

# Notes on Operations

## Finale and Future

### The 2CUL Technical Services Strategic Alliance

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*The Columbia and Cornell University Libraries' partnership (2CUL) is now in its sixth year. Its composite acronym (2CUL), which condenses a doubling of the two participating libraries' initial letters, summarizes its vision: a broad integration of library activities in many areas—including collection development, acquisitions and cataloging, e-resources and digital management, digital preservation, and reciprocal offsite use of collections. A key component in the partnership was the 2CUL Technical Services Integration, an initiative funded by a generous three-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which ended on December 31, 2015. In this paper, the third in a series, the authors report on the final year of this grant-funded project and reflect on the results of the two institutions' attempt to achieve deep, operational integration within technical services.<sup>1</sup> In presenting an honest appraisal of the project's challenges and vicissitudes, the authors hope that their experiences and insights will help other libraries plan their own collaborative ventures.*

A key component of the broad-based collaboration between the Columbia and Cornell University Libraries, known as 2CUL, was to have been the integration of the central technical services operations of both institutions.<sup>2</sup> This project, initially called 2CUL Technical Services Integration (TSI) and funded by a generous three-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, aimed to create a single, unified, and deeply collaborative operation that would support the broader goals of 2CUL by means of

1. a reconception of the institutions' separate library operations to achieve integration across both campuses by realigning staff responsibilities, workflows, and reporting lines; and
2. a transformation of the vision, priorities, and values of both libraries' technical services to support the overall institutional goals for 2CUL and to view institutional collaboration as fundamental to regular library operations.<sup>3</sup>

The libraries anticipated that the savings in staff time and effort in the integrated technical services divisions would create additional capacity for new or previously unrealized projects and initiatives.

The 2CUL TSI steering committee devoted the first year of TSI planning to creating an administrative infrastructure and encouraging staff buy-in to support the integration. They appointed ten working groups consisting of middle managers and other key staff to represent major functional areas of the two libraries' technical services operations. They charged these functional working groups to compile inventories of each unit's staff, expertise, policies, practices, and workflows; to exchange information regarding reporting and decision-making structures and

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Manuscript submitted March 14, 2016; returned to authors for minor revision April 19, 2016; revision submitted July 13, 2016; manuscript accepted for publication August 29, 2016.

The authors wish to thank the 2CUL Project Directors, Xin Li (Cornell) and Robert Wolven (Columbia), and fellow TSI JSMIN members, Adam Chandler (Cornell) and Robert Rendall (Columbia), for their input on a draft version of this article. They would also like to thank those (too numerous to mention here) who participated directly in the TSI project for their support and contributions to the work described in the following pages.

dependencies for and limitations on the scope of each unit; and to share baseline productivity numbers, when available. The 2CUL TSI steering committee hoped that this “middle-out” approach would also foster new working relationships in preparation for the targeted 2015 integration. The teams did a remarkable job on these assignments and submitted a rich array of insightful and comprehensive reports.

The second phase of the project called for the newly formed TSI Joint Senior Managers Network (JSMIN) to review the reports and recharge the functional working groups with the overarching directive to begin an incremental “soft integration of 2CUL technical services operations, one idea at a time, over an 18-month period.”<sup>4</sup> By the spring of 2014, however, it became clear that the functional teams were having serious difficulties fulfilling their renewed charge to plan for even a “soft” (i.e., stepwise) integration. The logistics involved in establishing institutional-level support for the project were far more complex than anticipated, especially in areas involving administrative differences at the university level, union restrictions, limits on access to each other’s financial systems, and delays in purchasing a shared library management system (LMS). For these reasons, JSMIN recommended a reframing of the project as a technical services initiative rather than a technical services integration, with a focus on what the two institutions *could* do together—essentially, collaboration on discrete initiatives that would, or were likely to, lead to mutually beneficial improvements to quality, productivity, and service to the 2CUL user community.<sup>5</sup>

In retrospect, the need for this adjustment in the goals for 2CUL technical services should not have been a complete surprise. To our knowledge, no one had attempted this kind of integration of two large, geographically separate research library divisions before—an integration that called for neither the elimination of one or the other operation nor the integration of other library operations into the bargain. Yet the project aimed for an outcome that went significantly beyond mere collaboration.

Collaborative initiatives between libraries are not new, but have become even more popular and indeed necessary in recent years. A search of the literature over the past decade and a half reveals hundreds of essays, articles, and reviews related to collaborative library projects, including dozens of contributions on collaboration in technical services. Most of these latter articles focus on cooperative cataloging initiatives, sharing online catalogs, collaborative training and documentation efforts, collaborations with collection development and interlibrary loan operations, collaborative relationships with material vendors, and collaborative approaches to special projects. A particularly rich compendium of such efforts, specifically between cataloging units, is the 2014 publication *Cataloging Collaborations and Partnerships* edited by Rebecca L. Mugridge, a collection

of commentary and case histories on recent efforts to leverage cataloging resources and expertise between libraries.<sup>6</sup> Reports and commentary on actual integrations or mergers of technical services operations are significantly more rare, however, because despite the collaborative ethos of present-day technical services departments, nearly all remain operationally independent.

Two notable exceptions have been the effort to create a “joint department of collection services” for the Kenyon College and Denison University libraries and the “fully consolidated, shared library technical services organization” known as BookOps, which serves the Brooklyn Public Library and the New York Public Library.<sup>7</sup> Like 2CUL TSI, the “KenDen” project sought to integrate a significant portion of technical services staff between two libraries that are not geographically contiguous, though at twenty-seven miles apart, Kenyon and Denison are considerably closer in proximity than Columbia and Cornell. The focus of the integration was primarily those processes related to the acquisitions and cataloging of print material. While the initial phases of the integration boded well for full implementation of the initiative, the focus of the collaboration eventually dimmed as the volume of print material the two libraries were acquiring decreased significantly following the project’s inception. Because the acquisition and management of e-resources for the two institutions are closely tied to OhioLINK and Five Colleges of Ohio consortial agreements, their bilateral partnership gradually became less relevant.<sup>8</sup> BookOps, however, is the culmination of an initiative that was perhaps the more relevant to TSI, given the size of the two integrated operations and their libraries’ continuing support for the venture. The BookOps venture will be discussed more extensively later in this paper.

## From Initiative to Alliance

In early 2015 (at the beginning of the third year of the grant-funded project), the JSMIN group convened for a frank assessment of the first two years of TSI planning and to develop goals for the final year of the grant. The group reviewed both the process of preparing initially for integration and the shift to a series of more modest initiatives. After a year of planning for integration, followed by a year of exchanging this grand idea for a more modest initiative, what did 2CUL hope to accomplish in 2015? JSMIN compiled a list of twenty-three goals for the project’s final year that seemed attainable and mutually beneficial. These goals ranged from the very concrete—such as evaluating ProQuest’s Intota product together for its potential usefulness to the e-resource units at both libraries—to more open-ended, opportunistic, and perhaps idealistic commitments—such as examining “our imbalances to find

balances” (translation: how can we continue to benefit from each other’s strengths?). Other goals for the third year of the project included collaboration on RDA training and documentation for support staff, sharing code and ideas for further development of each other’s Blacklight discovery systems, examining possibilities for shared troubleshooting of e-resource access problems, working with catalog record vendors to improve the quality of their services, developing guidelines for joint negotiation with e-resource vendors, and conducting a comparative study of print serials workflows at both institutions (all of which were, in fact, eventually achieved). JSMIN agreed to review and comment on these goals at three-month intervals. The group also concluded that many of the ideas proposed during the first two years of the project were no longer worth pursuing, given the project’s change in direction in mid-2014 and the delay in purchasing a shared LMS. JSMIN decided against rewriting the functional working groups’ charges, but proposed a hiatus for those groups whose work did not immediately support potentially beneficial collaborative initiatives. For instance, the print serials, database maintenance, and print monograph ordering teams, in particular, had struggled to find ways to integrate their work productively. In contrast, the non-MARC metadata, cataloging, and e-resources teams had more success in working together to expand their respective scopes, even if these collaborations did not realize the kind of cost savings 2CUL had hoped to achieve through actual integration of its technical services operations.

The JSMIN group retained hope that a shared LMS might galvanize TSI and, in early 2015, nominated two representatives to serve on the joint 2CUL LMS Replacement Project Team. This team was composed of staff who represented financial services, information technology, public services, and technical services from both institutions. They were charged to compile an inventory of those LMS features required to support mission-critical tasks in all four areas, perform an environmental scan of viable products, and prepare a report for the administrations of both libraries. JSMIN viewed this revival of 2CUL planning for a next-generation system as a positive development, especially after an earlier effort had fizzled in 2014. Since 2CUL’s inception, systems staff at both libraries had learned through previous joint investigative work to trust each other’s judgment, and they had a sense that 2CUL expanded the range of technical expertise and provided stronger negotiating power with systems vendors. Additionally, from JSMIN’s point of view, having the TSI teams established meant that an infrastructure was already in place for functional testing of technical services aspects of any new system. Although not explicit in the LMS Replacement Project Team’s charge, the collaborative investigative work that group performed included the possibility of LMS replacement as a joint venture. For TSI, access to a shared LMS was crucial for realizing the full

benefits of collaboration, especially in those functional areas like print serials, database management, and print monograph ordering that relied heavily on the libraries’ current Ex Libris Voyager System to accomplish the majority of their routine, everyday tasks. Moreover, both institutions wanted to fast-track LMS replacement for various other reasons, including the anticipated retirements of key personnel, and saw the 2CUL collaboration as a way to make this happen. Staff from both institutions attended the May 5–8, 2015, Ex Libris Users in North America (ELUNA) meeting to study developments in Ex Libris’ next-generation Alma system and began discussions on creating a joint sandbox with this system. The LMS Replacement Project Team prepared checklists of requirements, began planning for premigration cleanup, and conducted other tasks associated with system evaluation. They also considered Quali’s OLE system as a possible alternative to Alma. That summer, the process of creating a common checklist of requirements began to break down, perhaps because the previously critical requirement for a robust collaborative workspace for integrated technical services was no longer perceived as the driving factor for shared requirements. The team instead drafted a set of possible scenarios for moving forward, either together or separately. Meanwhile, the LMS market had evolved and Columbia was preparing for a major leadership change following the retirement of James Neal, its vice president for information services and university librarian. In the fall of 2015, in response to these factors, the 2CUL steering committee opted to decouple its interests regarding LMS replacement—a step leading to Cornell’s immediate decision to implement Quali OLE in mid-2017 and Columbia’s decision to continue to use Voyager for at least another two years.<sup>9</sup> There was, however, unanimous agreement that each library’s decision was better informed because of the joint investigation as 2CUL.

In part because of the 2CUL decision regarding migration to a next-generation LMS, JSMIN began to consider yet another change of focus—another reevaluation of the project goals—in its recommendations to mainstream 2CUL TSI at the conclusion of the three-year planning period. This change in perspective was also informed by decisions concerning 2CUL governance that JSMIN saw as relevant to the post-grant transition. Although the two institutions would continue to abide by the general principles set out in their 2CUL Consortial Agreement and its addenda, there would be no governance board exclusively charged with overseeing and resolving 2CUL issues. Nor would the 2CUL project managers, who played essential parts in the development of TSI, continue in their roles after 2015. The two library administrations issued a strong vote of confidence in, as well as a pledge for, continued limited support for TSI beyond the grant period. JSMIN, too, was unanimous in its desire to continue 2CUL collaborative technical services in

some form beyond the grant period. Its work in developing an infrastructure for integration had paid off, despite the aborted plan to integrate, in strong collegial relationships. In the words of JSMIN members, TSI activities had become more “natural” and “not as forced” as they had initially seemed when integration was the primary project goal. TSI was “getting [us] in the habit of thinking beyond ourselves,” and “see[ing] others as a sounding board” for issues of mutual concern.<sup>10</sup> TSI working group leads affirmed this perspective that the project had started to feel “organic” and had created a “comfortable interpersonal climate,” especially after the decision not to integrate.<sup>11</sup>

In late 2015, with the help of library assessment staff at both institutions, TSI planners issued a follow-up to an earlier TSI survey to technical services staff, which further substantiated these conclusions. While the survey was distributed to all central technical services staff at Cornell, union issues limited its distribution at Columbia to nonunion staff only. The earlier iteration of this survey was intended to measure perceptions of technical services *integration* in conjunction with individuals’ satisfaction with their current units and libraries.<sup>12</sup> Although the libraries did not finalize their decision not to integrate until after the initial survey was distributed, TSI planners felt that this reassessment of attitudes, perception, and satisfaction would still be useful for a better understanding of the evolving climate for collaboration within 2CUL and beyond. The results of the follow-up survey revealed that respondents thought that the TSI initiative had been a bold, optimistic idea, but that the libraries had underestimated the effort required to execute the project for doubtful and somewhat irrelevant gains. Despite this result, the first-impression term most often associated with TSI in the survey was collaboration. Moreover, collaboration ranked highest among six areas measured for unit satisfaction in both institutions—the others being innovation, efficiency, communication, decision making, and risk-taking.

Given these developments, JSMIN proposed—and the 2CUL steering committee approved—a plan to mainstream TSI as a “2CUL Technical Services Strategic Alliance” following the completion of its grant-funded work in January 2016. The goals of this alliance are the following:

1. to work together on discrete projects and initiatives of mutual strategic interest, whenever collaboration is likely to lead to better quality, greater productivity, improvement of services, and fruitful innovation than working alone
2. to preserve, promote, and invoke the 2CUL brand in broader collaborative forums—for example, the Borrow Direct consortium, the Linked Data for Production (LD4P) initiative, and the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC)—in which the 2CUL

alliance is likely to serve as a catalyst or provide the partner libraries with increased leverage in negotiating and advancing mutual interests

3. to maintain a lightweight administrative infrastructure to foster and support the continuing alliance between the two institutions’ technical services operations in conjunction with the broader 2CUL partnership

To our knowledge, no such framework for broad-based technical services collaboration between separate research institutions currently exists, as it is with this model that 2CUL Technical Services will henceforth be exploring new ground.

The 2CUL TSI project lasted three years and consumed enormous amounts of time and energy. It went through a major change in its goals from “integration” to “initiative” before TSI planners again regrouped to create an informal “alliance,” which may or may not continue as other large-scale projects, such as Cornell’s new LMS implementation, demand attention. Cornell and Columbia learned hard lessons about the need for a dedicated governing body to continually reaffirm the legitimacy and value of this challenging project early in the process, especially given the complexity of intractable, institutional work rules involving supervision and finance. Both sides underestimated the difficulty of aligning administrative priorities at the university level. Failure to purchase a shared LMS further hampered the project. 2CUL envisioned TSI as transformational, but was the only noteworthy change in its collective operations an increased openness to collaboration? What more did the two institutions learn from their efforts to plan and implement TSI? Was the idea of technical services integration as a “state of mind” (and one member of the JSMIN group astutely put it during the first year of the project) still useful for the future of 2CUL technical services and its joint, or even unilateral, collaborative ventures with other partners?

## An Affinity in Interests

Given the results of the three-year project, one might legitimately wonder whether TSI has contributed to an enduring collaborative partnership at all, let alone a “transformative” one.<sup>13</sup> Its structure may, in fact, reflect as much a commitment to cooperation as to collaboration. Abram has stressed the importance of this distinction, noting that cooperation “just meets some simple transactional goals like saving money on volume discounts or agreeing to play well with interlibrary loans. Cooperation is *simple*; collaboration is *hard* since it hits so many of those human hot buttons that generate emotional intensity—territorialism, ego, identity, sharing power, etc.”<sup>14</sup> Despite its original intent and its conceivers’ bold vision, TSI, as “technical services *integration*,” suffered from the outset and at the institutional level from

seemingly insurmountable legal and structural obstacles to the kind of deep, broad-based collaboration that its proponents envisioned. For this reason, 2CUL has not had to resolve cultural differences or manage the “human hot buttons” within the two institutions’ technical services divisions. Instead, the two operations now find themselves in the unique, and potentially rewarding, position of being unusually well prepared to work closely together in ways that extend beyond simple cooperation but that do not force collaboration beyond what is strategically sound and culturally viable. In other words, the two operations can now seek ways to leverage their partnership without the mandate to merge operations and without the concomitant territorial and cultural impediments to working together that this mandate initially presented.

In this context, 2CUL’s failure to achieve its original vision for TSI may ironically have led to a different kind of success, not as a single, unified technical services division but as a strategic alliance of two expert and highly functional separate operations. As a “natural” and “organic” product of the three-year TSI planning process, the 2CUL Technical Services Strategic Alliance may, in fact, turn out to be the best possible outcome for an initiative that, in retrospect, was unlikely to succeed fully in any case. It is important to examine this outcome more closely, starting with the successful integration of the Brooklyn and New York Public Library technical services operations.

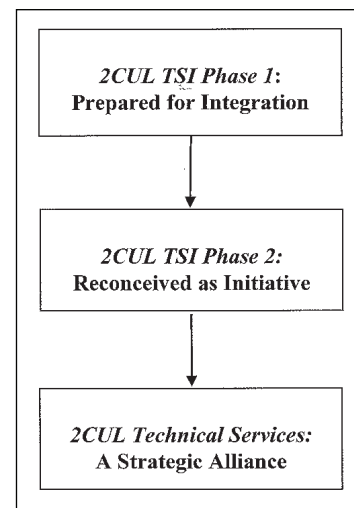
BookOps—the “fully consolidated, shared library technical services operation that serves the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) and the New York Public Library (NYPL)” —represents what is probably the most successful example to date of a technical services integration of two separate library operations on a large scale.<sup>15</sup> Processing more than 2 million items per year, the BookOps Library Services Center (LSC) in Long Island City opened in 2013 and realized more than \$3 million in cost savings in its first year, chiefly through automation and the reduction of high-volume, duplicative efforts in technical services.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that BookOps functions to a great extent as a separate business entity that is jointly directed and funded by BPL and NYPL, whose administrations established early in the process a governing board to remove institutional barriers to the project and to manage the high-level administrative, human resource, union and legal aspects of the consolidation. Importantly, however, the two libraries located their semi-independent, off-site processing center in nearby Queens—that is, within a ten-mile radius of each of the parent institutions. The BookOps model was based on a mandate to *consolidate* processing to achieve cost savings. The administrative details, governance structure and even the physical space were determined well in advance of integration. Further, NYPL and BPL predicated the rationale for establishing BookOps chiefly (or at least initially) on the idea

of co-location, rather than reengineering—bringing staff together under one roof rather than deep workflow and cultural integration of the previous separate operations. They assumed they would need a shared LMS to accomplish the latter collaborative goal. A commonly shared centralized processing culture would come later.

TSI, in comparison, was never conceived as a separate business and legal entity with the kind of continued, though reduced, direct affiliation with its parent institutions that BookOps has. Nor was the establishment of an offsite processing facility in proximity to both institutions possible for 2CUL. TSI was, from the start, envisioned as a *virtual* union of two separate operations located more than two hundred miles apart, with a structure to be fashioned chiefly by its implementers, based on what the two institutions learned during the planning process. The vision was that two large and similar academic libraries did not need separate approaches to processing but could integrate those approaches and align their values to generate savings and repurpose those savings to other areas. Culture change and the administrative structure to support it would develop during the planning process. Therefore the implicit goal of the TSI project (clearer in hindsight, perhaps, than in its initial, highly optimistic beginnings) was to explore the *possibility* of deep collaboration within this context and to create a new model for broad-based, joint technical services activities. In this sense, the vision for TSI went further than that of the KenDen project, cited earlier. We can best describe the development of this model over the course of the three-year project as a progression from the original idea of deep, unified collaboration to technical services integration to support for strategically allied efforts that are less administratively structured and that require less bureaucratic governance and overhead than the project’s initial hypothesis presupposed. Figure 1 illustrates this progression.

During phase 1 of the project, the two institutions sought *integration*, an operational state characterized by three important goals:

1. to realign 2CUL staff responsibilities, workflows, and reporting lines



**Figure 1.** Evolution of the 2CUL Technical Services Strategic Alliance

2. to transform the vision, priorities, and values to support overall institutional goals for 2CUL
3. to accept the idea of inter-institutional collaboration as fundamental to regular operations

With the definitive elimination of the possibility of interinstitutional reporting structures and streamlined accounting protocols, with bureaucratic delays that undercut lightweight, nimble experimentation to forge possible pathways around these obstacles, and with the growing uncertainty regarding implementation of a joint LMS in the foreseeable future, the stepwise integration envisioned for phase 2 of the project came to seem unwise, if not impossible. Instead, the TSI implementation team chose to “pivot,” to question the original hypothesis and ask “what *can* we do?”<sup>17</sup> At this point, 2CUL reimagined TSI as an “initiative” rather than an integration with what were essentially three revised goals:

1. to leverage the work and relationships of the TSI teams and functional working groups already in place
2. to focus on discrete projects that seemed to promise net mutual benefits
3. to accept the idea of interinstitutional collaboration as fundamental to regular operations

As phase 2 of TSI, with its investigative focus, came to a close, project leaders sought to mainstream the collaborative structures and workflows achieved in the three-year project on the basis of what the two libraries had built—and learned—during the TSI project. The idea of an alliance seemed to be most natural and viable alternative.

In addition to its denotation of a union or association formed for mutual benefit, an alliance can also describe a relationship based on an affinity in interests. As such, an alliance presupposes neither collaboration nor cooperation exclusively, but constitutes an understanding that lays the groundwork for both. Thus a “strategic alliance” describes—for 2CUL technical services, at least—an agreement to work together, in some way, whenever the partnership promises an overall or long-term benefit in matters of mutual interest. In this context, the 2CUL collaboration is better understood as a means to a strategically valued end, neither the *raison d'être* of the relationship nor the end in itself, for the goal of collaboration is always better performance leading to improved service.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, in the evolution of its goal from integration to alliance, the TSI project has positioned 2CUL to leverage its similarities in institutional culture rather than forcibly realign its cultural differences, both of which project staff now understand considerably better as a result of the early work of the project (i.e., the preparation for integration). Moreover, it was through TSI’s failure as technical services *integration* that 2CUL has been able to finesse its

differences and focus on its shared interests. 2CUL’s incipient collaboration on national linked data initiatives, such as the proposed Linked Data for Production (LD4P) project, is a good example of this aspect of the alliance: either institution could have chosen not to participate with the other and, in fact, could still make that choice. However, without the TSI project, it is unlikely that Columbia and Cornell would have immediately comprehended the potential utility of working together in this emerging area of interest for library technical services. As JSMIN had hoped, individual institutional imbalances can be replaced by collaborative balance. Moreover, the reflections of the TSI leadership team (JSMIN) on the progression from integration to alliance, plus the results of the follow-up survey of unit satisfaction and perceived ranking in key areas of performance, suggest that a certain amount of cultural realignment regarding the value of collaboration may already be occurring within the alliance. The challenge for the JSMIN group will be to continue to foster this cultural realignment, which may eventually, and hopefully, lead to deeper and richer 2CUL technical services collaboration.

## Conclusion: A License to Collaborate

Organizing people in such a way that leads to collaboration because you have a shared vision and mission.

—Amber Guild, President of Collins brand consultancy, on her management style<sup>19</sup>

Thus TSI, as a project that fell short of its original goal of interinstitutional divisional integration in support of the 2CUL vision of deep and enduring collaboration, may have paradoxically better positioned the Columbia and Cornell University Libraries to collaborate—specifically, whenever discrete collaborative initiatives are likely to lead to improved quality, greater productivity, and overall better performance in 2CUL technical services. The libraries anticipate that the project may have also positioned them to take advantage of new opportunities to collaborate with other institutions, either as 2CUL or independently of each other, given our enhanced cultural inclination to work with partners beyond the administrative and geographical boundaries of our own institutions. Successful collaboration—unlike consolidation—cannot, it seems, simply be decreed; the conditions for its possibility may, however, be instituted and encouraged as a cultural value, “as fundamental to regular operations.” What 2CUL technical services has hopefully achieved is a kind of “license to collaborate.” Among those local arrangements that are likely to continue as 2CUL technical services makes its transition from the project to mainstreamed, strategically allied

activities are, most notably, its shared use of the Pre-Order Online Form (POOF!), developed by Cornell but with considerable input from Columbia; joint representation through a single staff member in some aspects of the PCC (e.g., Robert Rendall, Columbia's principal serials cataloger is currently serving as the 2CUL CONSER representative for both libraries); coordination of activities and speakers sponsored by the Metadata Working Groups at the two institutions, with both local and remote options for participation; and regular discussion, joint investigations, and coordinated development of e-resource acquisitions and processing models between e-resources unit staff at both libraries.<sup>20</sup> This last item is particularly important because it represents the most integrative outcome of the extensive TSI planning activities of the various project-related working groups, several others of which were on hiatus in 2015 and are likely to remain so indefinitely. The 2CUL e-resources staff, however, worked together first to migrate Cornell to a Serials Solutions e-resource management (ERM) platform, then trained together on new Intota ERMs to which both libraries simultaneously migrated. Additionally, e-resources staff continue to review certain types of problems, issues, and workflows (such as the acquisition and licensing of streaming video) together. Most fruitfully, 2CUL e-resources staff, in cooperation with 2CUL collection development officers, have successfully pursued joint negotiations with resources and service providers, leading to an estimated \$200,000 in projected savings for the partner institutions.

Further, Columbia and Cornell's technical services operations are now frequently recognized nationally as 2CUL, an allied status that may subtly (or, in some cases, more overtly) give the two institutions greater influence on matters of mutual interest, such as PCC initiatives, aspects of linked data research and development, and pilot projects with larger organizations such as the Library of Congress and OCLC. The extent and precise benefits of this influence over the long term still remain to be seen.

Also yet to be determined is the medium- to long-term efficacy of the 2CUL JSMIN group and the technical services divisions' recently proclaimed "alliance." With the support of the Mellon Foundation and the initial push from their respective library administrations, 2CUL technical services staff have dedicated an extraordinary amount of time to building the relationships that uniquely position the two institutions for a rewarding partnership in this area of central library operations. It remains to be seen how the two libraries will sustain this momentum without the explicit obligations specified in the three-year planning grant from the Mellon Foundation and with the possibly reduced interest from Columbia and Cornell library leadership—which has undergone, and will continue to undergo in the coming months, significant changes in personnel. Nonetheless, those who have been directly involved in the TSI project now

possess a much broader first-hand understanding of what can be done, and at what cost, by large research libraries in similar legal, administrative, and geographical circumstances as those of 2CUL—that is, short of outsourcing entire areas of functional responsibility to each other (with the extraordinary levels of trust this option would entail) or resorting to a separate, semi-independent organizational structure, such as BookOps. As the foregoing summary of and reflections on TSI project activities indicates, those in technical services leadership positions within 2CUL now have a far better sense than they did three years ago about

- when to cooperate, collaborate, or create formal or informal alliances for our mutual greater good;
- the challenges inherent in collaborating without a project-specific and/or exclusive governance structure, or in collaborating during a change of leadership ("one of the riskiest times for any collaborative venture");<sup>21</sup>
- the factors that support nimble collaboration and the importance of achieving the proper level of bureaucratic support for collaborative initiatives, both large and small; and
- the relative and varying importance of organizational structure and differences in institutional priorities, values and culture, in pursuing any collaborative vision.

As we mainstream the 2CUL Technical Services Strategic Alliance into the daily ethos of production and planning at the Columbia and Cornell University Libraries, we hope that our experiences and insights from the three-year TSI project will be in some way useful to other libraries, especially large research libraries, who wish to leverage the power of institutional alliances in innovative ways to improve productivity and the quality of service they deliver to their user communities. The future value of research libraries may depend on it.

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