

# *Collaborative Collection Development*

## *Opportunities and Challenges*

KERRIE BURN

**C**OLLABORATIVE COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AMOUNTS TO GOOD stewardship of library resources, especially when budgets and human resources are limited. This chapter will outline some of the many ways that libraries can collaborate in a range of collection development initiatives. These include: the creation of shared print collection policies, retention agreements, shared library systems, joint purchasing of electronic resources, optimization of print journal subscriptions, and reciprocal borrowing agreements. Sharing collections can reduce the need for multiple libraries to purchase the same resource, a particularly useful strategy when libraries are located in close proximity. Users can also benefit from the different collecting priorities of collaborating libraries, with their corresponding subject strengths and areas of teaching or research specialization.

The University of Divinity is an Australian-based ecumenical institution with ten affiliated colleges and fifteen associated libraries. Founded in 1910, the university is very small compared to most other

universities, with approximately 700 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students. It awards certificates and diplomas through to master's and doctoral degrees. The combined collections of University of Divinity Libraries, together with the university's shared online resources, provide staff and students with access to an extensive range of resources that support excellence in learning, teaching, and research. Together, the libraries associated with the university have been able to provide access to a greater range of resources, certainly more than any one library could provide alone. Some of the projects that have been successfully implemented at the university are detailed below, and these will hopefully serve as a model for other libraries to emulate, learn from, or adapt for their own purposes.

### *The Foundations of Collaborative Collection Development*

The libraries associated with the University of Divinity have several formal agreements in place that provide the foundation for successful collaborative collection development activities.

#### *The Library Hub (2015)*

The Library Hub ([library.divinity.edu.au](http://library.divinity.edu.au)) provides all members of the university with a single point of access to online databases and e-books, and a range of other useful links and academic resources. The Library Hub was launched in February 2016 with the aim of creating a consistent standard of access for all staff and students, regardless of their home college or associated libraries, and to reduce costs and increase resources by using a single license where possible for online resources available to the whole university.

The project was funded under the university's strategic plan and, after a competitive tender process, the project was established through a formal agreement between the University of Divinity and Mannix Library. This agreement authorises the Mannix Library manager to liaise with vendors on behalf of the university and to liaise with libraries associated with the university to maximise the

benefits of the Library Hub. Arrangements made under the agreement are reviewed annually, providing an opportunity to note ongoing projects to grow and improve the Library Hub, document targets for the following year, and revise the annual budget.

The creation and development of the Library Hub is an ongoing collaborative library project that has demonstrated its value many times over. This was particularly evident during the rapid transition to online learning and the protracted lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Library Hub provides access to a much greater range of databases ([divinity.libguides.com/az.php](http://divinity.libguides.com/az.php)) and other online resources than any individual library could afford and avoids the need for very small institutions with limited resources to purchase the same online resources. Products such as LibGuides have also been used by the university to centralise library-related information and to produce a range of general purpose and subject-related guides ([divinity.libguides.com](http://divinity.libguides.com)). This has avoided the need for multiple libraries to produce similar material, saving time and creating greater consistency for all staff and students. A single University of Divinity Libraries brochure ([indd.adobe.com/view/432446da-6151-4544-8c3a-256ec177cba1](http://indd.adobe.com/view/432446da-6151-4544-8c3a-256ec177cba1)) also provides summary information about all of the library collections and resources to which members of the university have access.

### *The University of Divinity - Libraries Agreement (2018)*

Following the successful establishment of the Library Hub, steps were taken to formalise the relationship between each library and between the university and each library. This was for the purposes of the advancement of scholarship and mutual support, including participation in university governance, the development of policy relating to library resources, reviewing the allocation of funding for libraries, and the development of shared library services and resources for the benefit of all members of the university and users of each library. This formal agreement, which was signed by representatives of participating libraries and the university in December 2018, documents the obligations and commitments of all parties. Under this agreement, each library agrees to:

- provide all staff, students and other members of the university with access to their collections, including borrowing rights, at no charge (subject to reasonable constraints);
- contribute information to and provide reasonable support for the university-wide library catalogue of library resources;
- contribute to supporting the library committee of the university's academic board in the discharge of its responsibilities;
- abide by the Statement of Rights, Responsibilities and Conduct of Members of the University;
- abide by policies of the university that affect libraries and have been established after consultation with the library committee.

In turn, the university agrees to:

- maintain a library committee of the university's academic board and to provide for representation of each library which is party to the agreement on that committee;
- ensure the membership of the academic board includes the chair of the library committee or another suitably qualified librarian;
- consult with the library committee in the development or revision of policies of the university which directly affect libraries;
- reserve a portion of tuition fee income for distribution to libraries;
- ensure that each library which is party to the agreement is eligible to apply for relevant university internal competitive grants such as research grants;
- maintain a digital Library Hub accessible by all students, staff and other members of the university;
- provide each library that is party to the agreement with access to the digital Library Hub, subject to the terms and con-

ditions of contracts with vendors and suppliers to the digital Library Hub.

## *The Library Collections Policy (2019)*

This is an example of one of the policies anticipated in the library obligations section of the University-Libraries Agreement (clause E). The Library Collections Policy ([divinity.edu.au/documents/library-collections-policy](http://divinity.edu.au/documents/library-collections-policy)) was created by the library committee and subsequently approved by the university's academic board. The impetus for this policy was the desire to develop a shared retention policy to ensure that no library discarded uniquely held items. However, the policy also outlines a number of general principles to guide collaborative collection development, which are (in part) outlined below.

### *General Principles*

- Catalogued items held by only one library (including different editions) are not discarded but are retained by the original library owner or transferred to another library within the university network.

### *Principles Guiding Collaborative Collection Development*

- All libraries that are signatories of the University Libraries Agreement are guided by a principle of cooperation, and whenever reasonably possible they:
  - agree to provide access and borrowing rights to their libraries to all members of the University of Divinity;
  - provide free interlibrary loans (including cost of postage) to other signatory libraries;
  - support the development of university-wide collection policies and contribute to collaborative collection devel-

opment policy discussions, activities and strategies developed by the library committee;

- contribute to projects associated with special collections held by libraries associated with the university, including linking to these collections via the Library Hub;
- maintain minimum cataloguing standards (as developed by the library committee) to enhance discovery of all library holdings in the university's combined library catalogue, avoid duplication of records, and optimize access to library collections via the Library Hub;
- have an in-principle commitment to making electronic purchases through the Library Hub;
- participate in the e-book purchasing model established for the purpose of purchasing single-title e-books which are then available to all members of the university.

The relationship between the library committee and the academic board ensures that there is good representation from multiple stakeholders across the university in any library-related decisions. Having formal library policies that are developed by the library committee but approved/authorized and subsequently reviewed by the academic board ensures that there is greater buy-in at all levels of the institution and affirms a commitment to the stewardship of the combined resources of all libraries. In contrast, the success of any project can be impeded by competing agendas, allegiances, or loyalties to previous partnerships outside the current collaborative network. A formal policy document can help to develop a sense of mutual accountability for the commitments that it records. Having formal agreements in place can be an important prerequisite for successful collaborative projects, ensuring that all libraries (and other institutional stakeholders) have a shared understanding of their responsibilities and entitlements. This in turn can have a positive influence on the culture of the institution if the policies reflect the partners' shared vision, mission and values.

## *Current Collaborative Activities*

The university's library committee meets four times per year and reports directly to the university's academic board. Librarians also hold a "Librarians Day" prior to the start of each academic year to discuss shared activities and priorities for the year ahead.

### *Shared E-book Purchasing Model (2017)*

In 2017, the library committee established a shared e-book purchasing model which enables single title e-books to be purchased centrally and made available via the university's Library Hub. This model is currently opt-in and not all libraries have chosen to participate. A potential barrier to collaboration can occur when not all participants are seen to be contributing equally, with some libraries making minimal contributions while at the same time benefiting significantly from the contributions of others. Despite this, the university's shared e-book purchasing model proved to be extremely beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was a rapid transition to online learning and a greater reliance on online resources that could be accessed remotely. Because of the need for increased access to e-books during the pandemic a number of additional libraries chose to participate in the shared system from March 2020.

### *University ID Card (2017) and Reciprocal Borrowing (2019)*

Other current collaborative activities include the production of a single University of Divinity ID card. The provision of this card, which can be used to borrow from all libraries associated with the university, was rolled out across all colleges in 2017. This replaced a system where every library had issued its own borrower's card. In 2019, a reciprocal borrowing arrangement was established between the University of Divinity Libraries and the University of Melbourne, a much larger institution. The University of Divinity ID card can be used as proof of identity at this library.

## *Shared OCLC WorldShare Management Services (2021)*

In early 2021, four libraries associated with the university implemented a shared instance of OCLC's WMS Library Services Platform. This has resulted in a number of significant benefits, including streamlined processes, reduced costs, and improved functionality and collection accessibility. In 2022, three additional libraries will join the shared system, and the hope is that further libraries will choose to do the same over the next few years. Previously, OCLC WorldCat Discovery had been the basis for the university-wide shared catalogue of library print resources. OCLC WorldCat Discovery is now integrated into the Library Hub search interface. It provides access to all of the Library Hub's electronic resources as well as the print holdings of all libraries associated with the university that contribute their holdings to Libraries Australia, the resource sharing service managed by the National Library of Australia. For the libraries that also use the shared OCLC WMS library services platform, live availability data displays in Library Hub search results in addition to basic holdings information. The OCLC infrastructure also includes access to CONTENTdm, which enables the university to showcase digital special collections on a shared platform ([divinity.contentdm.oclc.org](http://divinity.contentdm.oclc.org)).

## *Future Collaborative Projects*

The library committee established a collection development working group several years ago, but unfortunately its initial work was interrupted by staff changes and the COVID-19 pandemic. The working group was recently reconstituted and will be investigating a number of collaborative collection development opportunities and facilitating future projects.

These could include:

- finalising a collaborative collection development and access policy for University of Divinity libraries;
- investigating further opportunities to reduce duplication of resources across the university;



- reviewing journal subscriptions across all libraries, both print and electronic;
- reviewing the e-book purchasing model and access to e-books across the university;
- making recommendations about collection development policies and best use of University of Divinity funding for library resources, to ensure widest possible access.

Most libraries have their own individual collection development and access policy, and many updated their policies when the working group was first established. The intention now is to develop a collaborative collection development and access policy which will facilitate future collaborative initiatives and formally document its underlying principles, shared understandings, and the commitments of the university and individual libraries. Collection development policies help to ensure that a library meets both the current and future needs of its institution. In addition to identifying current needs, a collaborative collection development policy would therefore seek to identify developing areas of teaching and research at the university. This would assist with determining purchase priorities and ensure that appropriate resources were available when required. The policy would also document decisions such as purchasing preferences for print versus digital formats. Purchasing e-books that are accessible to all members of the university, wherever they are located, can obviously reduce the need for multiple libraries to purchase the same print item.

A collaborative collection development and access policy would also identify the subject strengths of individual library print collections. These areas of specialization may be related to the different emphases of particular denominations, religious orders, or traditions at each institution, the historical teaching and research interests of staff, as well as the library's budget. The policy can document collection strengths across the collaborating libraries and record agreed-to commitments to maintain purchasing in these areas, allowing other libraries to also commit to retaining and building collection strengths in other areas. These mutual commitments can benefit the distributed collection model that operates at the university. The workability of this kind of model depends on the proximity of library collections and ease of access to resources for library users.

A project to evaluate current print and electronic journal subscriptions across the university was proposed in early 2022. This project would ascertain where the same title was held at multiple locations, which titles were available electronically, and where potential gaps exist. A number of libraries have already cancelled their individual journal subscriptions where the full text of a title is available online via the Library Hub's database subscriptions. A future journal optimization project would then seek commitments from individual libraries to retain titles that are not available via the Library Hub (or which have significant embargo periods), which in turn may allow other libraries to cease their own subscriptions. Aggregation of some titles to ensure complete runs of print journals at the one location may also be considered. Final decisions will be based on local requirements, proximity to holdings at other libraries, usage, price, and availability of titles in electronic format. There is also the potential for any cost savings to be re-allocated to the purchase of individual e-journal titles that are not available via any of the Library Hub's current database subscriptions.

Another project that is currently under discussion is a possible shared print repository. This would help to address the space limitations currently faced by some libraries and their resulting inability to significantly grow their physical collections. Relocating items to a shared repository would also help to ensure that the last copy of all items was retained and accessible. Having a documented retention policy also assists libraries whose holdings contribute to the distributed collection. It assists librarians to make decisions about whether to weed or retain items and means that not all libraries need to keep multiple copies of the same title. This sort of collaborative project is initially more likely to be considered for specialist research items rather than standard undergraduate texts. It is important for all stakeholders to be involved in any decision-making processes and for libraries to make informed evidence-based decisions on which monographs to weed, retain, digitize, and/or transfer to a shared repository. Data related to subject coverage, local usage, uniqueness and/or level of duplication, and availability in other local libraries would help to inform group decisions. The new OCLC WMS system currently shared by four libraries has a shared print option which enables a library to commit to retain certain items. This "committed to retain" information can appear on the catalogue display and be easily identified when doing collection analysis such as identifying the areas of duplication across participating libraries.

These kinds of collaborative projects require a great deal of transparency, trust, goodwill, and communication between the participating libraries. These are essential prerequisites for the success of any collaborative collection development initiative. No library wants to cancel a subscription on the basis of another library's commitment to its retention, only to have the second library renege on its agreement, close its doors, or change its institutional affiliation completely. This becomes a risk management issue, and libraries must make decisions based on the best available evidence at the time, perhaps with a back-up contingency plan. Libraries with a history and track record of successful collaborations will obviously feel more confident about making commitments to future shared collection development initiatives. A tension may always exist between the autonomy of an individual library and their commitment to the collaborative work of the larger group. However, the success of previous projects can result in an increased appetite for future projects and a confidence in their likelihood of success.

## *Conclusion*

Collaborative collection development initiatives can be extremely beneficial for participating libraries. Together, libraries can ensure their collective dollars stretch further and provide access to a much greater range of resources than any one library could provide alone. Limited—and in some cases diminishing—library budgets will obviously go further if they are not spent purchasing the same resources as other collaborating libraries or other libraries in close proximity. Collaborative collection development allows libraries to develop individual collection strengths, while the institution's distributed collection as a whole provides access to a more comprehensive and diverse selection of the complete scholarly record. Through a shared vision and an openness to working collaboratively, libraries can significantly enhance the range of resources and services that they offer to their communities.

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