

## STUDY CONFIRMS INCREASED HOMOGENEITY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

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Academic library collections in the U.S. are beginning to look more and more alike, according to doctoral dissertation research conducted by Anna Perrault.<sup>1</sup> The research analyzed changes in collecting patterns between 1985 and 1989 in the aggregated resources base of 72 ARL libraries. Data for the study were extracted from the 1991 edition of the OCLC/AMIGOS Collection Analysis CD system that contains 1.7 million bibliographic records of non-serial imprints for the ten year period 1979–1989.

The study establishes that there was a steep decline in foreign language acquisitions, a decrease in the percentage of unique titles in many subject areas, and an increased concentration on core materials. The overall decline in the rate of monographic acquisitions from 1985 to 1989 for the group of 72 ARL libraries was 27.76%. The humanities declined at the highest rate (31.98%), the social sciences (28.88%) at a lesser rate, with the sciences (15.81%) experiencing the lowest rate of decline. As a percentage of the total number of imprints, the humanities declined from a 40.14% share to a 37.79% share. The social sciences remained virtually static, but the sciences increased from 18.11% of total to 21.10%. Thus, by broad subject grouping, the sciences increased in proportion to the humanities and social sciences.

Foreign language imprints experienced a much greater decline than English language imprints. In 1985, the ratio of English to non-English imprints was 50/50, changing to 60/40 in 1989. While all foreign language groups in the study experienced steep declines, the three western languages of French, German, and Spanish declined less than Russian and the Asian languages (CJK), which had the highest rate of decline. (See accompanying table.)

The collecting pattern established for the foreign language groups was a clustering of titles in the history and literature of the geographic area in which the language is predominant. The strong place of American history and literature as core disciplines was reflected in lower rates of decline in those subjects. Disciplines with the lowest rates of decline — computer science, physics, general engineering, and medicine — had the highest number of holding libraries. The analysis by specific subject areas indicates that the group of 72 ARL libraries selected more titles in common in 1989 than in 1985 resulting in a greater concentration on a core of titles in central disciplines.

## NEW IMPRINTS BY LANGUAGE GROUPING: RATE OF CHANGE BETWEEN 1985 AND 1989

	1985	1989	Rate of Change
All imprints	144,879	104,660	-27.76%
English	72,802	63,820	-12.34%
Non-English	72,077	40,844	-43.33%
French	8,316	4,924	-40.79%
German	11,906	7,529	-36.76%
Spanish	9,545	6,342	-33.56%
Russian	7,717	3,975	-48.49%
CJK	9,580	4,822	-49.67%

The study indicates that in 1989, the 72 ARL libraries as a group added fewer titles, and fewer unique titles, but with a larger number of libraries acquiring the same title. The decrease in unique titles means less diversity in the collective resources base and thus more homogeneity in the distributed collections of the 72 ARL libraries. The research confirms the apprehension expressed in the Mellon study that “access to scholarly information may be narrowing” and that “pressures on acquisitions budgets will cause various research libraries to look more and more alike over time” resulting in a “decline in the richness of collections overall, not merely a decline in the range of holdings of any one library.”<sup>2</sup>

The implication of the dissertation’s findings for U.S. academic research libraries, with respect to all monographic publications but especially foreign imprints, is that it is misleading to assure researchers that a title can always be borrowed from or a photocopy supplied by another library. An access model of library service will not be effective if no library owns the material sought and if records and holdings do not appear in the utilities’ databases which are the major resource sharing vehicles. Collective action is needed among the nation’s academic libraries to insure the quality of the “national collection” for future research.

*Ed. note: This research received the 1995 ALISE doctoral dissertation award.*

<sup>1</sup> Anna H. Perrault. *The Changing Print Resource Base of Academic Libraries in the United States: A Comparison of Collection Patterns in Seventy-two ARL Academic Libraries of Non-serial Imprints for the Years 1985 and 1989*, Ph.D. dissertation, The Florida State University, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony M. Cummings, et al. *University Libraries and Scholarly Communication: A Study Prepared for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation* ([Washington, DC:] Published by the Association of Research Libraries for The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 1992), 3.