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Board of Directors Action Form

To: ACRL Board of Directors

Subject: ACRL Statement on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and the Print Collecting Imperative

Submitted by: Thomas Keenan, Chair, European Studies Section (ESS)

Date submitted: September 22, 2020

Background

A few months into the COVID-19 crisis, librarians at many institutions began receiving communications from their administrations announcing broad shifts toward an e-centric collecting model.

This response to the disruption in acquisitions operations and researcher access to collections was characterized by some as a temporary measure, and by others as an acceleration of a more irresistible and irreversible momentum. In all instances, bundling of e-acquisitions arrangements with larger-scale content vendors was presented as a necessary efficiency.

Librarians responsible for European studies and the representation in North American teaching and research collections of the world regions traditionally relegated to “area studies” — everything beyond the Anglo-American and Western European sphere — reacted with some alarm. Print remains the primary medium of these regions’ publishing and distribution infrastructures, and consolidation of acquisitions operations around large-scale electronic content aggregators has the potential to marginalize or exclude them in the representation of the world in the collections that support teaching and research in North America. Librarians responsible for these regions have worked hard over recent decades to ensure — largely through inter-institutional cooperative collecting initiatives — adequate representation in North American libraries, to make the full range of research-valuable materials related to these regions available to North American students and scholars, whether via the collections of their home institutions or via Inter-Library Loan and other collection-sharing structures.

Intensified pooling of acquisitions resources around large-scale electronic content aggregators endangers this model of collecting and resource-sharing. It has the potential to homogenize institutional collections, impose licensing restrictions that prevent collections from being shared between institutions, and to deplete the North American research library ecosystem. European studies and area studies librarians reacted as a class of library professionals and voiced their concerns through their professional associations in the statements referenced in the draft “ACRL Statement on Equity, Diversity,

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Inclusion and the Print Collecting Imperative” (Appendix A Doc 1.1) being submitted for your consideration. The proliferation of these statements is a strength; it demonstrates the breadth and diversity of library professionals who share these concerns. Nonetheless, members of ACRL’s European Studies Section (ESS), many of whom were signatories on some of these earlier statements, felt it was crucial that a statement of broader scope be issued by a professional body with a wider purview. The appended draft statement makes it clear that valuable content from outside the Anglo-American publishing and distribution sphere is not the only category jeopardized by an e-dominant collecting model, that there are important vulnerable categories within the North American publishing and distribution realm as well, and that at issue here are equity, diversity, and inclusion broadly conceived. ESS consulted with representatives of other ACRL membership groups, and confirmed that concerns around a move to an e-centric collection building model extend beyond area studies and European studies. From ESS members’ conversations with colleagues in the African-American Studies Librarians Interest Group (AASLIG); the Asian, African and Middle Eastern Studies Interest Group (AAMESIG); the Literatures in English Section (LES); and the Women & Gender Studies Section (WGSS), several of whom participated in the drafting of the attached statement (Appendix A Doc 1.1), it became clear that many of the collection-building efficiencies currently being proposed are in deep tension with the widely and emphatically espoused imperative for diversity and equitable representation within — as well as equitable access to — the library collections that support research and teaching in North America. This is an issue to which the profession and the community of teaching and research libraries as a whole needs to address itself and, given that, we feel strongly that our professional association — ACRL — should issue a statement in support of a measured and critical response to the present circumstances, a balanced, considered, and equitable response that takes full stock of competing priorities and imperatives.

Stakeholders

As stated above, the ESS members who worked on this statement consulted and collaborated with colleagues from the African-American Studies Librarians Interest Group; the Asian, African and Middle Eastern Studies Interest Group; the Literatures in English Section; and the Women & Gender Studies Section.

Fiscal and Staffing Impact

If approved, ACRL staff will add the statement to its website and will promote through marketing channels.

Action Recommended

That the ACRL Board of Directors approves the “ACRL Statement on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and the Print Collecting Imperative.”

Strategic Goal Area Supported

Please see the [ACRL Strategic Plan](#), and select from the drop-down the goal area that will be affected most by this action.

☒ Value of Academic Libraries

Goal: Academic libraries demonstrate alignment with and impact on institutional outcomes.

☐ Student Learning

Goal: Advance innovative practices and environments that transform student learning.

☒ Research and Scholarly Environment

Goal: Librarians accelerate the transition to more open and equitable systems of scholarship.

☒ New Roles and Changing Landscapes

Goal: Academic and research library workforce effectively navigates change in higher education environments.

☐ Enabling Programs and Services

ACRL programs, services, and publications that target education, advocacy, and member engagement.

The proposed action serves three of the ACRL strategic goals listed above: institutional alignment, responsiveness to changes in higher education, and promotion of openness and equity in scholarship. As librarians with significant liaison responsibilities, we are deeply conversant with the rapidly evolving landscape of teaching and research related to our areas of expertise. We are proposing this action largely because we know that, in order to guarantee continued alignment of library collections and services with the objectives of our users (including facilitating access to collections beyond our institutions, collections developed through efforts coordinated among colleagues at different institutions), we need to be afforded the freedom, flexibility, and support necessary to push collections into new areas in order to accommodate an increasingly interdisciplinary research and teaching sphere that is increasingly omnivorous at the documentary or source-base level. Inconveniently, this will at times inevitably be at odds with efficiencies that appear attractive and expedient from a higher-level, bigger-picture perspective. As down-on-the-ground librarians who work intensively with the users of our collections we are uniquely well positioned to register change and development in research and teaching and in our users' needs and expectations vis-à-vis library collections and services. A crucial element of our institutional and professional function is to impart that perspective to administrators who bear responsibility for the grand-scale direction and planning of our libraries' evolution. In addition to serving these priorities of institutional alignment and responsiveness to change in higher education, we are proposing this action in service of the mission to advance openness and equity of representation in — as well as access to — the library collections that support research and teaching.

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ACRL Statement on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and the Print Collecting Imperative

In keeping with its Core Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, ACRL recommends that North American research libraries continue to collect and preserve valuable print materials, even as the global COVID-19 crisis and associated financial circumstances may compel them to shift, at least temporarily, to digital formats where available. ACRL shares the apprehensions vis-à-vis vulnerable categories of important materials liable to be marginalized or excluded by a rapid and sweeping shift towards collecting models that categorically privilege electronic formats, apprehensions expressed by the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials (SALALM) in their [Collection Development and Equity in the Time of Covid-19 Task Force Resolution](#); the [Middle East Librarians Association \(MELA\)](#); the [Committee on South Asian Libraries and Documentation \(CONSALD\)](#); the Collaborative Initiative for French Language Collections (CIFNAL), the German-North American Resources Partnership (GNARP), and the Slavic East European Materials Project (SEEMP) in their joint [European Studies Statement on Collection Development, Access, and Equity in the Time of COVID-19](#); the Committee on Libraries and Information Resources of the Association of Slavic East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES CLIR) [Statement on Collection Development in the time of COVID-19](#); the [Statement on Collection Development and Acquisition Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) signed by the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL), the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC), and the Society of Chinese Studies Librarians (SCSL); a statement published by the [Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia \(CORMOSEA\)](#); and the [Equity and Access in Higher Education and Academic Libraries Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) statement signed by representatives of many institutions and professional bodies.

All of these statements identify troubling consequences of a sweeping shift in research libraries toward a collecting paradigm of digital primacy as a monolithic and permanent response to the formidable, but temporary, unforeseen challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. Many of the efficiencies being advocated by library administrations rely on consolidation of acquisitions processes and expansion of arrangements with large-scale commercial partners. The business models of these vendors are predicated on economies of scale that privilege materials for which there are well established markets within the academy. Such reliance on market forces is wont to perpetuate the marginalization of perspectives not traditionally well represented in research and higher education in North America; it risks reinforcing legacy political, ideological, and cultural hegemony and subalternity by reproducing them in the representation of the world compiled in collections that support North American research and teaching. Specifically, the aforementioned statements address the following circumstances and the related potential for damage to research collections in the context of a broadly adopted collecting paradigm centered around electronic formats:

- the continued prevalence of print in many regional publishing ecosystems and the lack of digital publishing and distribution infrastructure for materials issuing from those regions;

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- international intellectual property complexities that prevent, hinder, or complicate acquisition and use of existing electronic editions where available, including preventing or hindering the long-term preservation of those electronic materials via third-party arrangements such as LOCKSS, CLOCKSS, and PORTICO;
- the necessity for a healthy ecosystem of specialized vendors with intensive regional expertise to identify and capture research-valuable content likely to elude the broader collecting enterprises of less specialized vendors;
- e-resource licensing agreements' inhibition of inter-institutional cooperative collection development arrangements and inter-institutional resource sharing critical for ensuring equal access to research materials for the full range of researcher populations.

These same liabilities exist within the Anglo-American publishing and distribution sphere, and a shift of focus to center on digital formats risks perpetuating the marginalization or suppression in North American library collections of traditionally under-represented North American populations and perspectives as well. Important periodical and monographic output of Mexico, as well as of African American, Indigenous, Jewish, Latinx, LGBTQ+, and other communities in North America, remain outside of mainstream publishing and distribution structures and are likely to be overlooked by large-scale, general-scope electronic content aggregators.

ACRL therefore strongly urges academic and research libraries to take a deliberate, measured approach to any shift, temporary or permanent, toward an e-centric collection development model, an approach that balances fiscal exigencies with equity, diversity, and inclusion imperatives; takes full stock of the important research and teaching that cannot be accommodated through electronic resource collecting alone; and ensures support for continued print collecting in relevant areas.