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Taking Legacy Print into the Future: The Orbis Cascade Alliance Distributed Print Repository

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In a time where online full-text access to journal content is nearly ubiquitous and a near constant barrage of press releases tout the latest handheld devices to download and read e-books, it's no wonder that the future of print is a question on the minds of many people. Even the language that we use, "legacy print," hints at a time when print will take its place among the relics of other outdated information formats like eight-track and VHS tapes. Still, the fact remains that literally miles and miles of books and bound journals line the shelves in library stacks. These print materials take up a huge amount of space and often duplicate the holdings of other libraries. With the trend towards digitization of book and journal content, combined with the need to recover and re-purpose space for new uses, libraries are looking for responsible ways to draw down the legacy print in their collections while maintaining their historical commitment to long-term preservation.

In 2009, the 36 academic libraries within the Orbis Cascade Alliance completed a project to identify the print holdings of JSTOR I & II and American Chemical Society (ACS) journals within the consortium and to distribute responsibility for keeping two complete copies of those titles in perpetuity. The Distributed Print Repository (DPR), as it has come to be known, is supported by a Memorandum of Understanding, reviewed for legal sufficiency by the states of Oregon and Washington, that details the terms and conditions under which the print titles will be held and accessed (Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2008). With the DPR framework in place, Alliance libraries now have the option to withdraw titles held in the DPR, knowing that at least two copies of the print will be permanently preserved.

The potential space savings across the consortium is enormous given that holdings information was tabulated for a total of 418 titles. The compiled results, with a page break inserted between each title, produced an impressive spreadsheet totaling 504 pages and revealed some interesting insights into the combined serial holdings of the Alliance libraries. Of the titles surveyed:

- There were 15 titles for which a complete run was not reported by any library.
- Of these 15, there were 10 titles for which no print holdings were reported by any library.
- There were 16 titles held by only one library.
- Of the 403 titles for which complete runs were available, there were 43 instances where a single library held the print.
- Two or more libraries held 360 of the 403 titles with complete print runs.
- Of the 403 titles, 24 of the 27 reporting libraries could donate at least one complete run to the repository. Only three reporting libraries could not donate a complete run.
- Title assignments ranged from a low of one to a high of 331; the average number of titles assigned to any given library was 73. The average is somewhat skewed because the top eight holding libraries accounted for 87 percent of the assigned titles (Di Biase, 2009).



Institutions currently participating in the planning phase for the Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST)

Arizona State University
 California Digital Library (CDL)
 California Institute of Technology
 Getty Research Institute Library
 Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA)
 Huntington Library
 Occidental College
 Orbis-Cascade Alliance
 Oregon State University
 Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC)
 Stanford University
 University of Arizona
 University of California
 University of Oregon
 University of Washington
 Washington State University

With the DPR and the MOU in place, the Alliance is now poised to expand its shared print repository, adding other print titles for which digital surrogates now provide on-line access to the journal content. As the process moves ahead, it will important to take into account the activities and discoveries of the many other shared print archive projects underway across the country. Regionally, the Alliance has been invited to participate in an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant, awarded to the University of California, to “plan a distributed, retrospective print repository service for journals” (Western Regional Storage Trust, 2010).

The Western Regional Storage Trust (WEST) aims to coordinate the print archiving activities of libraries in the Western region of the United States. As institutional goals and priorities become clear, the grant will help participants design a business model, develop selection criteria, and establish standards for validation of the repository’s contents. Although the details remain unclear for the moment, the work of the Alliance will dovetail with WEST and contribute to the overall goal of expanding the number of print journals that can be reliably and responsibly withdrawn at the local level.

Combining its shared print activities with those of a larger entity like WEST may entail re-examining some of the decisions that went into the formation of the DPR. For example, the Alliance determined that its archive would be verified to the level of the journal volume. In other words, a page by page or even an issue by issue check of the JSTOR and ACS print journals was deemed to be too labor intensive and expensive. Hence, participating libraries were asked to ensure that copies for which they were assigned holding responsibility were complete at the volume level. Unbeknownst to the architects of the DPR, this level of validation is generally considered to be extremely low, and it remains to be seen if WEST participants will be willing to follow suit or if they will adhere to a more rigorous standard.

In other areas, the Alliance may find its decisions very much in the mainstream. For example, the first planning meeting for WEST revealed a strong preference to focus efforts on titles that exhibit the characteristics of print with electronic availability to the back files, post-cancellation access permissions and moderate overlap in print holdings between participating libraries. The JSTOR and ACS journals chosen by the Alliance can be viewed as a specific example of this type of candidate for inclusion in a print repository. WEST participants also indicated a preference for a business model that features either multiple storage facilities (e.g., Regional Library Facilities in California) or a hybrid system of storage facilities and library based storage arrangements. The hybrid model, in particular, reflects the distributed arrangement that the Alliance chose for its DPR.

In conclusion, shared print repositories will be a critical component in coordinating the preservation and access to print titles that may otherwise be withdrawn in an ad hoc manner that “unintentionally removes certain materials altogether from community-wide print holdings” (Schonfeld & Housewright, 2009). Consortia will be the prime movers in this endeavor given the relatively high costs of selecting, verifying and storing holdings into the foreseeable future. The Orbis Cascade Alliance membership is poised and ready to do its part in a regional and national network of heritage institutions committed to providing access to the increasing number of electronic resources without sacrificing the legacy print journals upon which the research collections in the consortia were built. 



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