Collaborative Repository for Academic Libraries

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Abstract  
The paper deals with the concept of collaborative repositories, explains the need for establishment of repositories by academic libraries, proposes a model network of academic libraries and highlights the major existing collaborative repositories in the world.

Keywords: Academic libraries, repository library, collaborative repository.

Introduction  
In the dynamic world of academic libraries, no library will succeed for very long unless it manages its most valuable resource, i.e. its collection as effectively as possible to extend maximum services to its users. Present society is a knowledge based society, where knowledge is the major creative force. In a knowledge society, the economic status of country is decided by its information resources. Information, being the basic resource for knowledge expansion has divided the world into information haves and have-nots. The growth and development of a country is directly proportionate to abundance of its information resources. This has resulted in increased importance to the access to the original and authentic information because the right information is the basic input for right decisions.

In the academic libraries where the users comes with multidisciplinary requirements, varied documents related to each subject have to procured and maintained in the collection. In the print era, libraries were acquiring and maintaining the volumes in large numbers. But with the availability of huge online academic resource the policy of maintaining print holdings in the libraries is being debated. It is true that the print holdings occupy a lot of space on the shelves, but when the question of authenticity of information comes into picture, the access to the original document is inevitable. It is also equally true that no library can continue to store its holdings with an intention of providing direct access to all its collection.

Space Constraint in Libraries  
In the changing times, though many aspects of libraries are often discussed in various platforms, yet the burning and practical problem of space constraint in the academic libraries is hardly addressed. Coupled with the increase in collection, the academic libraries – which have to cater to the different needs of users and provide access to information in varied forms under the single roof – are yielding place to the hybrid libraries. Most of earlier academic library buildings were not built with a vision of providing IT based services. This has added to the problem of ever present space constraint in the libraries.

There is no denying the fact that only the collection goes on increasing but there is no corresponding extension of building and other infrastructure due to stringent budgets. This results in problem for accommodating the new acquisitions in the library. The collection which primarily comprises of back volumes of journals, classics, or rare books is mainly required by researchers and this collection occupies a lot of space on the library shelves. Such a collection is more in university libraries which have developed it over a period of time in various subjects. The collection is infrequently used but essential to the users hence it cannot be weeded out. With the advent of e-publishing and digitization of information, the libraries are realizing that there was hardly any need to acquire and process documents in print media. But the reality is not so, though the arrival of paper less society was predicted in the 1980s, yet the print publishing has continued to flourish till today. Steve Connor¹ says “of the 22,000 peer reviewed journals across the globe, only 10,000 are available in digital form. This is an indicator that the libraries have to continue with acquisition and processing of their print holdings. This lack of storage

¹ Steve Connor
space in academic libraries has been increasingly attracting international interest. Therefore a solution has to be worked out which is suitable to both the librarians and the users. The repositories have emerged as a possible solution to this problem and are adopted in many countries."

Repositories

The Concept of repositories was floated by Eliot’s way back in 1902 when he noted that “rapid access to well organized repository is probably quicker than retrieving un-catalogued material from the deeper recesses of individual library collection”. It is an accepted fact that most of the libraries are facing the space constraints to house their collections. Academic libraries are facing this problem more as their weeding policy is different from the public libraries. Especially the university libraries, which are meant for catering the higher academic needs of researchers and teachers, have to procure books on diverse subjects and their serial holdings is also very large. Even the so-called large libraries are also finding it difficult to manage their overcrowded stacks which have resulted from an increase in scholarly publishing and the high cost of traditional library buildings. All this have made the repository an attractive option. IFLA³ conducted a survey on repository plan and models. It was a part of the provision of basic data to the elements of Universal Availability of Publications programme (UAP). It states that “the repository is to ensure that books and other material acquired by the libraries in a country (region) continue to be available for use even though local libraries may no longer be able to retain them”.

The survey also emphasizes that “…repositories are needed simply because libraries run out of space and because even when this condition does not apply, some have continuing policy of withdrawal”. This study has proven to be seminal in the development of repository libraries across the globe.

Collaborative Repositories

Among the variety of media, paper based materials accounts for the largest portion of research collections. For centuries the university libraries have been the house of written record of human intellectual achievement.

Hence, if the university libraries of a region collaborate and preserve their less used collection under a single roof, it forms a collaborative repository. It may be defined as “... a means through which multiple institutions work together and pool resources to manage significant portion of their holdings. They offer a shared space in which collection deposited by different libraries are maintained under a common regime: they are included in a common inventory control system, subjected to common standards for bar codes and labeling and shelved in standardized units. There circulation is managed by a single organization.”

Establishment of repository, libraries when viewed from the economic angle by the institution, turns out to be economically viable because repositories are cheaper to build and the capital and running costs for storing individual volumes is considerably less than that of a conventional library. The purpose of repository being storing but not facilitating browsing can accommodate many more volumes in the same area; in other words the density of storage is far greater in a repository. O’Connor² suggests an average 373 volumes per square meter as opposed to the conventional library, which is around 145 volumes per sq. mt. It is a 2.6 times better factor. It could be very economical venture, if the libraries of a particular geographical area come forward to start a collaborative repository.

The institutions with common objective regarding their less used collection can join hands to form a collaborative repository, it should be noted that for success of collaborative repository there is a need for unwavering commitment by the participating libraries.

In a successful collaborative repository the participating libraries should not only share the space and the cost involved but also should share the approach to the collection in terms of growth, shape, management and access. Collaborative effort definitely provides more efficient use of resources.

Leading Collaborative Repositories of the World

Accommodating the growing collection is a problem faced by the librarians across the world. Librarians from different parts of the world have formed their own groups and have established repositories. They may vary in their organizational set up, but the ultimate objective of preserving the valued collection for the future generation remains the same.

The repositories functioning successfully in different parts of the world show that it is the only solution by which the libraries can winnow their overcrowded stacks and still make them available to its users. Space problems and reduction of capital for building are the main reasons for libraries to consider collaborative repositories. Most of the participating libraries in many collaborative repositories have moved beyond merely satisfying their immediate needs for storage space but have begun to use the repository facility as tools to systematically archive certain kinds of materials. There are many repository libraries functioning across the globe, some of the leading collaborative repositories of the world are as follows,

CRL Center for research libraries, Chicago is a leading repository. It was founded in 1949 as a regional repository by 10 Midwestern Universities and now has 150 member colleges and universities. Its holdings consist of low-use primary source materials for research. Its goal is to make best use of resources and to provide for the scholars of the future most rich and diverse pool of knowledge possible.

The Five College repository of Ohio was founded in 1995 with funding from the Andrew W. Melton
foundation. The participating five colleges are Hampshire College, Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and University of Massachusetts. This Collaborative repository offers substantial cost savings through the elimination of duplication of copies stored in the repository and it guarantees ready access to original paper copies of research materials.

In Australia CAVAL the Cooperative Action by Victorian Academic Libraries was started in 1970. It is a cooperatively funded inter-institutional repository. The CAVAL Archival and Research Materials (CARM) center preserves last copies of valuable but low-usage archival and research material. Its mission is to “enhance the effectiveness of the educational and research activities of its member institutions”

CASS or the Collaborative Academic Store for Scotland was established in 2004 as a joint initiative between the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL) and the National Library of Scotland (NLS) to store the less used materials which is of continuing value to researchers.

The National repository library of Finland was founded in 1989 as a repository to be shared by the libraries of Finland. It receives and stores published materials from other libraries and makes them available for use to the country’s academic, public and special libraries. It participates in co-operative cataloging for the development of union catalogue. It is funded by the Government of Finland.

Regional Collaborative Repository
As mentioned earlier the scarcity of space is a universal phenomena. The situation of Indian universities is no different. At the time of construction the university libraries appeared to be huge, but the rate of acquisitions has outgrown the space available. The stringent library budgets do not allow for library extensions. In such a situation in India if each state establishes collaborative repository the burden on the librarians will lessen and only active collection can be maintained in the libraries.

Through this paper an attempt is being made to propose a road map for Indian university libraries which may lessen their burden of space constraint and serve as a guide to preserve their less used and valuable print collection.

The figure shows a network of state repository libraries which are formed by the university library in its preview. If all the university libraries of each state will collaborate to form a state level repository library where their valuable and less used collection is preserved in a separate building and provided access to the users whenever necessary. Such a repository will have a governing body for policy matter and administration matters.

This body will maintain the interstate repository transactions and frame guidelines according to the changing needs of the user communities from time to time. The less used collection from the state repository can be accessed by the user of any participating library, and in turn, if any library wants to use the books from repository library of other state, it can directly do so. Hence there will be a network among the state repository libraries. This network is monitored by governing body which frames set of guidelines for their operations.

![Figure 1: Network of State Repository Libraries of India](image-url)
The benefits of establishment of a collaborative repository of less used and valuable collection are manifold.

- The problem of space constraints in the libraries will be solved.
- The life of the less used collection will be lengthened under controlled environmental conditions in the repository.
- The new collection can be accommodated easily
- The libraries can make room for IT based services
- The collection in the library will be easier to maintain
- Users find the collection of the library neat and convenient to browse
- Users will have access to the valuable collection of other universities libraries through the repository

The administrative authorities will be relieved from the pressure for extension of library buildings.

Initially the network may be started in few states where the number of old libraries with huge collection is more and the transactions may be limited to the universities of that state. The strengths and weaknesses of the network should be identified and the guidelines and policies must be framed accordingly. Further the network may be operated on zonal basis like North, South, West, East and Central. India being a very diverse country, the needs of each state will be varied. Hence the needs should be identified first in libraries of each zone before establishment of repository.

A network can be successful only when the members are involved with equal zeal to achieve a common goal. The governing body must first plan in detail for establishment of the repository regarding the role of each participating library, the financing body, the administrative staff maintenance etc, which are agreeable to all the participating libraries.

The most common question that the users have while shifting the less used books is the whether the collection stored off site will be timely available. To ensure this, the system adopted for the physical delivery of the document must be foolproof.

**Conclusion**

Collaborative repositories are established to conserve and transmit authentic documents of historical or scientific value for the generations to come. The repository library can play a much stronger and definitive role in provision of information across our systems. Also the librarians should start thinking beyond their institutions and it is time that they agreed that the strength of library is not the quantity of its collection. The academic libraries represent an indispensable link in knowledge innovation. Knowledge management in libraries is to promote relationship between libraries, between library and users and to strengthen the network to quicken the flow of knowledge. Knowledge is the most important resource in the present era. Hence society depends on the continued availability of historical and cultural records that chronicle political events, document achievements in the arts, track scientific discoveries and capture human experience. These records are of immense value to society in helping to understand the past, shape its view of the present and plan for future.

**References**