

NEW COLLABORATIONS IN A BRAVE NEW WORLD: BUILDING A AGILE CONSORTIUM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Since the mid-1990s, there has been a “renaissance” of sorts in the area of library cooperation. Resource sharing has been a hallmark of U.S. academic libraries for over a century, in fact, but the development of the Internet as THE access point to an expanding universe of electronic content triggered a major resurgence in consortial activity in the United States and around the world.¹ The International Coalition of Library Consortia (<http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/index.html>) now includes over 150 member organizations from around the globe.

For a consortium such as the Greater Western Library Alliance (<http://www.gwla.org>), this recent rise in the popularity of consortia in general has been both a blessing and a curse of sorts. On the one hand, the trend toward more cooperation, especially with respect to digital information, was one of the main reasons why the libraries that belonged to what was then known as the Big 12 Plus Libraries Consortium decided in 1997 to provide funding to the organization in order to hire staff and begin developing and implementing more programs. As a result, I became the first Executive Director of the consortium in March 1998, and a second staff person was hired in July 2000. Since 1998, we have grown from a membership of sixteen academic and one special (Linda Hall Library) research libraries to our current roster of thirty libraries in fifteen states stretching from the Mississippi River Valley to the Pacific Coast and from our country’s border with Canada to the entire length of its border with Mexico. Those fifteen states account for over 40 percent of the total area of the United States (3,838,207 square kilometers or 1,481,940 square miles).

The other issue (the curse, as it were) is the challenge presented to our organization by the rise in popularity of library consortia. By design, we are a cooperative consisting of “research” libraries. Seventy-five percent of our members, for example, belong also to the prestigious Association of Research Libraries (ARL). What that means in most of our states is that the top one or two academic libraries in that state belong to the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA). But they also belong to at least one other statewide cooperative initiative including all or most academic libraries in that state and they may also be the “flagship” institution in a university system-wide initiative of some sort. Add to that their membership in a regional network such as Amigos Library Services (<http://www.amigos.org>) in the Southwest or the Bibliographic Center for Research (<http://www.bcr.org>) in the Rocky Mountain area, and the result is that some members of GWLA have three and sometimes four overlapping consortial commitments.

The challenge for GWLA, then, is to provide cooperative opportunities for its members that don’t place them in the position of having to choose between their various consortia in terms of where and how to participate in a program. This conflict is most often seen in licensing electronic resources, where a publisher or other content provider is often working with several consortia in a geographic area. Our response to that kind of conflict is to be selective about the electronic resources that we license for our members,

so we tend to focus on products that will be of more interest to larger libraries such as ours rather than small and medium-sized academic libraries.

The other, and more productive, way that we avoid conflict for our members is to develop other programs beyond the “traditional” consortial activities such as interlibrary lending and borrowing, cooperative collection development, and joint licensing of electronic resources. In these efforts, technology is again the catalyst, as it is now in “virtually” everything that library consortia do for their members. The remainder of this paper will provide background on three technology-based projects in which GWLA and its members are involved.

Western Waters Digital Library (<http://www.gwla.org/reports/wwdl.htm>)

The Greater Western Library Alliance began its first strategic planning initiative in October 1998. Previously, programmatic activity had been limited to only a reciprocal borrowing and lending agreement amongst the members. One of the first strategic interests identified by the library directors attending that planning retreat was the development of collaborative digital libraries. The consensus of the group was that there were significant complementary library resources within the membership in a variety of subject areas that could result, when combined, in the formation of significant collaborative digital libraries that would be facilitate resource sharing while preserving the collections.

Development of GWLA’s first digital library project began in early 2001. The Western Waters Digital Library (WWDL) will focus on the important issue of water resource issues in the Western United States, where climate, geography and population growth have made water an increasingly scare resource. Participating member libraries will provide information sources related to water from their collections in almost every format, including printed text, photographs, maps, manuscripts, audio, video, databases, models, simulations, and virtual realities. Data will be culled from a variety of sources, including government reports, oral histories, legal transcripts, water project records, and personal papers and photographs. The WWDL will be a new scholarly and public digital library resource that includes social, geographic, economic, legal, scientific, environmental, geological, policy and planning, recreational, and historic information. Not only scholars and students, but policymakers and the general public as well will benefit from electronic access to this body of information.

As stated in the original prospectus for this project as prepared by GWLA’s Digital Library Projects Task Force, “a digital library in today’s consortial environment faces multiple challenges, including: the desire for a single interface, seamless access, a wide variety of resources, remote sites with differing technical environments, and differing access controls.”ⁱⁱ To address these challenges, GWLA will employ a harvesting approach that utilizes a central repository for metadata to provide a single point of access to the digital library, using Open Archives (OAI) protocols. Meanwhile, the various collections of images, text, scientific data, etc. that comprise the digital library will be retained locally at the owning institution.

Phase One of the WWDL will consist of a pilot project to demonstrate the efficacy of this interoperability model. Initial focus will be on collections related to the following four major Western river basins: Colorado, Columbia, Platte, Rio Grande. Currently, twelve GWLA member libraries have identified collections on these river

basins that could be added to WWDL. As the project expands and other river basins and water resources are added, other member libraries will join the project as well. Several proposals for grant funding for WWDL have been submitted to foundations and appropriate government agencies. Funding to begin the pilot project could become available as early as Summer 2002.

Bioengineering Cooperative Resources and Services Project

Another resource sharing area that the GWLA library directors identified in 1998 was cooperative collection development, but a more “holistic” approach to this traditional area of library cooperation soon emerged. A “Science Cooperative Collection Development” planning group, consisting of library directors, collection development officers and science bibliographers, met in October 1999 to explore areas of research interests within the member institutions and identify possible collections-related topics in science and technology. In a series of discussions and meetings, the focus of the group’s work soon narrowed to bioengineering as the discipline that was most appealing to a large number of member libraries, and one in which there was a growing emphasis on many of our campuses. Work on identifying further those aspects of bioengineering on which the project continues.

More important than the topic, however, has been the development of the framework for this project. During the initial planning sessions, it was agreed that a purely “collection development” focus for such a project was too limiting, and ignored the reality that, when collection decisions are taken collaboratively, many other service units within each participating library are affected. Consequently, a set of principles was developed that will guide decisions on the bioengineering project as well as future “cooperative resources and services” projects, as this program is now called. Additionally, a model was constructed that identifies the service components that should be considered as each project is developed:

Collaborative Principles

1. Focus on needs of research and graduate programs
2. Focus on unique resources
3. Broad definition of scholarship with emphasis on public domain materials
4. Quality
5. Long term sustainability
6. Maximum access for users
7. Format neutral
8. Interlibrary loan component required
9. Reference component possible
10. Ensure copyright permission for all resources
11. Negotiated agreements/assertive program
12. User-centered project agreements
13. Potential for collaborative ventures
14. Adherence to SPARC principles

Model: Potential Components

1. Identification of research interests

2. Collection analysis
3. Maintain/build comprehensive tools to identify, access, and provide access
4. ILL and document delivery
5. Indexing/abstracting reference resources
6. Electronic resource consortial purchasing agreements (commercial and non-commercial)
7. Digitization projects (based on collection analysis)
 - Theses and dissertations
 - Uncataloged collections (e.g., technical reports, collections of institutes and centers, local data sets)
 - Archival collections
 - Grey literature, ephemeral materials, and second tier objects
8. Reference services (e.g., Internet-based and one-on-one services)
9. Instruction and other library services
10. Value added services (e.g., alert services, current awareness services, historical research)
11. Tie-in to existing consortial projects
12. Identification of faculty to engage in process
13. Identification of other partners (e.g., academic societies, federal governmental agencies, university presses, etc.)

A Bioengineering Cooperative Resources Planning Group, led by Mel DeSart at the University of Washington, was organized and held its first meeting at the University of Utah in December 2000. This group was cross-functional in nature, representing collection development, reference, ILL, and other service areas. In March 2002, the planning group submitted its final report to the library directors of GWLA and recommended that implementation of the project begin, focusing initially on three sub-areas of bioengineering – bioprocess, bioenvironmental, and bioresource. Recommended components of the project include digitization (theses, dissertations, technical reports), reference services and abstracting/indexing resource access, interlibrary loan/document delivery, consortial purchase of materials/tools, various types of collection analysis, and affiliation with various related societies or professional organizations. Components of the bioengineering resource would be phased in through three phases of implementation. The planning group's report was approved by the GWLA library directors, who charged GWLA staff with organizing an implementation task force to begin the work of developing the bioengineering resource.

Scholarly Communication Initiatives

Perhaps the most innovative accomplishments of the consortium involve initiatives undertaken in the area of scholarly communication and scholarly publishing. The key issues, continually rising prices for scholarly journals and monographs, a constantly expanding universe of information which research libraries must consider for acquisition, and a continuing trend toward commercialization of scholarly publishing are well known.ⁱⁱⁱ All of GWLA's member libraries have been interested in these issues for some time and in April, 1998, they were discussed in a consortial context when the GWLA library directors met here at the Linda Hall Library with several members of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Soon after that meeting, we had an opportunity to begin conversations with several of our university

provosts about these critical issues. Key leadership within that group has come from David Shulenburg, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost at the University of Kansas, who authored a position statement on scholarly communication issues that was publicized with help from GWLA in May 1998.^{iv} Scholarly communication quickly emerged as a major program area for the consortium at the first strategic planning retreat in October 1998, but initial goals and strategies dealt primarily with raising awareness of the issues on our campuses. That emphasis would shift dramatically, however, within six months' time.

In April, 1998, GWLA was approached by the University of Kansas Libraries (<http://www.ku.edu/libraries>) and Allen Press (<http://www.allenpress.com>), a Lawrence, Kansas-based publisher and printer of scholarly scientific journals, about a project that would combine the efforts of scientific societies and academic libraries in the development a cost-effective electronic database of scientific journals in the biological and environmental sciences. In part, Allen Press was acting on behalf of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (<http://www.aibs.org>), a Washington, D.C.-based organization representing over eighty scientific societies and other organizations working collaboratively to advance research and education in the biological sciences. The major impetus behind this initiative, in fact, was to provide an alternative platform for many of the smaller societies, which might otherwise be forced to turn to a large, commercial publisher for help in publishing their journals electronically.

BioOne™, as the initiative came to be known, began development in the Spring of 1999 and the database was launched in only two years, in April 2001, with thirty scholarly journals providing coverage back to January 2000. The database now includes 47 journals and over a dozen more will be added in the near future. In its first year of operation, BioOne recorded sales in the U.S. and Canada alone of over \$1.2 million US. Working with OCLC, its partner for marketing and distribution elsewhere in the world, BioOne now has license agreements with libraries in Mexico, Israel, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Australia and China. Additional international agreements are expected by year's end.

Much of the development funding for BioOne came from the academic library community, primarily through the good offices of our other founding partner, the Scholarly Publishing and Resources Coalition (<http://www.arl.org/sparc>), or SPARC. Over 170 member libraries of SPARC pledged significant portions of their funds already earmarked for SPARC projects specifically to the development of BioOne, accounting for over \$700,000 US in funding. The remainder of development funds for the project came as in-kind contributions from all five of the founding partners.^v

For GWLA, the BioOne initiative was a unique opportunity to become an active agent for change instead of just another group of libraries demanding change. Fortunately, we were (and still are) an organization that was agile enough to see an exciting opportunity that would advance one of our key strategic goals, realize the importance of that opportunity, and act on it promptly. Since we began the BioOne project, I've made many presentations about this initiative, and my favorite part of the entire saga is how quickly the GWLA library directors reached consensus in April 1999 and enthusiastically endorsed active GWLA involvement in the project. Our members realized how important it was to be risk takers on this occasion, and they accepted the challenge enthusiastically.

Conclusion

A major impetus behind the resurgence of library cooperation that began in the mid-1990s was increasing availability of electronic information resources and the cost of those resources. Existing consortia began to refocus their energies on licensing databases on behalf of their members in hopes of obtaining better terms and price, while new “buying clubs” were formed specifically to address the proliferation of electronic information.

Since then, however, more and more library consortia are realizing that there is only so much that content providers are willing to do for consortial customers and that database licensing as a *raison d'être* for a consortium's existence is a short-term strategy at best. These consortia are now developing new programs that will enable their members to share resources in other ways, still using information technology as the framework. Digital library projects, shared reference services, electronic publishing, cooperative cataloging, and patron-initiated, Web-based ILL are but a few examples of the types of projects that consortia are developing for their members libraries. The consortia that will be successful in this “brave new world” of network-based information technology will be those with a vision, a well-developed strategic plan, and the organizational agility to identify new opportunities and act upon them.

ⁱ See Alexander, Adrian W., “Toward the ‘Perfection of Work,’: Library Consortia in The Digital Age,” *Journal of Library Administration*, Vol. 28 (1999), No. 2.

ⁱⁱ *Western Waters Digital Library: A Prospectus*. <http://www.gwla.org/reports/wwdl.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Branin, Joseph J. and Case, Mary, “Reforming Scholarly Publishing in the Sciences: A Librarian Perspective,” *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, v. 45, no. 4 (April 1998): 475-486.

^{iv} See <http://www.gwla.org/pressreleases/scholar.htm>.

^v For more information on the development of BioOne, see Alexander, Adrian W. and Goodyear, Marilu, “‘LaJolla Confidential’: The Inside Story of BioOne™,” *The Serials Librarian*, Vol. 40, Nos. 1 & 2, or Alexander, Adrian W. and Goodyear, Marilu, “Changing the Role of Research Libraries in Scholarly Communication: The Development of *BioOne*™,” *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 2000).