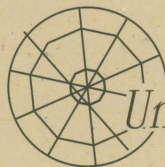


Gatherings

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University Libraries

WESTERN
MICHIGAN
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The First Law of Libraries: Collecting Resources

By Barbara J. Cockrell, Associate Dean,
Resources & Technical Services

The University Libraries' collections comprise more than 4.5 million individual physical items including books, periodicals, images, music, video, manuscripts, statistical data, maps, government documents, institutional records, archival materials, indexes, databases, and more. There is a vast array of content presented in an ever-expanding mix of formats that includes physical and virtual materials, literature and data, ancient documents and new research, items of unique local interest, and those with global perspective. However, despite the differences between these individual items, they have something in common. They have been selected to support the teaching and research mission of Western Michigan University. The University Libraries, through its faculty and staff, strives to provide quality resources that fill the University's informational needs.

Building Collections: An Interactive Task

Effective collection building in an academic setting begins and ends by anticipating and responding to the information needs of our users. In order to be responsive to the world of users, the Libraries has established several "communication channels" and processes. Three internal channels are key.

First, each academic department at the University is assigned a library liaison (<http://www.wmich.edu/library/liaison/>) to facilitate effective two-way communication. These librarians work directly with a departmental faculty "partner" to build collections that support the department's academic programs. In addition, the faculty librarian pro-

motes new resources useful to the department; advocates and provides instruction about accessing the Libraries' catalogs and databases, both print and online; and involves the academic unit in decisions about new or reallocated resources.

A second source of recommendations is built on the interactions with students and faculty at the public service and reference desks and in our instructional classes and workshops. These communications identify topics being researched at WMU and how well or poorly these are served by our existing collections. And, planned and impromptu conversations, e-mails, and phone requests are supplemented with patrons' online suggestions via our Web site where anyone may request new books and other resources.

Finally, we have, for many years, participated in a major plan, the Blackwell Collection Manager that is built on the academic profile (the programs and degrees) and the faculty research interests of each department at WMU. Blackwell profiles provide automatic shipment of the profile-matched materials most needed in the teaching and research of WMU's academic departments. In addition, the specific library liaison, e.g.,

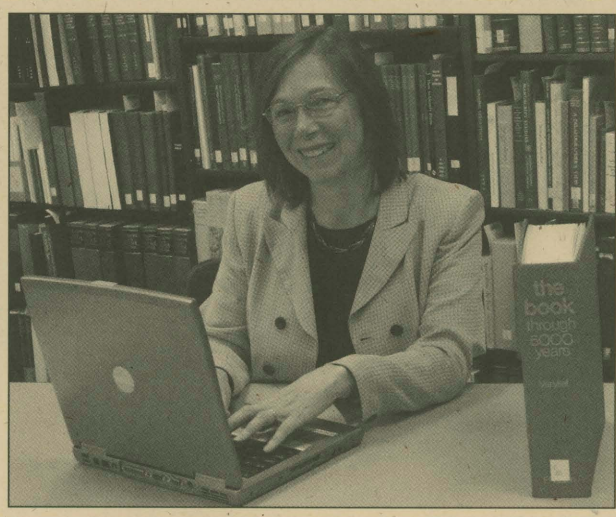
to History, Comparative Religion, Management, Social Work, Physics, Psychology, etc. reviews dozens of related titles each week that can be added to the automatic profile shipments.

Beyond the liaisons' interactions with departmental faculty, other users, and the collection profiles, additional ongoing acquisition procedures exist. Among them is a major responsibility of the liaison librarians to examine the product reviews, accreditation requirements and recommendations, journal citation rankings, and selected title listings of their respective disciplines. This means that the Libraries' faculty and staff are constantly evaluating and investigating new products that come to market. As part of this process, we set up trials and solicit feedback about online resources before committing to a purchase.

Still another measure of what needs to be accessed and/or acquired comes through our Resource Sharing office. Items that have been requested by faculty and students through interlibrary loan, because they are not available in print or other media in our Libraries or online from the Web site, serve as indicators of deficiencies in our existing collections that need to be addressed. We also track the circulation statistics of our print resources and analyze usage statistics of online items to inform future decisions. We are increasingly able to compare WMU's collections against those of peer or aspirational institutions, to identify subject strengths and gaps, as well as unique or rare items that we might wish to highlight or make more readily available.

The Rise of Online Access

Computerized catalogs and indexes to the literature, initially on CD-ROMs and then on the Web, provide, without question, easier as well



Barbara J. Cockrell: Collection Manager

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as faster and more comprehensive searching. Some of these indexes have articles and other content embedded within them while others simply provided citations to the primary literature. Scholarly e-series began to appear in the early 1990s and by 1994 there were more than 75 peer-reviewed electronic journals. Early adopters were the sciences (notably physics and computer science), engineering, and business, although even in 1997 some of the largest publishers in these fields had no journals online. The trend, however, was inescapable. By 2002, 75% of the journals listed in the *Science Citation Index*, 63% of those in *Social Sciences Citation Index*, and 34% of the titles in the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index* had the content of the articles available online (*Library Journal*, April 15, 2002, p. 52).

The significant and rapid change in the availability of online scholarly information can be seen in the University Libraries. Only a decade ago, in 1997, the WMU Libraries reported 56 online databases/indexes and only 33 online serials. Ten years later, in 2007, the University Libraries had 445 searchable indexes to information, and subscriptions to approximately 9,000 electronic serials, a truly exponential increase in full text availability. Currently, we subscribe to almost twice as many serials in online format as we do in print, a ratio that is likely to rise as our clientele expresses a strong preference for online availability, AND as publishers provide safeguards for permanent archiving and increasingly move to online only publishing of serials.

Besides its omnipresence, online access provides a welcome alternative to microfilm or fiche, which, for most of the 20th century, were the traditional formats used to preserve items like newspapers or annual reports that are transient in nature and often published on poor quality paper. Academic libraries have deliberately moved to electronic format for these types of materials as they become available. We are now beginning to see increased utilization of the online potential of such products as it becomes possible to manipulate and transform the information that is presented. Thus a resource like *DemographicsNow* allows users to compare variables geographically and investigate trends over time while *SciFinder Scholar* allows users to visualize molecular structures and simulate reactions.

Of course, not all library resources lend themselves well to the electronic format. The physical attributes (such as bindings, paper, and annotations) of our rare books

can hold considerably more value to a scholar than the text they contain. Even today with computers everywhere, few people express the wish to read novels and non-fiction online. Students in the University Libraries almost always want an "old-fashioned" book to check out, not an electronic resource even with Amazon and Kindle readily available. Perhaps when online or stand alone readers more closely approximate books, this will change, but it's not here and now. The University Libraries has approximately two million print monographs and these will not be disappearing any time soon. However, within the past five years, electronic books have become the most rapidly growing segment of the information market and they represent a significant part of University Libraries' monograph collections.

An online format is increasingly the preferred standard for works such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, and computer manuals that are scanned for terms and referenced rather than read cover to cover. Texts that can be easily divided into short passages or sections also lend themselves well to the online environment. Business, engineering, computing, science, and, surprisingly, poetry have all proved highly successful in electronic format. Western Michigan University's Libraries has purchased "persistent," i.e., non-expiring, access to 25,750 electronic books and leases access to almost 50,000 more. These range from a collection of early English books that date back to the 1400s to books on every conceivable subject, e.g., nursing, international affairs, accounting, biography of North Africa, statistics, race and racism, etc.

Extending Library Collections

Despite all of our best efforts as described in the paragraphs above, it is unrealistic to expect that the collections of the University Libraries will meet every user's needs. There are no limits to the topics being researched at varying levels of sophistication within a university. On any day, at any hour, someone will access our main page at www.wmich.edu/library/ and search one of our hundreds of databases or our catalogs and find reference to an article or a monograph that we do not have online or in print. Since the doors first opened, the University Libraries has expanded our collections through borrowing and lending agreements with other libraries across the world. This service, interlibrary loan, locates what we do not have, in another location, requests the item, and the article or book is sent to us either electronically or by document delivery. Our students and faculty receive what is needed through their computer or find it in their

mailbox.

Still another access point to information not directly owned or leased is a state network. In the last year, Michigan has implemented *MelCat*, a statewide catalog service and the University Libraries is a member. *MelCat* is a shared catalog of information resources owned by public and academic libraries throughout Michigan. Patrons who do not find a title in our Libraries can search, locate, and request items from the collections of fellow members and pick up the item a few days later at Waldo Library. We are also members of the Center for Research Libraries, a consortium of North American universities, colleges, and independent research libraries that acquires and preserves a range of scholarly materials that would be outside the scope and/or price range of these libraries individually. Items from the CRL collection (including special interest foreign language resources) are made available to member institutions electronically and through interlibrary loan.

Because of these efforts ... we have strong collections that reflect our institution's past and continuing commitment to teaching and research. We have strong collections that reflect our community's history and growth on which the future is built. We have strong collections that set us apart from other Michigan institutions and make us a special place in which to study and research the past and the present and, ultimately, shape the years to come.



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