The Role of Social Science Knowledge and Libraries in Preserving Cultural Heritage

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Abstract:

The Collaborative for Cultural Heritage and Museum Practices (CHAMP) at the University of Illinois is a "research center whose goal is to foment the critical study of cultural heritage and museum practices on a worldwide scale. It is unique in its linkage of cultural heritage and museum studies in the globalizing context." Based in the departments of anthropology and landscape architecture, CHAMP brings together a range of partners, including the Graduate School in Library and Information Science and the Center for Global Studies, to offer two interdisciplinary graduate-level minors in Heritage Studies and Museum Studies.

This paper considers two aspects of the CHAMP project: 1) how this model exemplifies the role of social science knowledge and libraries in preserving cultural heritage; and, 2) the process of developing a library collection that supports research and teaching on cultural heritage. What infrastructure and preconditions must be met in order for libraries to develop and sustain collections, services, and expertise in this interdisciplinary area?

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Multidisciplinary geosciences, sociology, art, ecology, social issues, interdisciplinary social sciences, political science, urban studies, and area studies, are just a few of the subject headings found when one reviews the facets provided by both SCOPUS and the Web of Knowledge in searching the phrase "heritage studies." The Collaborative for Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies or CHAMP is a strategic research center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that has recognized the interdisciplinary nature of heritage studies and built close relationships among several disparate areas in the social sciences.   As stated on its web site, "CHAMP addresses the politically, socially, economically and culturally

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sensitive world of museum work today" and recognizes "linkage of cultural heritage and museum studies in the globalizing context."(CHAMP@Illinois 2003)

The Collaborative was created out of the wish to consolidate and refine the museum studies program and heritage studies on the Illinois campus. The faculty innovators who proposed the program were cognizant of the many factors that affect cultural heritage. In addition to the art, architecture, and anthropology of heritage studies, CHAMP broadens the view of the researcher to consider many other disciplines within the frame. For example, one of the first questions explored in a 2006 workshop was the way in which politics affects the preservation of cultural and ethnic identity and civil rights. Individuals from the fields of history, cultural studies, anthropology, political economy, urban studies, gender studies, and regional planning met to share information about "Cultural Heritage and Human Rights."(CHAMP 2006)

The second CHAMP workshop, held in 2007, set the stage for a discussion of "Intangible Heritage Embodied." Focusing on the 2003 UNESCO convention to safeguard epics, tales, music, rituals, celebrations, craftsmanship and systems of folk knowledge, this workshop included sessions on Landscape and Space; Stories and Memory; and Performance and Space, Music, Language. (UNESCO 2003, CHAMP 2007) Again, scholars from a wide variety of disciplines joined together to explore both meaning and application of heritage studies.

The CHAMP collaborative project reflects the ability of the social science disciplines to join together in critical examination of problems and articulation of solutions at both the theoretical and applied levels. Although the methodologies of the social sciences are not mirror images of each other, there is often enough flexibility within a discipline to experiment with different approaches. The dependence on statistical datasets in the political sciences can be blended with the rational choice theory of economics and the qualitative inquiry of anthropology. The theoretical basis of all of these disciplines is grounded in the discovery and analysis human behavior. The methodological bases for each of these disciplines emphasize the scientific aspects or prediction of human behavior. After over a century of differentiation to pursue in-depth analysis of specific questions about society, the social sciences are occasionally pursuing the synthesis of this knowledge in order to apply what we have learned. Perhaps this is related to an understanding that the unit of analysis is six-plus billion people in our globalizing world.

Two of the disciplines represented by CHAMP faculty are urban planning and anthropology. Urban planning is an example of interdisciplinarity in that it encompasses housing, economic development, urban policy and management, public administration, community development, architecture, education, and landscape knowledge. This includes both theory and methodology from economics, sociology, political science, and other social sciences as well as a healthy dose of biology, ecology, transportation, and civil engineering.

Anthropology, the other key department in the development of CHAMP, is an excellent example of multidisciplinary approaches. With the expansion of the sphere

of study in anthropology from small-scale or radically diverse cultures to include the study of complex modern societies, we see the expansion of sub-fields in social anthropology, historical anthropology, medical anthropology, and others where the study of "culture" is key, and the anthropological method is the one primarily applied to the studies.

These examples help us understand the differences between interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies in the social sciences. The interdisciplinary is described by Hérubel as when "Two or more disciplines [are] actively engaged, synthesizing their efforts within a given range of objectives and conditions. Techniques and methodologies mesh and meld in order to accomplish objectives." (2008:4) When describing multidisciplinarity, the same author states, "Several disciplines [are] involved, providing their unique perspectives without actually melding. Disciplines come together to explore phenomena and work on stated objectives, while retaining their singular characteristics." (2008:4)

The preservation of cultural heritage is also dependent upon the field of library and information science. Cloonan and Harvey state, "In the last twenty-five years, 'preservation' scholarship has evolved to a dual pursuit: the idea that we need to preserve and the theoretical issues concerning preservation – what to save, how to save it, and how such decisions are made." Further they state "It is increasingly being perceived that the issues of the archives, library, art, and historic preservation fields have much in common…and each field can learn from the others." (2007:1) The CHAMP program does just that, bringing together a variety of disciplines to explore questions of heritage, culture and its preservation including anthropology, urban planning, library and information science, art history, landscape architecture, history, recreation, sport and tourism, architecture, and geography. The academic programs include interdisciplinary graduate studies minors in Heritage Studies, and Museum Studies.

CHAMP works on a variety of projects in areas around the world including Champaner, India, Cuzco, Peru, Luang Praband, Laos, Doi Sutep, Thailand, and New Philadelphia in the U.S. In all cases, the projects promote sustainability of the cultural treasures related to CHAMP's projects using an integrative approach that draws from political science, anthropology, economics, tourism studies, history, library and information science, and even science and technology to achieve its goals.

The Challenge for Libraries: Square Peg, Round Hole

University colleges, schools and departments are generally organized along disciplinary lines and academic libraries often mirror that arrangement with bibliographers, liaisons or subject specialists (with liaison as well as collection development responsibilities) assigned to specific departments or disciplines.   This organization by discipline can pose challenges to librarians who seek to facilitate

interdisciplinary[1] research by acquiring the relevant resources, organizing information to facilitate access for those working both within and across disciplines, and providing customized services to support emerging forms of scholarship and scholarly communications.

Based on a review of the library literature, Knapp (2008:6) identifies two areas in which interdisciplinary studies present challenges to libraries: "the arrangement and acquisition of knowledge (collections and collection development) and identifying the knowledge (cataloging)." To these, I add a third area: facilitating access to knowledge through the provision of targeted services including reference, instruction, and other scholarly support services including the creation and dissemination of customizable discovery and access tools.

To some degree, the challenges faced by libraries reflect those faced by individual scholars and by those groups and organizations interested in fostering research which crosses disciplinary lines. Salter and Hearn (1997) describe some of these challenges:

> Support from the universities, criteria of the granting councils' adjudication committees, support for learned journals, the organization of universities into departments, and the association of graduate degrees with specific disciplines all lend credence to the idea that disciplines are an inevitable and necessary component of intellectual work. (1997:20-21)

We can see how similar issues play out within libraries if we consider the allocation of funds to support collection development. Many libraries allocate funds for acquisitions along disciplinary lines, much as universities allocate funds to departments or funding agencies target particular fields of study. Whether based on formula (number of faculty, undergraduate or graduate majors, credit hours taught) or on historical allocation patterns, library funding structures are not easily retro-fitted to support scholarship focused on particular problems or issues (e.g., health, migration or the environment) or situated at the interstices between traditional disciplines.

Although the research library is often upheld as a common ground for all scholars, a neutral space supporting all forms of inquiry, as Wilson and Edelman observe "nowhere is the traditional discipline based university structure more clearly evidenced than in collection development where the selection responsibilities of academic librarians are largely oriented toward academic departments (1999:1). A number of authors have noted the gaps that arise due to this arrangement and bemoaned the time required to negotiate responsibility for purchasing materials in these in-between areas (Metz & la Foltin 1990, Hickey & Arlen 1992, Wilson & Edelman 1996), even going so far as to label discipline-based alloactions a "plague" (Packer 1988).

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[1] Following Wilson and Edelman (1996), *interdisciplinary* is here "defined inclusively as work that is carried out utilizing insights and techniques from one or more disciplinary sources."

A number of major research libraries are seeking to redress this situation by re-examining their long-standing practices and experimenting with new allocation models, such as the University of Oxford, which has appointed a single bibliographer to coordinate the acquisition of materials supporting wide range of disciplines in the social sciences. Selection decisions are not made based on subject, however, but by "focusing on *purpose* of a purchase rather than its subject, and when trying to differentiate between related subjects, such as politics and modern history, he considers the *approach* of the author rather than the subject of the book." (Robb 2008:16).

Salter and Hearn (1997:3) note that interdisciplinary work is sometimes dismissed as being yet another one of those "intellectual fads and fashions" and a "luxury that universities can ill afford." As libraries and research institutions face hard decisions on what to continue to support and what can no longer be sustained through the current economic downturn, it will be interesting to see whether problem or issue-based approach gains ascendancy or if there is a retrenchment toward a discipline-focused core.

Building Support for CHAMP at the University of Illinois Library: It Takes a Village

Many of the issues outlined above have been factors affecting the process of developing a library collection that supports research and teaching on cultural heritage at the University of Illinois. When CHAMP was launched, the co-directors sought the assistance of existing contacts within the Library to build the necessary collections and services to support scholarly inquiry in what was a new area of research focus for the university.

The first area of concern was the development of library collections to support research in these areas. Museum studies had previously been supported by the Library in a very piecemeal way, with the selectors for art and art history targeting a select subset of materials directly relevant to art museums, conservation, and collecting and the anthropology selector picking up materials with a cultural or archaeological emphasis. Likewise, cultural heritage was collected on an ad hoc basis with the selector for tourism and recreation buying some materials and the anthropology selector buying others. However, the entire range of materials falling in between tourism and economic development, on the one hand, and ethnographic theory and archaeology, on the other, were falling between the cracks. In particular, basic resources need to support a full-fledged research program in this area, specifically serials like *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, relevant publications produced international agencies such as UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICAHM, WMF, as well as basic reference materials, were not being purchased

As Wilson and Edelman (1996:199) suggest "at the individual level selector loyalty to a specific library and audience must be balanced against the needs of interdisciplinary users. Primary constituencies…may not always appreciate the "applied" needs of other user groups. Additionally, any subject selector's bias toward a given discipline may be counterbalanced by forming a group of selectors with joint

responsibility for allied areas." In conversations with the scholars involved with CHAMP, it became apparent that the "applied" needs were foremost in supporting the type of research being done by this interdisciplinary group of researchers, as well as orienting materials, like reference works and textbooks, that are invaluable to scholars working in new or unfamiliar domains. This, of course, was precisely the area where the existing collections were the weakest.

Through a series of informal conversations, the three subject selectors (anthropology, art and tourism & recreation) developed number of strategies to support more robust and systematic collection effort in cultural heritage and museum studies. First, we each articulated our current collecting practices related to cultural heritage and museum studies in order to reach a common understanding of our respective areas of coverage and identify any existing gaps. Based on this we negotiated our new areas of collecting responsibility as they would be expanded to fill these gaps going forward.

Identifying the gaps and divvying up responsibilities was easy, the next challenge was securing the funds needed to acquire the necessary materials. As in many other research libraries, the historical system of allocation by discipline was a barrier to this effort, but we were fortunate to be able to take advantage of some mechanisms put in place to help mitigate the limitations subject-based allocations at the University of Illinois library. Taking advantage of a fund specially designated for interdisciplinary serials, we were awarded competitive funds for subscriptions to a few much-needed serials. We also explored a number of other options for securing the starter funds needed to bring the existing monograph collection up to the level needed. While we weren't successful in our efforts to establish a permanent funding line designated for these areas nor in securing an increase in the ongoing allocations to the constituent funds, we were able to secure a one-time allocation from one of the departments involved. This generous allocation allowed us to purchase basic materials, including current and retrospective monographs, as well as core reference sources, with each selector developing the collection in their designated area of responsibility.

Once a core set of materials were on hand thanks to the seed funds provided for collection development, Jo Kibbee, a librarian from the Central Reference Department, created a resource guide to support heritage and museum studies related-research http://web.archive.org/web/20070822211651/ilabs.inquiry.uiuc.edu/ilab/champ/5126. This webguide draws on resources from the relevant sections of *Cultural Anthropology: A Guide to Reference and Information Sources* (Jacoby and Kibbee 2007). Reflecting the mission and scope of the CHAMP inititiative, the guide runs the gamut from theoretical to applied and brings together carefully selected resources from a range of disciplines, helping to facilitate boundary-crossing research by scholars unfamiliar with the literature in a given field.

Wilson & Edelman's (1996:199) caution that the proliferation of networked information resources has the potential to both "facilitate and inhibit interdisciplinary research" is a point well taken. Navigating unfamiliar domains is challenging, especially when one is not familiar with where to start or who the authorities are in

that area. The sheer quantity of information can in itself be daunting. In the field of cultural heritage, in particular, many of the most important information sources are freely available publications and data produced by governmental agencies and international organizations active in this area (e.g. UNESCO and ICOMOS). While these freely available materials are a boon to access (especially when acquisitions funds are scarce), these publications may or may not be reliably archived and can be challenging to discover using standard research approaches.

Scholars working across the disciplinary domains face unique challenges, as Palmer and Neumann (2002) found in their study of the strategies developed by boundary-crossing scholars in the humanities:

> In order to work across multiple intellectual domains, these scholars develop strategies for extending the scope of their information field. For example, they are eclectic readers and active browsers who regularly probe for leads in outside domains. At the same time they place particular emphasis on what might be called "push" information sources that deliver diverse information directly into their work routines through channels such as listservs, editorial and reviewing activities, and cross-disciplinary colleague relationships sustained through e-mail and conferences. As a result, potentially fortuitous discoveries in peripheral subject areas increase, and scholars develop links with reliable sources and "locals" to assist in explaining and validating material from unfamiliar territories. Likewise, basic resources such as reference works and textbooks are essential for verification and self-education.

To some extent, the existence of CHAMP itself helps facilitate some of these practices by bringing "locals" from different domains together to help translate and serve as guides and ambassadors to work in their respective fields. Recent conversations between scholars from CHAMP and the librarians involved in this effort have focused on using emerging tools such as BibApp <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/bibapp/>, and IDEALS, the institutional repository at Illinois < https://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/>, which can facilitate the identification of collaborators and reveal the connections between disparate domains, as well as developing a customized new book list, like that created for Global Studies <http://cgs.illinois.edu/resources/library_resources/new_books.html>, which incorporates tables of contents and browsable cover images (imported from feed licensed from Syndetic Solutions) that can be pushed via an RSS feed to help facilitate exploration of relevant materials.

Conclusions

In a recent paper describing the challenges and opportunities interdisciplinary research presents for libraries, Knapp (2008) suggested that disciplines are like a densely branching tree, with crossed and entangled limbs:

> While some might view this analogy as meaning that our ever-thickening tree is resulting in confusion and impenetrability, we can also view the crisscrossing branches in our example as increasing the number of paths of inquiry we can take to find the answers to our questions (Knapp 2008:1).

The challenge for the librarian seeking to support research and discovery in this environment thus becomes illuminating the path through the provision of relevant guideposts for the scholars exploring novel intersections, as well as those who are following long-established paths.

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