Notwithstanding the current economic difficulties facing the European Union, the EU has continued to provide grant funding for academic projects, some of which result in the development of global resources.

Individual European countries have undertaken major initiatives to improve access to materials for area and international studies. For example, the British Museum's World Collections Programme was organized "to establish two-way partnerships with institutions in Asia and Africa, and increase their access to UK collections and expertise." The British Museum was the home base. Other participants included the British Library, the Natural History Museum, the Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew), the Tate, and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Some European countries have arranged bi-national agreements with the U.S. which result in joint funding opportunities. Examples with implications for international and area studies libraries and archives include: the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the British Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), the National Science Foundation and JISC, and NEH and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

Government funding in the developing world often favors the sciences and technology with substantially less support provided for the social sciences and humanities. When joint funding opportunities are available between those countries and the U.S., they privilege science projects with bi-national agreements involving the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health and rarely include the National Endowment for the Humanities or the National Endowment for the Arts.

Governments in the developing world have often been slow to provide definitive interpretations of their copyright laws regarding digitization and access to digital objects.

The Global Forum should prepare and disseminate position papers that explain the compelling need for greater attention to collections serving the humanities and social sciences; state the arguments for bi-national funding initiatives in the humanities and social sciences; call for local interpretations of copyright laws in order to make more resources available for scholarly use as digital objects; and encourage U.S. research libraries and archives to explore mutually beneficial engagements with counterparts in the developing and developed worlds.

Non-governmental bodies

Non-governmental bodies are often more nimble and less bureaucratically encumbered as collaborative partners than their government counterparts.

Private collections in the developing world are sometimes superior to government libraries and archives in their holdings. Private collections are at risk when the owners die.

Non-governmental organizations in the developing world frequently maintain repositories of their working papers and other documents of academic value. However, the staff maintaining those collections rarely have adequate training in documentation and preservation.

The Global Forum should encourage groups of U.S. librarians and archivists with responsibilities for world regions to seek out and collaborate with non-governmental bodies in order to preserve private and NGO collections and to support the training of librarians and archivists in international standards for documentation, preservation, digitization, and access.

For-profit organizations

Corporations already have contributed significantly to improved access to resources for international and area studies. The example of Google Books has been dramatic. However, if Google and other corporate players were able to expand their digitization activities in the developing world the benefits of those activities would be noteworthy, particularly for colleagues in the regions that we study.

Publishers hold intellectual property that is inaccessible because of cost to our colleagues in the developing world. Some publishers are exploring new ways of supporting expanded access to their resources while not compromising their capacity to generate revenues needed to maintain their operations. For example, Brill recently co-sponsored a workshop on "Linking data in cultural studies on South and Southeast Asia" to explore new models of collaboration.

The Global Forum should propose the establishment of fora to explore linkages with for-profit organizations that would expand access to scholarly resources for international and area studies.