The First Five Years:

Reports from the TriUniversity Group of Libraries

University of Guelph
University of Waterloo
Wilfrid Laurier University

Content

"The most important resource of the TriUniversity Group of Libraries is its staff. It is their expertise, dedication and commitment to service that have made the collaboration both possible and successful." - The University Librarians

The right time to collaborate

The libraries at the University of Guelph, the University of Waterloo, and Wilfrid Laurier University have enjoyed a long history of co-operation. For years, users have been permitted to borrow materials from any of the three libraries, returning them to the library closest at hand. An efficient interlibrary loan service has helped expedite the exchange of library materials, and each library has made a practice of considering the holdings of the other two before acquiring expensive, non-core materials or cancelling subscriptions.

In the '90s, a time when universities in Ontario were experiencing unprecedented fiscal constraint, the three libraries found themselves facing a number of common problems. There was increasing pressure to replace ageing or inadequate computer systems. Space was an issue

at all three libraries: Laurier was packed to the roof and Guelph and Waterloo were well on their way to filling both their main buildings and additional rented storage space. The weak Canadian dollar and soaring prices were necessitating major serials cancellations. Librarians at the three institutions agreed that the best way to move forward was to collaborate.

Their timing was right. Technological advances were making greater collaboration among institutions possible. The provincial government had begun to offer financial incentives to encourage inter-institution collaboration. There were new presidents at all three universities: Mordechai Rozanski at Guelph, James Downey at Waterloo, and Lorna Marsden at Laurier. In February 1995, the presidents of the three universities signed an agreement to collaborate on a series of joint library projects and initiatives. The goal of the TriUniversity Group of Libraries (TUG) is to work toward an integrated programme of library collections and services.

The plan called for collaboration in three areas: information resources and services, joint storage, and library systems. Six projects were identified:

1. building or acquiring a joint storage facility easily accessible from all three libraries
2. exploring the feasibility of purchasing a single integrated library system
3. facilitating the sharing of data resources
4. networking information resources
5. facilitating the sharing of paper-based information resources and making information available electronically
6. rationalising collection development

What is TUG? The TriUniversity Group of Libraries (TUG) comprises the libraries at the University of Guelph, the University of Waterloo, and Wilfrid Laurier University. TUG has a combined staff of 350, a budget of over $25 million, and a library collection of more than 7 million items. Together, the three libraries serve 45,000 students and 1,700 faculty members. TUG is also a major information resource for people and businesses in the cities of Cambridge, Guelph, and Kitchener-Waterloo.

TUG today

During a period of financial constraint, collaborating has enabled the libraries at Guelph, Waterloo, and Laurier to respond to the needs of their users. Despite a 400 per cent increase in the number of items requested and delivered, the turnaround time for interlibrary book and document delivery services has been reduced. Dozens of scholarly databases are now accessible to users at all three libraries through a shared database system. TUG's innovative Data Resource Centre (TDR) has been established, providing easy access to key numeric and statistical databases, and consultation and user support.

TUG's most visible accomplishment is TRELLIS, a shared, integrated library system which offers access to the combined catalogues of all three university libraries and acts as a gateway to a

large number of electronic information resources. Selecting and implementing the new system was a major undertaking, but the effort was rewarded when TRELLIS went live in April 1998, providing users on all three campuses with easy access to over 7 million items.

A tangible sign of TUG's success is a shared storage facility purchased jointly by the three universities in July 1996. Located on Malcolm Road in Guelph, a 25-minute drive from each campus, the TUG Annex serves as a secure storage facility for low-use library materials. Jointly purchasing a library system has allowed the TUG partners to avoid thousands of dollars in hardware, software, and conversion costs.

Jointly purchasing and operating the Annex has helped members of the TriUniversity Group of Libraries avoid millions of dollars in construction costs. In terms of rationalising collection development, reducing duplicate journal subscriptions has avoided additional costs. The costs avoided by sharing electronic information and services have yet to be calculated.

The TUG partners

Wilfrid Laurier University, the smallest institution in the group, is the oldest, established in 1924. Laurier has academic strengths in business, social work, and music.
wlu.ca

Founded in 1957, the University of Waterloo is world famous for its programmes in computer science and has major strengths in engineering, mathematics and psychology.
uwaterloo.ca

The University of Guelph was founded in 1964, based on colleges dating back to the late nineteenth century. Guelph is known nationally for its programmes in agriculture, veterinary medicine, and applied life sciences.
uoguelph.ca

1995

February
Mordechai Rozanski at the University of Guelph, James Downey at the University of Waterloo, and Lorna Marsden at Wilfrid Laurier University sign an agreement to collaborate on a series of joint library projects and initiatives, establishing the TriUniversity Group of Libraries (TUG).

May

A 30-member System Evaluation Group is formed to guide the selection of a commercial library automation system.

June

A two-day workshop on successfully managing change in collaborative environments is offered to a cross-section of staff from all three libraries. The idea of harmonised services begins to evolve.

November

Staff involved in circulation, reserves, and collection maintenance at the three libraries spend a day together "workshopping" ideas about collaboration and change. Key relationships are established that will be critical in the development of harmonised policies.

1996

March

Members of the System Evaluation Group unanimously recommend the Endeavor Voyager system to the university librarians. In all, more than 125 staff members from all three universities have been involved in examining various aspects of the systems considered.

May

The university librarians present a paper entitled "Towards Effective Collaboration: The TriUniversity Library Consortium" at the Ontario Universities Computing Conference at the University of Waterloo.

July

The three universities jointly purchase a building at 110 Malcolm Road in the west end of Guelph. Renovations begin to transform the former bottling plant into a joint library storage facility.

December

Low-use materials from the libraries at Guelph, Waterloo, and Laurier are moved into the new joint storage facility, which is large enough to accommodate years of growth at all three libraries. Staff members attend an informal open house and tour the new facility.

1997

January

After lengthy licensing negotiations, the three libraries sign an agreement to purchase a Voyager Library System from Endeavor Information Systems. By early February, Voyager software is mounted on a server at the University of Waterloo and testing and implementation begins.

May

The Presidents' Forum on Scholarly Communication is held at the University of Waterloo. Inspired by the success of the TUG collaboration, faculty members, librarians, and graduate students from Guelph, Waterloo, and Laurier spend a day exploring issues related to the changing world of scholarly communication.

June

The three university presidents and other dignitaries gather at the TUG Annex for its official opening.

1998

February

A TUG Collections Workshop brings together 30 librarians and staff involved in information resources management and collections-related activities. The two-day event provides the opportunity to discuss one of the most difficult aspects of inter-library collaboration: the rationalisation of information resources.

April

TRELLIS goes live, allowing users at Guelph, Waterloo, and Laurier to search the combined catalogues of all three libraries from one system. A web gateway to services offered jointly and by individual libraries is launched. The university librarians present a paper entitled "TriUniversity Group of Libraries: Experiences and Lessons from a Comprehensive Collaborative Initiative" at a conference on organizational change at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

May

Staff from all three libraries get together to celebrate the successful launch of TRELLIS. Tex-Mex is the theme for the party, held in Federation Hall at Waterloo.

June

The TUG Book and Article Retrieval Service is up and running. Faculty, staff, and students at all three universities can request books by putting "holds" on them in the new online catalogue,

TRELLIS, and can request articles by submitting an electronic form, TUGdoc. Nearly 15,000 articles are requested and delivered during the first year of operation.

August

TriUniversity Data Resources (TDR), a service that allows users to access and process large data files via the World Wide Web, is launched.

September

The three university presidents and other officials attend the public launch of the new TRELLIS system, held in the McLaughlin Library at the University of Guelph. A number of major indexing and abstracting services go live

1999

January

TUG receives a Certificate of Merit for Information Innovation from the Ontario Library Association, an award that recognizes technological innovation that benefits library users. The TriUniversity Information Resources Group is formed, charged with promoting, encouraging, and overseeing collaborative collections work. To date, jointly purchased resources include web-based journal indexes and abstracts such as Biological Sciences, Canadian Business and Current Affairs, and Environmental Sciences and Pollution Management.

June

TriUniversity Data Resources (TDR) wins a Quality and Productivity Award from the Canadian Association of University Business Officers. CAUBO commends TUG for offering a service which saves time and money and greatly improves data services accessible to a very large audience.

October

The TUG partners host Access '99, an annual conference on leading edge information technology. Librarians from across Canada gather to hear speakers discuss the technical aspects of library computer networks, image file formats on the web, customized web pages for library users, and the experience of one library system in digitizing unique materials related to local history.

November

A paper written by the three university librarians, "The Truth is in the Details: Lessons in Inter-university Library Collaboration," appears in Library Management, Volume 20, Number 6, 1999, published by MCB University Press in England.

The search for a new storage facility

As soon as the ink had dried on the TUG agreement, the search was on for a new joint storage facility. Guelph and Waterloo had already outgrown both their main buildings and additional rented storage space, and Laurier was full to capacity. One early decision was to buy rather than rent a facility. An economic downturn in the mid-'90s had significantly reduced the cost of renting storage space, but it was proving impossible to find a building that would meet the unique needs of a library storage facility without extensive—and expensive—renovation. A $400,000 grant from the provincial government helped offset some of the cost of purchasing a building.

After an extensive search, in July 1996 the three universities jointly purchased a building on Malcolm Road in Guelph. A task group including representatives from each of the three universities was formed to plan the interior. Another group was charged with determining collection management policies, including ownership agreements and weeding policies. Renovations had to be done to the building, originally a bottling plant. Air conditioning, phone lines, a security system, and new shelving were installed and computer equipment and furniture brought in from all three institutions. In late fall the collections were moved in, and shortly afterwards the TUG Annex was open for business.

The three libraries share operating costs, including staffing the Annex and shuttling materials among libraries. These costs are more than offset by the benefits of the new joint storage facility. The TUG Annex, which is large enough to accommodate years of growth at all three libraries, is providing storage space for low-use materials at a fraction of the cost of constructing additional space on any of the three campuses.

Why the name TRELLIS?

A trellis is a lattice used to support climbing plants. The word "trellis" evokes images of growth, strength, intertwining, branching out - all words that describe what a library should do. These words also describe the benefits of the new library system.

Acquiring a new library system

Selecting and implementing an integrated library system proved an even more formidable task than jointly acquiring a building. The activities of the TUG partners were being watched by other academic institutions and the provincial government. The three libraries were planning to completely integrate both their catalogues and their client databases.

Collaboration on this scale is complex, but the benefits outweighed the challenges. A single library system would offer integrated catalogue access to the holdings of all three libraries as well as to the materials in the new joint storage facility. Such a system would offer users

powerful search and retrieval capabilities and access to electronic resources at all three libraries and on the World Wide Web. It would also facilitate joint collection development and allow library staff to share resources and expertise.

A 30-member evaluation team from the libraries and systems departments of the three institutions worked together to determine selection criteria and identify vendors with the most advanced systems. Seven functional subgroups were established with responsibility for different aspects of the evaluation process.

Five vendors were invited to make day-long presentations, then the field was narrowed to three. After more detailed investigation and further trials, another vendor was eliminated. Then after site visits to installations of both systems, the evaluation team unanimously recommended the Endeavor Voyager system to the three university librarians. In all more than 125 staff members from the three universities were involved in examining various aspects of the systems considered.

Once a system had been selected, two more teams were formed: one to negotiate a contract with the vendor and another to co-ordinate implementation of the system. Eight implementation sub-groups were formed, responsible for such areas as acquisitions, cataloguing, and circulation. By the time the system went live in the spring of 1998, hundreds of staff members from all three institutions had participated in the project.

The end result: Better service

"One of the results of this collaboration," says Murray Shepherd, University Librarian at Waterloo, "is an enormous improvement in service. We have fewer staff than we had ten years ago, there are more students, more programmes, and there is more technology. By any measure of performance, we're doing a better job with fewer people."

TRELLIS, the Endeavor Voyager system containing the catalogues and client databases of the libraries at Guelph, Waterloo, and Laurier, offers seamless access to over 7 million items. Circulation policies have been harmonised so that borrowers can access collections in any of the libraries without needing to be familiar with three different sets of protocols, policies, and regulations. A recent upgrade to TRELLIS allows users to renew books at any of the three libraries online. Interlibrary book and document delivery services have improved dramatically, and TUGdoc, a service that allows users to request copies of journal articles not available at their home library, is now available online.

Through the TUG home page, researchers at all three universities have access to an expanding range of electronic information resources and data.

The next priority

With the basic infrastructure in place—adequate storage facilities, an integrated computer system which allowed users to identify and locate library materials, efficient interlibrary loan and document delivery services—the next priority for the TriUniversity Group of Libraries is to facilitate the efficient and effective collecting and sharing of information and data resources.

Paper-based resources such as books and journals, though in some ways easier to deal with than electronic resources, present their own particular challenges. There is a desire on the part of all three libraries to have paper-based resources available locally. Waiting for a particular book or journal to be delivered is not a viable option for an undergraduate who has a paper due the following day, and paper materials can only be in the hands of one user at a time. However, fast, reliable book and document delivery services have helped ease these problems. Collaboratively collecting and sharing electronic resources presents a different sort of challenge. Although electronic resources are easier to share, adequate infrastructure, including public access workstations, servers, disk storage, and network capacity, is necessary to ensure reliable delivery. Deciding which of the new and expensive electronic resources to acquire can also be a challenge, and negotiating licensing agreements can be difficult and time consuming. Early on, a task group including representatives from each of the TUG libraries was formed. Their mandate was to discuss the electronic resources available in the three libraries, to identify areas of redundancy or duplicated effort, and to recommend areas in which collaboration might be most beneficial. Though the TUG partners continue to struggle with many of the issues associated with collaboratively collecting and sharing electronic resources, they have enjoyed some notable successes in their first five years.

Text-based electronic resources

When the TUG agreement was signed, each library offered some text-based electronic resources, such as bibliographies, journal indexes and abstracts, and full-text journals. In the fall of 1997, the TUG partners launched a pilot project offering users at all three libraries networked access to several electronic indexes and abstracts.
Through the TUG home page, users now have access to a large suite of electronic journal indexes and abstracts which provide full citations for journal and newspaper articles, conference proceedings, books, book chapters, and other useful materials. Some of these indexes include a "Check for holdings" feature which allows users to determine whether or not a particular journal is available at one of the member libraries. Though licensing agreements vary from title to title, TUG users now have access to over 4,200 full-text electronic journals. The TUG home page also provides access to selected Internet search tools and to a wide range of subject guides which lead users to resources in print and electronic formats. TUG's Electronic Reference Shelf provides users at all three libraries with instant access to dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, and style manuals and up-to-the-minute information about the weather and currency exchange rates.

Electronic data resources

In 1999, the Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO) honoured TUG's TriUniversity Data Resources (TDR) initiative with an award for quality and productivity. CAUBO commended the TriUniversity Group of Libraries for offering a service which not only resulted in significant savings in time and funds, but greatly improved data services accessible to a very large audience.

Prior to the establishment of TDR, the use of large data sets on the three university campuses was limited to a relatively exclusive group of users with the necessary expertise and resources. Rich information sources such as Statistics Canada's Survey of Consumer Finance or the National Population Health Survey were not available to most users. Access was limited to researchers with large budgets and the ability to write statistical programmes to generate useful results.

To address this problem, members of individual centres for data resources at Guelph, Waterloo, and Wilfrid Laurier and representatives from Computing and Communications Services at Guelph and Information Systems and Technology at Waterloo joined forces to create a centralised online data service. The main focus of this new service, based on the highly successful Data Resource Centre at the University of Guelph, is a joint web site where all data licensed to be shared is mounted and maintained. Data is purchased collaboratively and agreements are negotiated for all three campuses.

A web-based interface allows users to select a data set and variables and run statistical analysis on the data from their desktops. The centrally located and staffed TDR office fields requests, acquires data, and mounts it quickly on the system. TDR staff members are available to consult with users on all three campuses, though individual institutions continue to offer support and service to local users and to maintain data licensed only to members of their community.

Together, the TUG partners are able to acquire and distribute more data than would have been possible for any single institution, given the current fiscal climate. Users benefit from this pooling of data resources and from the sharing of expertise at the three institutions. As the concept of regional centres for university data resources gains currency in North America, TDR stands as a model of successful collaboration.

The first five years

Inter-institutional collaboration on the scale initiated by the TriUniversity Group of Libraries is more than a resource-sharing exercise. TUG's ultimate goal is to form not one library, but three libraries linked together, three libraries informed by one vision.

Much of what has been accomplished during TUG's first five years—jointly purchasing a storage facility, implementing an integrated library system, sharing information resources and services—can be attributed to TUG's team-based approach. Senior administrators from the three libraries direct high-level planning, but it is teams drawn from the staff of the three libraries that accomplish tasks, achieve goals, and provide services.

The long-term investment has not been in hardware, which will wear out, or in software, which will be replaced, but in people. Knowing that collaboration will save time and money in the long term is not enough to make it work. The university librarians understand that investment in human resources is required if collaboration is to succeed.

Lessons on team building

An important factor in this collaboration has been the building and sustaining of staff relationships. Despite the geographic proximity of the three libraries, few staff members knew

each other or had worked together prior to 1995. It was important for staff to get to know each other.

To this end, events were arranged that brought staff from all three libraries together. In the fall of 1995, for example, the staff of all three circulation departments spent a full day together talking about collaboration and change. Several important and interesting ideas emerged from these discussions, laying the groundwork for the collaboration that followed. Since then, a TUG-wide set of circulation policies and procedures has been developed, a feat requiring an unprecedented level of inter-institutional team work and group process. Looking back, it's easy to see the importance of that initial workshop in establishing the relationships which made this accomplishment possible.

Learning is another important part of successful collaboration. The organisation that emerges from a collaborative venture is different from any one of the institutions involved. Staff members learned to come to terms with ambiguity and uncertainty, to accept that, in many undertakings, there are more questions than answers.

The learning continues. As TUG continues to explore new territory in the area of multi-institutional collaboration, staff in all three libraries participate in seminars, workshops, and institutes, jointly and separately, formally and informally, to learn more about the art of collaboration.

Equally important to successful team building is leadership. Team building is a difficult, time-consuming venture, and not the traditional work of administrators. It's the work of leaders. It requires a commitment to a new approach to getting work done. Staff members at all levels have been given the responsibility and authority to make things happen. For example, a group of people drawn from throughout the three libraries was responsible for the evaluation and selection of a new library system. They managed this process with considerable independence from the university librarians and achieved an important objective: they demonstrated that leadership is the responsibility of all staff members.

Empowering teams to lead TUG initiatives has encouraged commitment to and ownership of the collaboration. Now when a question arises, the first question is more likely to be "What does this mean for the TriUniversity Group of Libraries?" than "What does this mean for my department?" or "What does this mean for my library?"

Looking forward

In the next few years, the TUG partners will be focussing on a number of specific initiatives:

1. developing a server that will deal with non-standard databases,
2. finding a way to deal with geo-spatial data,
3. developing the TUG web site,
4. working with scholarly organisations and other universities to encourage scholar-centred publishing, to provide an alternative to commercial publishers, and
5. evaluating technology that will allow libraries to deliver customized information to individual users.

As well, the TUG partners will continue to participate in consortial purchases through the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL), a group of 19 university libraries in the province of Ontario working to increase their buying power by sharing resources and purchasing materials collectively. Also through OCUL, the TUG partners will continue to participate in the development of a regional shared interlibrary loan and document delivery system.

The TUG libraries will benefit from a new initiative, the Canadian National Site Licensing Project (CNSLP), a consortium of 64 Canadian universities that negotiates with journal publishers and vendors to obtain Canadian site licenses for electronic versions of scholarly journals primarily in scientific disciplines. The consortium received a $20 million grant from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation to help fund this initiative, which will increase the quantity, breadth, and depth of research literature available to Canadian scholars.

"A major accomplishment would be remaining abreast of evolving information sources and resources and continuing to provide a good, comprehensive array of information for our users," says Virginia Gillham. "That's our job as librarians: to make informed decisions and provide the right selection of information."

Developing and maintaining the infrastructure to serve the changing needs of the faculty, staff, and students at the three universities will also be a challenge. "We've made a big investment in the TRELLIS system," notes Mike Ridley, "but we're going to need other kinds of servers, and other kinds of access devices, network computers and workstations and printers and scanners, just to keep current."

"Perhaps our biggest challenge," notes Murray Shepherd, "will be to continue to celebrate our successes, to nurture the collaborative spirit, and to understand and respect our different cultures."