



PERSPECTIVES ON...

• Academic Library Consortium in Jordan: An Evaluation Study

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Available online 26 October 2012

PURPOSE: Due to the current financial and managerial difficulties that are encountered by libraries in public universities in Jordan and the geographical diffusion of these academic institutions, the idea of establishing a consortium was proposed by the Council of Higher Education to combine these libraries. This article reviews the reality of establishing a public university libraries consortium in Jordan through answering the following questions:

1. What are the reasons and motives for establishing a consortium?
2. What are the potential problems and challenges facing the library members when establishing a consortium?
3. Where the benefits regarding the economics of knowledge management achieved by the consortium?

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH: Using a Descriptive Method of research, this case study examines the initial goals for establishing a consortium related to the benefits achieved four years after the consortium was launched.

FINDINGS: The consortium enriches the digital governmental university libraries network with information sources through

a sharing mechanism. This mechanism allowed for the consortium to coordinate database subscriptions and to act as a lobby group when dealing with library vendors in an attempt to economize in subscription costs.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE: The paper focuses on the benefits of developing a library consortium and establishing procedures as a road map for other libraries especially in developing countries.

Keywords: Academic library; Center of Excellence; Jordanian university libraries; Libraries consortium

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communications technologies has led to an explosion of research in Jordan. Adding to this surge is the emergence of the internet, which shifted the publishing model away from paper toward electronic formats and, in turn, shifted patrons' search patterns away from print toward an on-line searching model.¹ This growth in electronic research materials has driven libraries around the world to examine and change their policies relating to patron access and to the acquisition of material, reconsidering the way in which they develop their collections. No longer are libraries and information centers focusing on "collection ownership" but rather on "collection access" where they pay for temporary electronic access to material instead of purchasing the print material for perpetuity.

One of the side effects of the knowledge explosion is related to vendors. Vendors have the physical capabilities for storing the electronic materials, forming formal agreements with publishers and representing the publishers when marketing to and negotiating contracts with libraries. As these publisher-vendor agreements have increased, they control more and more of the information resources available to libraries and, naturally, the fees associated with those resources. What this means is that libraries have been, and will continue to be, at the financial mercy of these vendors.²

In an effort to meet the ever-changing needs and expectations of their users, it is necessary for libraries to continually rethink their traditional services. Acquisition librarians, for example, have a traditional responsibility of purchasing material in order to help develop the libraries' collection. However, physically owning the item is no longer a requirement but providing access is still essential and subscribing to an

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item for a specified time period instead of owning or holding it, may be the only way in which the library can acquire access to the source.

It is the financial challenges caused by these publisher coalitions that have forced libraries to consider forming consortia as a practical and economical way to facilitate information exchange and collection-sharing among libraries. Forming a consortium is always a complex undertaking, but this is particularly the case among the central libraries of the public universities in Jordan. These libraries suffer from a lack of cooperation among their library services because, not only did each library possess its own unique library information system (ILS) but their policies and procedures also differed. Adding to these issues was the geographical distribution of the libraries, which made it difficult to coordinate services and communicate regularly.

The consortium of the central libraries of the public university in Jordan is controlled by the Center of Excellence (COE). The COE is administrated by a board of directors, which consists of directors of the government university libraries. In 2007, the higher education council issued a decision number (4922/1) to establish the Center of Excellence (COE) to manage the consortium. Al Yarmouk University Library was chosen to be the headquarters of the COE and its members are:

1. Jordanian University
2. Al Albayt University
3. Science and Technology University
4. Mutah University
5. Hashemite University
6. Al-Balqa Applied University
7. AL-Hussein bin Talal University
8. German-Jordanian University
9. Al-Taffila University
10. Yarmouk University.

This perspective will show that building this library consortium is a pioneering step in establishing library consortiums in Jordan and the Arab world, while offering an opportunity to researchers in the rest of the world to learn about the latest developments in the profession of library and information science in Jordan.

HISTORY AND STATUS OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN JORDAN

In 1962, King Hussein established Jordan's first public four-year higher educational institution. The University of Jordan (UOJ) and its library were established to meet the needs of the Jordanian people as it was defined in a report written by a British delegation, assessing the overall status of education in Jordan. The report called for the urgent need to establish Jordan's first university.³ Today, this comprehensive institution is the home to eighteen faculty departments who deliver education to 38,000 students. The UOJ Library houses over one million volumes, 70,577 of which are electronic journals and 51,000 are e-books.⁴ To meet the growing demand for higher education, in 1976, the Yarmouk University was established in the city of Irbid, which is located in the northern region of Jordan.⁵ Soon after, six additional public universities were built in different regions across the Kingdom of Jordan.⁶ Due to the rapid development in higher education, a law was issued in 1980 to organize university activities and laid the foundation for the establishment of the Council of Higher Education in 1982.⁷ The Council was created to regulate higher education, provide policies and guidelines in order to coordinate efforts among Jordanian public universities. Members of this council also became the core members of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which was instituted in 1985. Both the Ministry and the Council worked in tandem to help universities plan and implement the Jordanian government's educational policies.⁸

As the economy grew in Jordan, so, too, did its population and, as a result this led to the establishment of more and more universities, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Public universities in Jordan and date established

| N | University name | Year of establishment | Location |
|----|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 | Jordanian University | 1962 | Amman |
| 2 | Yarmouk University | 1976 | Irbid |
| 3 | Muotah University | 1984 | Al Karak |
| 4 | Science & Technology University | 1986 | Irbid |
| 5 | Al Albayt University | 1994 | Mafrak |
| 6 | Al Hashiyiah University | 1996 | Al Zarqa |
| 7 | Al Balqah University | 1997 | Al Salt |
| 8 | Al Hussein Bin Talal University | 1999 | Ma'an |
| 9 | German-Jordanian University | 2005 | Amman |
| 10 | Al Tafilah University | 2005 | Al Tafilah |

Due to this increase in educational institutions, educational standards, particularly revolving around academic libraries, became a priority in an effort to unify and organize services such as collection development, technical and user services. It was believed that these services needed to be compatible with the goals and standards of the Jordanian higher education system. For example, among the ten public academic libraries, just three of them were compatible with the Jordanian standards regarding library space. Adding to the space issue was the lack of a mechanism for any of these schools to work together so that they could utilize the common benefits from each other's collections. In 2003, the total number of bibliographic records in the ten libraries was 996,031. Without a mechanism to share these collections, libraries were forced not only to purchase duplicative material for their researchers but also to limit the access their students and faculty had to other collections around Jordan. The benefits of individual library collections were restricted to the students and teaching staff affiliated with each individual university, negatively impacting Jordan's knowledge economy.

As a result, academic libraries began to implement the standards issued by the Jordanian Higher Education System. However, these libraries faced several obstacles, most notably problems revolving around the lack of financial resources. Consequently, the only way some libraries could implement and address all of the standards was if the implementation cost was reduced. It became clear that the only way to reduce the cost was to share library services and resources among the multiple institutions, thereby creating a consortium.

As stated above, there are several reasons why it was difficult for the ten public university libraries to develop a consortium. One of the fundamental issues revolved around interlibrary loan or the lack of interlibrary loan agreements among the ten libraries. In the public higher education system, there was no interlibrary loan agreement among the academic libraries, which was largely because each library had different interlibrary loan policies and procedures. Adding to this issue, each library used different resource sharing software to process their interlibrary loan requests with no central record storage to manage it — one of the roles that OCLC resource sharing and delivery software ILLiad provides to some libraries in the United States. Due to this situation, it was difficult, if not impossible, for public academic libraries in Jordan to share their collections using an interlibrary loan service.⁹

Adding to the interlibrary loan issue was the lack of a union catalogue, an important requirement to utilize document delivery services and a critical component in the ability to create an inter-library loan service among the libraries. Development of a union catalogue would not only allow each library to know what the bibliographic holdings

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