

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 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;

- 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; and
- 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.