

PRESENTATION TO TRLN ANNUAL MEETING

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Those of you who attended the first of these annual meetings back in March of 1983 may recall that I traced the history of TRLN in considerable detail then. At that time TRLN had been in existence for four years, a great deal had already been accomplished, and the nature of the work had begun to shift somewhat from what it had been in its earliest, formative stages - changed to the point that a certain nostalgia had begun to develop for the days of the 049 Field Task Force and the long Coordinating Committee meetings at the Humanities Center in which we hammered out a great many decisions and compromises which resulted in our unified approach to systems development. I don't need to remind those of you who took part in those early meetings that they were not a painless experience. I don't intend to repeat that history today. Instead, I am going back even further into our history to show you what real nostalgia is all about.

In that earlier paper I dated the beginning of TRLN back to 1977 when a committee appointed by the Library Directors proposed a comprehensive program of library cooperation with an online bibliographic access system serving as the cornerstone supporting programs of cooperative collection development,

preservation, access services, and coordinated delivery of services to users in the Triangle area. The groundwork laid in 1977 was indeed the immediate antecedent of TRLN, but today I would like to suggest that TRLN may be viewed as part of a much longer history - one going back over fifty years to the early 1930s - and that TRLN potentially represents the culmination of a chain of events in the area of library cooperation that is unprecedented among U.S. research libraries.

I recently did a paper on cooperative collection development for a Symposium in Chicago. In preparing that paper I went back to some of the source documents relating to the cooperative programs between Carolina and Duke. These documents, it seems to me, suggest some interesting parallels with what has been happening more recently with TRLN, and they may also suggest a few lessons that we would do well to learn from this earlier experience.

In 1934 the Duke and the University of North Carolina Libraries received a joint Grant from the General Education Board for a project of interlibrary cooperation. As with TRLN, the receipt of the Grant was preceded by several years of discussion among librarians in the two institutions (one interesting difference here - cooperative work in those days took place mainly through individual contacts between University Librarians and, to a lesser extent, among Curators of Special Collections, rather than through committees). In fact, I found

no reference to any committees involved in these early programs. That is definitely not a parallel with what we are doing now.

The eventual goal of cooperation at that time was coordinated development of research collections, but it was decided then, just as we decided in 1977, that adequate means of bibliographic control and improved access to collections would be necessary before coordination of collection development could proceed effectively. Thus, the 1934 Grant was used to establish the daily interlibrary delivery service and to support a bibliographic component which seems to have been called "the Exchange of Catalogs Project." The North Carolina version of this catalog became the North Carolina Union Catalog, and the microfilm version of that catalog is still providing services at the State Library and in our own libraries for interlibrary loan.

As we all know, the daily delivery service is now greatly expanded to include a number of libraries in Raleigh and the Research Triangle Park. As far as I can tell, it has operated continuously since 1934. This is the service which we all take for granted and which we commonly refer to as the "truck service". It is interesting to note that for its first twenty-five years or so it was known as the "station wagon service." I'm not sure whether this reflects the growing volume of materials delivered on the route or the growing preference for vans over station wagons as a means of transportation.

The Exchange of Catalogs Project offers a more definite parallel with TRLN. The technology used in 1934 to duplicate and exchange catalogs is interesting. The libraries adopted a photostatic technique called the Dexigraph, developed by Remington Rand to compete with the real Photostat (Photostat by the way, like Xerox, is a trade name which has come to represent a process. Dexigraph was simply a cheaper version of the real thing). The Dexigraph was not only an extremely cumbersome process but one which resulted in a negative print image on heavily treated stock that tended to warp grotesquely when used as a catalog card. Dexigraph cards also had a tendency to stick together in the catalog tray. You can imagine the problems these white on black cards represented when we microfilmed the catalog in 1970 and Dexigraph cards had frequently to be filmed on the same frame as conventional cards.

I conferred with Sam Boone about the Dexigraph and he explained that the full Dexigraph process included a second step to reverse the image, but the Grant was not sufficient to fund this part of the process. Years later, I understand, this was in fact done for a number of the original Dexigraph cards. This kind of sacrifice may be considered similar to a few TRLN has made while operating under the Title II C Grant, but I submit that our sacrifices pale in comparison to those of these earlier projects. The 1930s, after all, were a time when "making do" was the name of the game, and librarians of that period

developed a high degree of skill in working effectively within the constraints of a situation.

As you probably know, the libraries went on to receive cooperative collection development grants from the Carnegie and the Rockefeller Foundations and they forged model collection development agreements in areas such as federal, state, international, and foreign documents, newspapers, and Latin American studies and later in Eastern European, East Asian and African materials. That is another story in itself and I am happy to report that Pat Dominguez and Luke Swindler at Chapel Hill are working on a detailed account of the early development of these programs. But let me just say that our pedigree in that area is more distinguished than that of any other group of research libraries in the country.

The relevant point here is that these programs of the 1930s represented maximum capitalization on the limited technology of the time. The Dexigraph is a quaint and primitive technology indeed when compared to online bibliographic networks, online public access catalogs, and the whole range of computing and telecommunications technology that we can bring to bear on library problems today. Yet the Dexigraph was the supporting technology for perhaps the leading example of coordinated collection development in the country, programs which are still far ahead of what is happening in most research libraries. TRLN is now on the verge of implementing a sophisticated

bibliographic information system, and our challenge is clear: we need to develop programs which capitalize on these capabilities to the same extent that our predecessors did in a simpler time.

At its last meeting the TRLN Board decided to consolidate all of the various cooperative programs among the three libraries under the general governance of the board. The Coordinating Committee in turn has charged a reconstituted Organization Committee with the task of proposing a structure that will incorporate cooperative collection development, access policies and services, and cooperative preservation, as well as any other cooperative programs that may come along, into a single organization. In taking this step, the Board emphasized the fact that the implementation and further development of the bibliographic information system is still our main priority. But at the same time, the decision recognizes the fact that the time has come for other program areas to be moving ahead in a coordinated way along with technical development.

Let me say one thing regarding TRLN's approach to systems development and the programs and services that will be supported by that development. We have put together here a moderately sized library systems organization with a stable source of support and an organization that permits effective collective action. That organization is dedicated to the objective of developing high quality systems which are oriented generally to the needs of research libraries and specifically to the

requirements of the TRLN libraries. We are in a very good position with respect to developing systems which are highly responsive to our own program requirements, as we define and organize them. This is one advantage that we have over libraries which have acquired commercial or network systems. These libraries will have to work through national user groups and advisory committees representing all types and sizes of libraries in order to influence the future development of the systems on which they are dependent. We all know how frustrating that can be from our experience with OCLC. At TRLN we will, to a much greater extent, have the opportunity to design systems that are defined by the specific requirements of our own programs and services, and thus we should have the flexibility to continue to innovate in these program areas.

Much of the documentation on these early cooperative projects consisted of correspondence between Robert B. Downs, then Librarian at North Carolina, and Harvie Branscomb, the Librarian at Duke. There were also proposals and program statements apparently written collaboratively by these two eminent Librarians. As you probably know, Branscomb authored the influential book, Teaching with Books, and went on to become Chancellor at Vanderbilt University. Downs left North Carolina to become Librarian at New York University and later at the University of Illinois, where he established a reputation as one of the great research library collection builders of all time.

A striking feature of these documents is that they express a great breadth of vision and an ambitious social purpose. Downs and Branscomb visualized the result of their collaborative efforts as no less than a great library research center serving the entire Southeast, which was then an impoverished area in terms of library resources. It is too easy to say that this rhetoric was successful simply because so many foundation officials took the bait in the late 30s and early 40s - it was also successful in the sense that today, fifty years later, the research collections in the Triangle area do indeed represent the richest concentration of such materials in the southeast (and one of the finest in the country) and that this is due both to the individual efforts of the institutions and to the fact that the collections have been developed collaboratively. Although our obligation to the rest of the region is much less firmly articulated now than it was then, and I consider it appropriate that that is the case, we do have enormous resources accumulated over a long period of time at great public and private expense, and I believe that the effective utilization of these resources represents a great social value and a mission of considerable significance.

We all know that times have changed. The rhetoric of the ambitious social mission has been replaced by the management rhetoric of cost containment. Nevertheless, I think that it is still important that TRLN - as we pursue the goals of cost-effectiveness in the delivery of library services - also

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keep in mind broader and longer term goals such as those expressed in the early days of our cooperative activity. I believe that the lasting impact of the programs established in the 1930s is due in large part to the fact that they were not circumscribed by a limited vision of the future. I believe that Gary will be describing some of the potential of TRLN in terms of future systems development in his presentation. It seems to me that our own history tells us that we should be embracing these kinds of ambitious possibilities as real and achievable goals for TRLN.

The early programs of cooperation took place in the context of a joint University-level committee called the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. As judged by the correspondence, there was also considerable involvement by President Frank Porter Graham in the conception and early development of the library programs. No equivalent to the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation exists today but I daresay that the number of cooperative programs and joint enterprises among the three universities far outnumber those of the 1930s.

The point here is not necessarily that we need a modern equivalent to the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, although that might not be a bad idea at some point, but that the cooperative library projects of the 1930s were articulated in the context of an institutional policy and a community of interrelated programs, and they drew a great deal of strength

and support from these connections. As we begin coordinating our own program through the TRLN Board, we should at the same time become more conscience of activities ranging from the Microelectronics Center to the small but formally organized groups such as the Triangle East Asian Colloquium. The creation of the TRLN Board, with members from the academic administrations of the universities, has already been a step in that direction, but I think we need to make a much greater effort to establish contact with inter-university programs which may have mutually supportive interests.

Recently in interviewing Julie Nye for the position of Library Systems Analyst we discussed a possible role for her in writing grant proposals. She said that she would welcome that opportunity but that she wanted to warn me that she had one glaring fault as a writer - she tends to overuse the word concomitant. I don't think I told her, but I should have, that that isn't necessarily a flaw, because concomitance seems to be the one unavoidable aspect of everything we do in TRLN.

So, along with the need for TRLN to coordinate with other inter-university projects, there is a concurrent need to coordinate with other activities related to computing and networking on each campus. At Chapel Hill, Gary and I serve on the campus Advisory Committee on Academic Computing and I assume there are similar arrangements at Duke and State. From our experience, we have learned that library computerization and

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networking share goals similar to those of many other groups on campus, that there is a great deal of interest in what the libraries are doing, and there is a strong desire for library systems and networks to interface with other systems and networks developing on campus. Indeed, if the kinds of things Gary will be talking about are to come to pass, they will be developed in conjunction with a number of other systems on our campuses. The TRLN approach to systems development, which involves local control over the applications software for library systems, will no doubt facilitate this process of coordination and will be a considerable strategic advantage of TRLN in the long view.

When I describe our cooperative collection development programs to groups outside this area, I am often told that what we are doing here is really great, that our goals of developing and using collections as a unified research resource are commendable and realistic for the special situation here in the Triangle. On the other hand, I am also told that this convergence of favorable circumstances does not exist in many other places in the country and that other groups cannot expect to achieve what we can achieve here. The geographic proximity of the institutions, the fact that the Duke and North Carolina libraries are so similar in size and mission, and that the NCSU collection has been developed in a complementary fashion over the years due to the distinct program orientations of the North Carolina State and the Chapel Hill campuses, and the fact of our

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long tradition of cooperation - these present a unique set of circumstances. It is probably true that we pull together more of the positive factors for general cooperation and joint systems development than most other consortia of research libraries. And when you look back at the beginnings of our programs in the 1930s, it is clear that the creators of these programs were acutely aware of the special circumstances here and that they viewed these circumstances as a special opportunity to develop a center of excellence in research library collections and services.

To my mind, the lesson here is that we should continue to exploit these special factors to become perhaps the leading example of a local area research library network in the nation. We do, of course, face the same challenges of research libraries generally - conditions that compell us to participate in national bibliographic networks, to follow national standards and proctocols, to develop network linkages, to participate in national programs of cooperative preservation, retrospective conversion, and collection development. But due to our fortunate circumstances we are also in a position to complement such programs by unified action at the local level in a way that is beyond the reach of most research libraries.

Let me now review the four points that emerge from this brief and admitedly impressionistic reference to our early cooperative activity, points which seem to me to be especially

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relevant to what we are doing today in TRLN. These might be called "Little lessons from library History," like Haynes McMullan's column in the Journal of Academic Librarianship.

(1) First is to adopt and articulate broadly based and ambitious goals which express a significant mission within and without our institutions. I am referring here to underlying goals and perspectives which transcend the immediate focus of development at any given time and which are not unduly limited by a restrictive view of the future.

(2) Second, is to take maximum advantage of the special conditions and resources in the Triangle and to act in accordance with the special opportunities these conditions present, which implies that at times we will be in a position to follow a course that is not open to the majority of research libraries.

(3) Third, is to capitalize as completely as possible on the capabilities of technology to support innovative programs of library service and to insure that the development of technical systems are driven by the requirements of such programs.

(4) Fourth, is to work towards the integration of TRLN systems and programs with developing systems on each campus and with other joint university projects and organizations.

In many ways, TRLN has recaptured the spirit that gave rise to cooperation in the 1930's and we have already adopted some of these perspectives without consciously making this connection with the past. It is my hope that TRLN can assert principles such as these more actively, and that such principles will become major factors when we make critical decisions related to the development and implementation of the network.

Thank you.