The CBB Library Collaborative: A Snapshot of the Successful Partnership between the Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin Libraries

Becky Albitz, Associate College Librarian for Collection Management and Pete Schlax, Science and Data Librarian at The George and Helen Ladd Library, Bates College, discuss how the CBB Library Collaborative has been serving the needs of students and faculty since 1977.

The CBB Library Collaborative, comprised of Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin College libraries in Maine, has a rich history of cooperation across a broad spectrum of library services and endeavors that spans more than 30 years. It serves as a model within the academic library community for what can be achieved through partnership, planning, mutual respect — and common sense.

THERE IS STRENGTH IN NUMBERS
Just as the state of Maine is recognized for its long history of collaborative ventures, so too are the CBB Libraries. Their official collaboration started in 1977 when these three small private liberal arts colleges agreed to allow reciprocal borrowing. Throughout the 80s and 90s the level of cooperation continued to grow to include expanded interlibrary loan. In the mid 2000s there was impetus to discuss shared collection building. As a result, CBB established a shared book approval plan and initiated a concerted effort to collect electronic content collaboratively.

Today our mission at CBB is to leverage our similarities, our curriculum, and our collections to create as shared a program as possible for each community in a cost-efficient way.

HOW IS CBB STRUCTURED?
The CBB governing board, which meets about twice a year, consists of the three libraries’ Directors and Associate Directors. They are responsible for guiding the big picture, for example, the decision to merge the catalogs across the three libraries.

Both formal and informal communication is the backbone of the Collaborative. The most active and longest-standing group within the Collaborative is the collections group. Each college has two representatives — the head of collections and another person with a strong collections background. They meet once a month to entertain offers from information providers, manage package renewals, and negotiate new agreements, to name a few of our activities. “We really get down to the nuts and bolts when it comes to putting collaborative agreements in place,” notes Becky Albitz.

The science librarians at Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin meet several times a year and frequently communicate via email and phone. Pete Schlax comments, “At a recent session we talked about how each of the schools deals with some data management issues and how librarians might facilitate that process. We also shared our experiences at our institutions regarding some of the resources that we use collaboratively.”

Other specialized groups are active within the Collaborative as well.

A RICH COLLECTION OF EBOOKS AND JOURNALS
Across the CBB there are approximately 6,000 library users. Anticipating the needs of faculty, researchers, and students can be tricky. Therefore we rely heavily on faculty recommendations and our own subject expertise.

Becky Albitz is the Associate College Librarian for Collection Management at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Previously she was the Electronic Resources and Copyright Librarian at Penn State. Becky has published widely in the areas of electronic resource management and media librarianship.

Pete Schlax is the Science and Data Librarian at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Relatively new to the library profession, Pete received a PhD from the Biophysics Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has investigated the regulation of cellular processes including the role of protein degradation in picornavirus infection. Most recently, Pete developed and taught the Cell Biology and Genetics laboratories at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine.

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Ebooks
To date the most extensive area of CBB cooperation has been electronic books, with agreements and approval plans in place to purchase packages as well as individual titles collaboratively. It has taken serious negotiation with some of our publishers to get to that point, but CBB has been successful so far in negotiating agreements with every publisher that we have been truly interested in pursuing.

Journals
When it comes to journals and journal packages, there is a much larger financial commitment in comparison to books, so the collection must fulfill specific and demonstrated information needs. Faculty has a very good idea of what they think is needed, but the advent of digital publishing and the subsequent proliferation of content have in some ways complicated the process. Yet still the basic questions apply: How expensive is it? What is the cost per use? Working together and taking advantage of analytic tools, CBB strives to maintain a collection that is truly useful and encompasses seminal information across all fields of study. Almost all of CBB’s journal packages are currently licensed within a consortium.

Impact of Digital Content
With our shared catalog, MARC records, and digital content in place, boundaries are starting to disappear and what is available at each CBB location is increasingly transparent. Users performing full-text and abstract database searches can pinpoint the right content in a way that they really could not before. Increasingly sophisticated analytical tools help us get a more granular level of data about the kinds of content being used, how they are getting used, and how much they are getting used. It will be interesting to see how these factors influence usage patterns and consequently licensing patterns.

THE SHARED EXPERIENCE STRENGTHENS AND SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
For us the ability to interact with our colleagues at Colby and Bowdoin on a regular basis and share our experiences — some successful, some less so, but always instructive — has been incredibly rewarding and enriches us all. Our interactions are always stimulating because we are able to come back and try to apply some of what we have learned from each other.

Because CBB is a nationally known collaborative, we are often asked to speak at conferences. Preparing and delivering these presentations give us additional opportunities to reflect on what we are doing now and brainstorm about what we can do in future.

WHAT’S AHEAD FOR CBB?
Our efforts up until now have concentrated primarily on collections and systems like the merged catalog and collaboration within our subject areas and collections. We are now expanding our focus for the future and are discussing the potential for collaborative services, looking at things like technical services workflows.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CBB COLLABORATIVE?
For more information go to cbbnet.org or contact Becky at rabitz@bates.edu or Pete at pschlax2@bates.edu

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We are pleased to announce the successful and seamless rollout of Advantage, the subscription management system implemented for AIP Publishing and Publishing Partner Member Society journals. This system replaced the legacy tool, MACS (Member and Customer Service), in mid-July.

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