

Coordinating Collection Development: The RLG Conspectus

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Collection development officers in libraries whose parent institutions are members of the Research Libraries Group, Inc., have a new collection evaluation tool, the RLG Conspectus. The Conspectus is an overview, or summary, arranged by subject, of existing collection strengths and future collecting intensities of RLG members. It serves as a location device for collections considered as national resources and as a basis for assignment of primary collecting responsibilities. The authors trace the antecedents of the Conspectus to work of ALA committees, the initial RLG Collection Development Committee, and a group known as GNOMES + 2. Descriptions of the data-gathering process and of the online version of the database precede an outline of the benefits, realized and anticipated, to individual institutions, as well as the partnership. The Association of Research Libraries is conducting an experiment to see if the methodology can be extended to non-RLG association members.



When Columbia, Yale, the New York Public Library, and Harvard formed the Research Libraries Group, Inc. (RLG) in 1974, they created a rare opportunity for cooperation within the world of research librarianship. RLG was more than just another library consortium. This small community of universities, their libraries, and an independent research library formed a partnership to achieve planned, coordinated interdependence in response to the threat posed by a climate of increasing economic restraint and financial uncertainty. RLG was a group of homogeneous, geographically proximate institutions, similar in goal and function, and with a history of earlier cooperative endeavor. Their commitment to active, mutual support was strong.

In its first years, RLG experienced the withdrawal of Harvard, the addition of Stanford University, and the adoption of the computer-based bibliographic processing system (BALLOTS) developed at

Stanford. By the close of 1982, there were twenty-six full, affiliate, and associate members and sixteen special members of the partnership. BALLOTS, RLG's technical processing system, was overhauled, with many of the traumas that accompany large-scale technological innovation, into RLIN (the Research Libraries Information Network), a bibliographic utility supporting many of the functions of its parent consortium.

Following the acquisition of RLIN and the expansion of membership, RLG's other principal programs—collection management and development, shared resources, and preservation—were reconstituted in somewhat different form. RLIN, coupled with central staff access to other resources of the Stanford computer facility, had a substantial impact on the development and operational nature of these programs, and each deserves its own study. For the Collection Management and Development Program, however, the availability of computer re-

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sources made possible the construction of the *RLG Conspectus*, a collection evaluation instrument to facilitate coordinated collecting activity. This article describes the history, operation, and future of the *Conspectus*.

The *Conspectus* is an overview, or summary, of existing collection strengths and future collecting intensities of RLG members. Arranged by subject, class, or a combination of these, its divisions contain standardized codes that describe collection/collecting levels on a scale of 0 to 5 (with 5 as "comprehensive"). But the *Conspectus* planners also harbored a larger vision. Assuming its successful development, they hoped the *Conspectus* would become the cornerstone of a larger national cooperative effort (one now being studied by the Association of Research Libraries) among all the principal research libraries of the nation, for the eventual benefit of generations of scholars.

The invention of the *RLG Conspectus* derived from the fortuitous conjunction of individuals sharing common interests and goals, the expansion of RLG membership, and agreement that something like a national collection development policy would be necessary to protect the research capacity of the nation's universities from the impact of repeated and unfavorable economic cycles. Using this tool, research libraries could focus collective resources on appropriate distributed but coordinated effort, thus ensuring availability of unique or rare titles to the nation's scholars. To this was added the availability of staff and computer support from RLG. The ideas that eventually were forged into the *Conspectus* can be traced to three sources: GNOMES + 2, groups within the American Library Association, and the initial work of the first RLG Collection Development Committee.

GNOMES + 2

In 1978 at the ALA Annual Conference, a group of chief collection development officers heard John Finzi (now director of

the Collections Development Office of the Library of Congress) present a position paper on a "new Farmington plan." Recognizing that no single library, including the Library of Congress, had or could acquire the entirety of world book production, Finzi called for distribution of collection responsibilities both for "exotic" regions or areas and for certain classes of material in other subjects or disciplines. Calling itself GNOMES + 2, this group consisted of the collection development officers of the Seven University Group libraries: Stanford, Cornell, Harvard, Yale, Chicago, Columbia, and Princeton, plus the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress.* A shared concern for the future of research library collections was evident in the room. The group's major worry was how to rationalize the collecting powers of the nation's major research libraries to achieve adequate support for both foreign area studies and subjects or disciplines, for which materials are fugitive or under poor bibliographic control or distribution. In the course of the discussion, GNOMES + 2 members committed themselves to devising an appropriate scheme—analogue to the Farmington plan, but different in scope—and proceeded to carry the idea to other forums.

RLG AND ALA

The chief collection development officers of the four RLG members formed the first Collection Development Committee in 1974. By 1978 their work was providing important practical and theoretical concepts to help shape the growing idea of a nationwide plan. This group forged an initial program that included two key components:

1. The analysis of collection development needs and programs at each institution, the preparation of collection development policy statements, and development of the means to coordinate and rationalize information from the four policies.

*The reference is to the nickname of the Seven University Group who humorously call themselves "gnomes" because they meet in dark and smoke-filled rooms underground.

2. The allocation of "primary collecting responsibilities" for subjects, geographical areas, and forms of material by which a library undertook partnership responsibility for collecting in certain areas.

Primary collecting responsibilities (PCRs) were assigned for publications from countries in Africa, Central America, and Eastern Europe, for intergovernmental agencies and international organizations, and within the fields of architecture and journalism. These PCRs were distributed among members when fields were identified as "non-conflict"—that is, there were no competing or overlapping programs of importance among the member institutions.

The third source shaping the concept of the *RLG Conspectus* derived from discussions and work within various units of the American Library Association. Members of GNOMES + 2 and RLG were active in ALA as well and carried their ideas and commitment to meetings of the Chief Collection Development Officers of Large Research Libraries Discussion Group and of subject specialist sections within the Association of College and Research Libraries, where complementary work was already under way. The RTSD Collection Development Committee, which had begun to prepare a series of guidelines to foster and facilitate management of library collections, included a guideline for the preparation of collection development policy statements with definitions of collection levels adapted from those articulated by RLG (see appendix A).¹ A set of language identifiers modified from RLG was also included.

THE RLG COMMITTEE REGROUPS

By 1979, following the move of RLG's central staff to Stanford, representatives to the revitalized, newly named Collection Management and Development Committee brought to their first meeting a community of shared activities, interests, and goals reflecting both these earlier discussions and developments in their own institutions. Together with strong leadership from David Stam and Paul Mosher, chair and vice-chair, and John Haeger of

the RLG central staff, the ideas, activities, goals, and shared products made up the stuff and substance from which the new committee formed its programs. The backbone became the *RLG Conspectus*.

In January 1980 the committee received and endorsed a subcommittee recommendation that "the committee develop an RLG collection policy statement . . . to serve as a vehicle for cooperation with the Library of Congress and other major research libraries in developing an eventual national research resource collection of materials held severally by RLG and other major research libraries, with primary collecting responsibilities distributed among those libraries and LC, and with LC acting as a kind of 'system equalizer' to minimize the impact of local program change on national research library resources."² Members further agreed that the coordinated policy statement should carry information on existing collection strengths as well as current collecting intensities.

At the same meeting, the committee brainstormed ideas on the nature of cooperative collection development and agreed to several objectives, the achievement of which would require support by a cooperative RLG collecting policy. They included:

1. The need to identify collection strengths nationally.
2. Mutual reliance and interdependence in providing research materials.
3. Establishment of a tool to identify collecting levels at other institutions, to allow for changes, and to assess their significance.
4. Capacity to control better the physical growth of library collections and operating costs, and to distribute both collecting responsibilities and savings that might result.
5. Development of a mechanism to locate needed research materials more adequately.
6. Rationalization and standardization of format and terminology of local collection development policies to enable libraries to achieve the above goals.
7. Development of a mechanism whereby an institution may store or dispose of locally unneeded materials with

the knowledge and assurance that materials will be available elsewhere.

8. Establishment of a means for relating collection policy to preservation policy, both institutionally and cooperatively.

9. Development of a mechanism for relating collection policy and responsibility to cataloging priorities and for establishing centers of cataloging.

Paul Mosher agreed to develop a proposal for constructing an RLG policy.

"CONSPECTUS" COINED

Three months later, the committee approved the Mosher proposal on the format and content for the RLG collection development policy, to be known as the RLG *Conspectus*. The word "conspectus" was defined as a "breakdown of subject fields in such a way as to allow distributed collection responsibilities for as many fields as possible."³ This term has received general acceptance as a way of differentiating the national descriptive policy statement now in formation from those of individual institutions. Moreover, the term reflects the distribution of collection strengths and collecting intensities in a way that can facilitate planning, but without the prescriptive implications of a "policy." It was recognized that each participating institution must be left free to create its own policies as local programs and funding permitted; the *Conspectus* was viewed as a means to encourage coordination of those individual institutional efforts for the greater benefit of libraries and their users across the nation, without giving up local autonomy.

The committee also adopted a number of general principles, summarized as follows:

1. The *Conspectus* must be easy to use, flexible enough to meet changing needs, and capable of elaboration in order to treat adequately each field and subfield.

2. The need for specificity in collection strength and collecting intensity would normally be most useful and necessary for fields in which many or most libraries collect at a fairly high level and which involve a wide range and large number of materials, such as medieval history, German history, French literature, or sociology.

3. The Library of Congress classifica-

tion should form a general framework for the *Conspectus* through the use of its various schedules, but other subject descriptors, outlines, or breakdowns could be used for academic fields not adequately covered by LC.

4. Recognizing that such a complex project as the *Conspectus* might never be fully completed, or might be completed hastily in only a marginally useful manner, it should be phased in at logical stages according to an established timetable.

In determining where to start within the LC classification schedule, the committee used the National Shelflist Measurement Project data as a guide. By starting with fields that reflected the largest acquisition and cataloging efforts of member libraries, the eventual collecting assignments, even partially worked out, would represent a significant achievement. Since linguistics, languages, and literature (class P), combined with history (classes C, D, E, and F) collectively represented 39 percent of all titles held by research libraries, these fields were chosen to start. Subsequent work would proceed through the classification roughly based, in descending order, on the number of volumes represented in research library collections.

At the same time, the committee recognized that work on *Conspectus* segments for area studies programs, such as East Asia, or subjects representing special RLG interests, such as art and architecture, might be undertaken in a parallel timetable if it seemed desirable to do so.

Committee members and RLG central staff worked hard throughout the balance of the year to revise definitions of collecting levels and language codes and to construct work sheets for data collection and a format for data presentation. Ultimately, the committee envisioned an interactive, online format that would allow access to the database by subject, institution, LC class, geographical area, or other useful descriptors, since, in hard copy, the entire document would be several hundred pages long and cumbersome to use.

EAST ASIA EXPERIMENT

While the collection development officers were making their own plans, RLG

established an East Asian program and began to mount a major development effort to build the capacity for handling East Asian scripts in RLIN. Since East Asian vernacular collections are generally housed separately from general research collections yet cover all subject fields, it appeared that a methodology for gathering data about them could be effectively employed. Such a strategy would satisfy twin objectives. As a microcosm of the general collections, problems encountered could be resolved and the methodology revised before a great commitment of time had been made. Secondly, since East Asian materials are often expensive, any data that would help rationalize and distribute the cost seemed worthy of collection.

RLG central staff prepared a broad subject outline based on the Library of Congress classification scheme and asked East Asian librarians to provide separate values on a scale of 0 to 5 to describe existing collection strength and current collecting intensity for materials in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages. The experiment was a success. When the values were spread out on a grid, patterns began to take shape that reflected what most curators thought to be true about the relative strengths of their collections. Fear that institutional pride might result in a gross overrating of collection strength proved unfounded. When inconsistencies were spotted, they were resolved through discussion.

Heartened by this experience, RLG central staff, in close consultation with specialized subject bibliographers, began to prepare work sheets to cover other subject areas, and the *RLG Conspectus* became a reality. Immediately, of course, the problem of using the LC scheme to describe today's interdisciplinary research collections became apparent. For example, LC classes C, D, E, and F describe only one type of history; today's historians regularly use materials in B (philosophy and religion), H (social sciences), J (political science), L (education), and other classes in writing social and intellectual history. The same holds true for other disciplines. Studies have shown that some 55 percent

of the titles used by sociologists nationwide are given numbers outside of the LC class for sociology.⁴

Initial work sheets therefore attempted to draw from all classes any field that supported research effort in one. The history division, for example, contained a number of lines for reporting from other classes, such as the H class for economic history, J for constitutional history, etc. Later, as work on the online file progressed, it became clear that this was less important and possibly misleading, since the system could draw together data from throughout the schedule, and the methodology was changed.

By the fall of 1980, data collection was under way. RLG has now collected data for subjects that account for more than 76 percent of RLG libraries' collections. In addition to language, literature, and history, these include: art and architecture, philosophy and religion, most physical sciences, music, economics, political science, sociology, law, and East Asian and South Asian studies. These fields have been collectively divided into more than 2,700 subjects and geographical subdivisions. Provision has been made for brief, informative notes to clarify or enhance specific data by highlighting subject collections of particular strength or problems of assessment. On the drawing board are work sheets for government documents, life sciences, geography and earth sciences, technology, medicine, and Latin American studies. Others planned for the near future are anthropology, psychology, and education.

From the foregoing, it is clear that a "two-track" system of reporting has emerged. In addition to following an LC class arrangement, *Conspectus* segments are being completed for major area studies collections that cut across all classes of knowledge. In part this reflects acquisitions practices, which are often geographically based. But it also recognizes the self-imposed obligation of American research libraries to provide adequate bibliographic coverage for all areas and peoples of the world, a national need that became once again acute following the death of the Farmington plan.

RLG CONSPECTUS ONLINE

Recognizing the complexity and length of the entire document, and the problems that would arise from trying to manipulate its bulk to arrive at needed information, RLG central staff has mounted all of the existing data online, so it can now be readily retrieved. This new interactive database, called the *RLG Conspectus Online*, can be searched by subject, class, collection level, and institution, among other values. The system's flexibility and ease of use greatly enhance the utility of the data. Development work on the database received funding support from the New York Public Library, an RLG member.

If a bibliographer in a northeastern research library, for example, wishes to make a decision as to whether or not to purchase an expensive new multivolume set in the field of European demography, he or she could first search the RLIN bibliographic files to see if any RLG library had ordered it. If no record were found,

the bibliographer could then switch to the *Conspectus Online* to look for collection levels in other libraries. Using subject words such as "economic" and "demography," the bibliographer finds a record containing collection data for that field and discovers that Princeton has both a comprehensive (level 5) historical collection and a commitment to continue to collect at that level in a wide variety of foreign languages (5/5W). (See figure 1.) Moreover, as a backup the New York Public Library has both an existing collection and ongoing collecting policy at level 4 (a strong research collection) and a note that indicates an emphasis on English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish languages.

This information has increased the bibliographer's options. It is now possible to decide to depend on Princeton (or NYPL as a last resort) for access to the set under the liberal lending policies of the RLG Shared Resources Program and to use the money that would have been spent for

(EC029) ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY - ECONOMICS
Demography

PCR:None
HB879-3700

COSG 3/3F
CSUG 4/4F
CTYG 4/4F
CUBG 4/4W
CUDG 4/4E
DCLC 4/4W
ILNG 4/4E
MAAR 4/4E
MDJG 2/3F
MIUG 3/3W
NHDP 3/3F
NJPG 5/5W
NJRG 3/3E
NYCG 3/3W
NYCX 4/3F
NYPG 4/4W

NYUG 3/3E
PASG 4/4F
PATG 3/3E
PAUG 4/4E
RIBG 4/4F

CCI for foreign materials is 3.

For materials in languages other than English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish, collecting is limited to bibliographies and indexes, dictionaries, government directories, demography, statistical results of censuses and other statistical reports, and official government gazettes.

Demography collection supplemented by departmental library. .

FIGURE 1
Display from RLG *Conspectus Online* Database

purchases in areas more closely tied to local academic programs.*

Wider-ranging collection decisions could also be influenced by use of the *Conspectus* database. An RLG institution that did not have a high-level academic program in economic demography, for example, could decide to reduce its collecting effort from a present level 4 (advanced research) to level 3 (advanced study), with attendant cost benefit, relying on Princeton's level 5 collection (along with the level 4 collections of other institutions) to answer the infrequent call for such materials from its own faculty and students.

Clearly, one of the advantages of this data-gathering effort is to increase options for local decision making. Within the RLG partnership, the work has led to other benefits, some obvious, but others unanticipated.

Forming Collection Development Policy Statements

Each library contributing data to the *Conspectus* inevitably will construct a complete, useful local collection development policy, representing its future intentions as well as its historical collection strengths. Collection development planning, trade-off decisions in terms of collecting strengths or intensities, and changes in collecting levels suggested by changes in academic programs (or by financial exigency) can much more easily be made, and their impacts understood. Once the local changes are made, RLG central staff can quickly revise the data, and the change is rapidly communicated to all member libraries.

For institutions that already had devised collection policy statements, the conversion to the *Conspectus* was relatively simple. Even so, the process itself has proved to be an effective training aid for staff members, who may greatly increase their knowledge about collections.

Rationalizing Collecting Responsibilities

As each portion of the *Conspectus* is completed, a subcommittee of the Collection Management and Development Committee reviews it in detail. For the present, this initial review focuses on subject areas where there are no research level (level 4 or 5) collections within RLG or where there are only one or two. If there are at least three collections at level 4 or 5 (research or comprehensive) among RLG members, the subject is considered adequately covered. If two or fewer member libraries have research-level collections, it is possible that this is an "endangered" field and that a member should be sought to accept a primary collecting responsibility (PCR). To make such a recommendation about an uncovered or poorly covered field, the subcommittee considers first if a level 4 collection is necessary within RLG or if a combination of level 3 collections, overlapped, may contain a sufficient number of unique titles to equal a level 4 or 5 collection and thus adequately cover the subject area.

The subcommittee then reports its recommendations to the full Collection Management and Development Committee. The library for which an assignment is suggested has an opportunity to explain whether or not it would be likely to accept responsibility for an area. RLG recognizes that local academic programs dictate a library's collection practices to a great extent, and local constraints as well as national needs are considered when a library is asked to maintain a level 4 or 5 collection (or to upgrade from a lower level to a higher one) in the interest of the partnership. Any library may opt not to do so and may then notify the committee that local program or financial problems make it necessary to reduce a collecting level, even if the institution has accepted a primary collecting responsibility. So far the

*As part of the Shared Resources Program, RLG members have committed themselves to give priority to interlibrary loan requests from RLG members and to respond within three days to any request. Members also agree to use the United Parcel Service for shipping and to loan material that has been received but not yet cataloged. No fees are charged among members.

equalizing factors of the other member libraries plus the Library of Congress have been found more than adequate to handle the few cases that have occurred.

Assignment of a primary collecting responsibility to one institution may affect collecting policies elsewhere—or it may not. Faculty and library commitment to support of local academic programs may remain high, even though another institution may possess a larger collection or budget. The level of local collecting activity remains a local decision. The *Conspectus* is intended only to increase local options. It does not dictate local policy.

As part of its analysis, the subcommittee also takes into account the existence of other strong, accessible research collections outside the RLG partnership. While there is consensus that RLG libraries represent a high proportion of available scholarly publications among their 75 million volumes, even their combined holdings plus the Library of Congress do not represent the entire universe, particularly in certain specialties. RLG's present plan is to recognize strengths outside the partnership and to look for eventual collaboration on a larger scale so that these may be taken into account in an expanded national research collecting scheme.

Nine portions of the *Conspectus* have been analyzed and more than 150 PCR assignments made in subjects as disparate as Russian architecture, Chicano literature, Chinese medicine, pastoral theology, and Finnish history. This represents about 20 percent of the fields identified for possible assignment. Assignment of the others was considered unnecessary or postponed for a variety of reasons: (1) the volume of publishing or scholarly interest in the field was minimal (e.g., Manx language); (2) the field was well covered outside of the partnership (e.g., band music); (3) the number of collections at level 3 within the partnership was sufficient (the hypothesis, again, that multiple holdings at level 3 collectively equal a strong level 4 collection);⁵ (4) the assignment was postponed pending receipt of data from a member thought to have the strongest collection; or (5) the assignment was postponed awaiting additional information

from an area studies segment. Accepting primary collecting responsibility obliges the member institution to continue collecting and processing materials at the level at which the assignment was accepted, to maintain the materials in good condition, and to make them available to other RLG partner libraries within the scope of the RLG Shared Resources Program, unless relieved of the commitment by RLG.

Within this framework, the Library of Congress serves as a kind of equalizer for the system. Should none of the RLG libraries have strong academic programs in the study and history of the Irish or Gaelic languages, for example, and should no member wish to upgrade its collecting to the level considered desirable by members, the Library of Congress has agreed to consider accepting a primary collecting responsibility for that field, possibly even upgrading its collecting activity, in order to provide support for the system. In return, LC looks forward to being able to depend on the collecting responsibilities of other major research libraries within the country and to take those opportunities, when desirable, to cut back on its own collecting in certain areas.

Resource for Reference and Interlibrary Loan

The RLG *Conspectus Online* database is likely to be a rich resource for the interlibrary loan librarian who needs to find and borrow older titles not represented in RLIN or other finding tools. If a location cannot be determined from other sources, the librarian may search the *Conspectus* for a strong collection in the subject and direct the request first to that library. Since the RLG interlibrary loan subsystem allows the requester to define a hierarchy of potential sources for a title, the *Conspectus* can help establish a logical order. If a negative response is received from the first institution queried, the request automatically is sent to the second, and so on.

The reference librarian is likely to find the *Conspectus* of equal utility in directing faculty and graduate students to strong research holdings in subjects out of scope for the home institution. Used this way, the *Conspectus* becomes a practical, gen-

eral guide to a greater world of scholarly resources.

Regional and Specialized National Planning

There are signs that the *RLG Conspectus* methodology is being used, in part or as a whole, as a basis for other efforts at regional or nationwide cooperative planning. Members of the Colorado Organization for Library Acquisitions (COLA), a subgroup of the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries, use a modified version of the RLG definitions for collection levels as a basis for assigning points to reach a ranked order of expensive items suggested by members for cooperative purchase. (Colorado State University is an RLG member.) Likewise, work sheets for the Japanese portion of the East Asian conspectus division were used by all institutions with significant Japanese collections in the western United States to collect data in preparation for a Western Regional Japanese Library Conference held in January 1982 at Stanford University. Five of the thirteen libraries represented were RLG members. A group of South Asian bibliographers, meeting in conjunction with the annual conferences of the Association of Asian Studies, prepared work sheets for South Asian area studies and are in the process of data revision. The universities of Chicago, Washington, and Wisconsin, all non-RLG members, are contributing to that project. Other initiatives based on *Conspectus*-like activities are developing within SALALM (Seminar on Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials) and among university libraries in Indiana.

In addition to the benefits outlined above, others can be anticipated. As the work progresses, the data may be used to reach decisions for RLG's other cooperative programs, such as shared cataloging and preservation. At least one RLG member hopes to use the data as an aid to fundraising efforts, that is, identifying for potential donors opportunities for gifts and endowments to build or maintain collections of special strength or value as demonstrated in the *Conspectus*. Likewise, the data may help demonstrate to deans and

provosts the requirement for funding support to build collections when new faculty appointments are made.

DATA VERIFICATION

As the work on the *Conspectus* has proceeded, the complexity of its compilation and its pioneering nature have, not surprisingly, brought some problems to light. Since there are no adequate quantitative measures of collection utility or excellence, it was recognized from the beginning that judgment and discrimination would be involved in determining collection levels. Comparative shelflist measurement data exists for some libraries according to a more simple Library of Congress scheme, and this data can be of help. However, not every RLG member library contributed to that project, nor does data exist for every subject. Furthermore, the collections of many libraries have been built up over time from bulk gifts, purchases, or exchanges, which may tend to inflate the library's title count, without adding measurably to the quality or significance of the collection.

To help ensure the veracity of the data, therefore, RLG has initiated a program of "verification" and "overlap" studies, which may be used in conjunction with shelflist measurements to guide libraries in assigning comparable collection levels. These studies are designed also to represent the distribution of unique titles and the pattern of duplication among member libraries, which can provide interesting data for further planning of the RLG collaborative effort. The value of these studies was confirmed by a pilot collection evaluation project sponsored by RLG in the summer of 1981. A sample of 1,000 monograph and serial titles in the field of English literature was drawn from the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* and the Modern Language Association bibliographies. These were checked against the holdings of four RLG members—Columbia, Yale, Stanford, and California-Berkeley—each of which had reported a level 4 (research) collection, and therefore could be expected to own the major published source materials required for dissertations and independent

research. If one were to distribute the five levels of the scale evenly by percentage of holdings, an institution reporting a level 4 collection should be expected to hold between 70 and 85 percent of the titles considered important. The results of this study showed holdings that ranged from 76 to 86 percent of the titles searched, illustrating not only the accuracy of the reports, but that some collections were slightly undervalued (see table 1).

Of more interest and perhaps comfort to scholars and librarians alike, was the fact that aggregation of results demonstrated that fewer than 5 percent of the titles checked were not found at any of the libraries. The value of this kind of verification and overlap study became clear to the Collection Management and Development Committee at once, and fifteen other members have replicated it. The data has already proved useful in bringing about greater accuracy of reporting of collections and better understanding of their relative quality. Instruments have been designed for three additional verification studies—in French literature, Swiss history, and mathematics—and others are in the early planning stages. All of the studies use a sampling technique common in collection evaluation studies.⁶

Another problem with the data as it presently exists involves the use of language codes, which, no matter how much they are worked over, never are capable of precise application (see appendix B). The importance of consistent use was recognized only after analysis of the initial portion of the *Conspectus* began. Some institutions had not at first supplied these codes, and others used them only sporadically. As the value of the codes in distinguishing collection strengths and in assigning collecting responsibilities became clearer, their accurate use was stressed. Earlier data eventually will be upgraded, using subsequent reports from member libraries to bring about greater consistency and thus better understanding of the result.

Overlap of the portions of the *Conspectus* organized by subject with those organized by geographical area also requires attention. The South Asian area studies work sheets cover all subjects, for example, and

subdivide them by country. But these subjects, and occasionally similar geographic subdivisions (in history, for example) occur in other parts of the *Conspectus* at varying levels of detail. Now that the *Conspectus* is available for searching in an interactive mode online, areas of overlap can more easily be monitored and adjusted to prevent inconsistency in reporting data. Finally, the process of gathering data has revealed the need for revision and refinement of subject breakdowns in some areas to make them more useful. RLG anticipated this but decided to postpone the revision process until data had been gathered for all subjects scheduled.

THE ARL TEST

During the past year, the Collection Development Task Force of the Association of Research Libraries has been studying "current commitments and possible approaches to national cooperation in building and maintaining in-depth collections in specialized areas."⁷ In pursuit of that end, the task force initiated a project to explore the potential benefits to the association's libraries of using the RLG format to create a national collection development policy or conspectus.

Five volunteer test libraries from ARL (Iowa State University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Manitoba, the University of Cincinnati, and the University of Wisconsin) gathered and submitted data for the subjects of religion and philosophy, chemistry, and economics. RLG staff processed the data and produced printouts for ARL on a cost-recovery basis. In January 1982, members of the task force and staff of the test libraries and RLG member libraries met to discuss methodology and results as well as the possibilities, issues, and problems presented by such a project undertaken at the national level. Subsequently, the ARL Collection Development Task Force recommended that the test libraries develop a set of verification and overlap studies for the three test subjects similar to those used by RLG. The work was completed late in 1982; the task force will review results and make a recommendation to the Association of Research Libraries on

TABLE 1
COLLECTION ANALYSIS PROJECT IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
RESULTS OF REPLICATION AT RLG INSTITUTIONS—BY NUMBER OF TITLES,
PERCENTAGE HELD, AND REPORTED COLLECTING LEVEL (CL)

| Section of Bibliography | Total Titles | NNC | | | CtY | | | CSt | | | CU | | | NN | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-----|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|-----|
| | | # | % | CL | # | % | CL | # | % | CL | # | % | CL | # | % | CL |
| Old and Middle English* | | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 |
| General Old English | 111 | 88 | 79.3 | | 97 | 87.4 | | 84 | 75.7 | | 92 | 82.9 | | 85 | 76.5 | |
| Langland | 97 | 72 | 74.2 | | 89 | 91.8 | | 70 | 72.2 | | 81 | 83.5 | | 74 | 76.2 | |
| Renaissance Drama | | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 5/5 |
| Jonson | 118 | 102 | 86.4 | | 108 | 91.5 | | 94 | 79.7 | | 94 | 79.7 | | 105 | 88.9 | |
| Marlowe | 97 | 80 | 82.5 | | 79 | 81.4 | | 77 | 79.4 | | 79 | 81.4 | | 82 | 84.5 | |
| 18th-Century Prose | | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 5/5 |
| Swift | 133 | 108 | 81.2 | | 118 | 88.7 | | 105 | 78.9 | | 111 | 83.5 | | 107 | 80.4 | |
| Godwin | 80 | 60 | 75.0 | | 66 | 82.5 | | 51 | 63.8 | | 59 | 73.8 | | 63 | 78.7 | |
| 19th-Century Fiction | | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 5/5 |
| Austen | 94 | 68 | 72.3 | | 80 | 85.1 | | 76 | 80.9 | | 79 | 84.0 | | 80 | 85.1 | |
| Gissing | 74 | 61 | 82.4 | | 65 | 87.8 | | 66 | 89.2 | | 59 | 79.7 | | 69 | 93.2 | |
| 20th-Century Poetry | | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 4/4 | | | 5/5 |
| Auden | 138 | 108 | 78.3 | | 121 | 87.7 | | 98 | 71.0 | | 118 | 85.5 | | 121 | 87.6 | |
| Gunn | 31 | 21 | 67.7 | | 15 | 48.4 | | 18 | 58.1 | | 27 | 87.1 | | 26 | 83.9 | |
| Total | 973 | 768 | 78.9 | — | 838 | 86.1 | — | 739 | 76.0 | — | 799 | 82.1 | — | 812 | 83.5 | — |

*Representative authors were selected as examples of the subject; the collection level (CL) is for the entire subject, e.g., Old and Middle English.

whether to adopt the *Conspectus* format as the basis of a truly national research collection development statement.

The efforts of RLG and ARL have gone a long way toward realizing the dream of many librarians for a description of existing research collections nationwide in areas of interest to scholars all over the nation. The development of a national conspectus is a project of potential significance approaching that of the development of the National Union Catalog of past generations. Through this effort, scholars and librarians everywhere will have a better concept of the location of major research collections. By understanding existing patterns of strengths, and by distributing responsibility on the basis of collaborative self-interest, the research libraries of the nation may develop even

stronger research collections with less undesirable redundancy and unnecessary expenditure. But it will not be an easy or simple task. To work, interdependency must be carefully laid on a foundation of enduring mutual commitment and trust, commodities that have not always been easy to obtain.

In a sense, the *Conspectus* represents an insurance policy against future uncertain times. This new vehicle should provide the means for improved service, as well as enabling trade-off and reallocation of resources in ways that will result in local economies. The project will give to librarians and scholars a bibliographic research tool on a grand scale that will make efforts at bibliographic access and rapid delivery more efficient and effective than ever before.

REFERENCES

1. American Library Association, Collection Development Committee, *Guidelines for Collection Development* (Chicago: The Association, 1979), p.3-4.
 2. Research Libraries Group, Inc., "Summary Minutes of the Meeting of the Collection Development and Management Committee" [sic] (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ., 1980), p.3.
 3. Research Libraries Group, Inc., "Summary Minutes of the Meeting of the Collection Development and Management Committee" [sic] (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 1980), p.2.
 4. Louis Golomb, "Defining and Meeting the Library Needs of Social Science Researchers at Stanford" (unpublished paper, 1981), p.8. This study showed that 55 percent of the titles from the *Annual Review of Sociology* over a ten-year period were given classification numbers outside of LC classes HM-HX. See also James C. Baughman, "A Structural Analysis of the Literature of Sociology," *Library Quarterly* 44:293-308 (Oct. 1974) and his "Toward a Structural Approach to Collection Development," *College & Research Libraries* 38:241-48 (May 1977).
 5. Preliminary work on overlap studies within RLG and studies cited elsewhere support this hypothesis. See, for example, William Gray Potter, "Studies of Collection Overlap: A Literature Review," *Library Research* 4:3-21 (1982).
 6. See the methodology described in Paul H. Mosher, "Collection Evaluation in Research Libraries: The Search for Quality, Consistency and System in Collection Development," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 23:26-28 (Winter 1979).
 7. *Association of Research Libraries Newsletter*, no.105:11 (March 3, 1981).
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APPENDIX A: RLG DEFINITIONS OF COLLECTING LEVELS

0. *Out of Scope*: The library does not collect in this area.
1. *Minimal Level*: A subject area in which few selections are made beyond very basic works. For foreign law collections, this includes statutes and codes.
2. *Basic Information Level*: A collection of up-to-date general materials that serve to introduce and define a subject and to indicate the varieties of information available elsewhere. It may include dictionaries, encyclopedias, selected editions of important works, historical surveys, bibliographies, handbooks, a few major periodicals, in the minimum number that will serve the purpose. A basic information collection is not sufficiently intensive to support any courses or independent study in

the subject area involved. For law collections, this includes selected monographs and loose-leaves in American law and case reports and digests for foreign law.

3. *Instructional Support Level*: A collection that is adequate to support undergraduate and *most* graduate instruction, or sustained independent study; that is, adequate to maintain knowledge of a subject required for limited or generalized purposes, of less than research intensity. It includes a wide range of basic monographs, complete collections of the works of more important writers, selections from the works of secondary writers, a selection of representative journals, and the reference tools and fundamental bibliographical apparatus pertaining to the subject. In American law collections, this includes comprehensive trade publications and loose-leaves, and for foreign law, periodicals and monographs.
 4. *Research Level*: A collection that includes the major published source materials required for dissertations and independent research, including materials containing research reporting, new findings, scientific experimental results, and other information useful to researchers. It is intended to include all important reference works and a wide selection of specialized monographs, as well as a very extensive collection of journals and major indexing and abstracting services in the field. Older material is retained for historical research. Government documents are included in American and foreign law collections.
 5. *Comprehensive Level*: A collection in which a library endeavors, so far as is reasonably possible, to include all significant works of recorded knowledge (publications, manuscripts, other forms), in all applicable languages, for a necessarily defined and limited field. This level of collecting intensity is one that maintains a "special collection"; the aim, if not the achievement, is exhaustiveness. Older material is retained for historical research. In law collections, this includes manuscripts, dissertations, and material on nonlegal aspects.
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APPENDIX B: RLG LANGUAGE COVERAGE CODES

- E— English language material predominates; little or no foreign language material in the collection.
- F— Selected foreign language material included, primarily European, in addition to the English language material.
- W— Wide selection of material in all applicable languages.
- Y— Material is primarily in one foreign language.