

Is yours the last one in captivity?

New collections-based research

As the recent recipient of the YBP/Lindsay & Croft Research Award, I am currently undertaking research focused on identifying the prevalence and distribution of single (last) copies in the collections of Australian research libraries, and recording the extent of overlap between collections.

The research will also produce data about the focus and scope of the national research collection in terms of subject coverage. With the benefit of this data, Australian research libraries will be in a better position to assess the value of collaboration with regard to a number of collection management functions, including collection development, storage of legacy print collections, disposal, last copy retention, and inter library loan/ document delivery.

Previous Australian overlap studies have been hampered by the limitations of the software available for use with the National Bibliographic Database (NBD). The holdings data in the NBD is now available from WorldCat, which is supported by OCLC's WorldCat Collection Analysis software dedicated to mining collections data. The availability of this software greatly improves the prospects for collections based research.

My research will therefore make use of the WorldCat Collection Analysis software to identify the existence of overlap and unique holdings in Australian research collections. It will also be possible to use a feature that allows for the creation of 'predefined groups' that allow for a richer examination of the holdings data than could be obtained by comparing single libraries. Groups could include (for example) libraries representing the Group of Eight, the Australian Technology Network (ATN), National and State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA), selected special libraries, or TAFE. The results from the study will therefore present a more sophisticated understanding of overlap and the distribution of single copies than has

previously been possible. This data will allow the Australian research library community to plan accordingly for the long terms storage, discovery and delivery of legacy print materials.

The project is a continuation of research that has been undertaken in conjunction with CAVAL Ltd regarding the long-term management of Australian print collections. In the most recent phase of the research, a pilot study was conducted to test the methodology that will be employed and the results of this pilot study will be reported in a forthcoming issue of Australian Library Journal. As a collaboration between a university-based researcher and industry, the research also serves to foster the important links between research and practice. Too frequently research is believed to produce outputs that have little relevance to practice while practitioners are often perceived to develop services on a non-existent evidence base. This project is grounded in a collaboration of research and practice that will have benefits to both.

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