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The National Virtual Academic Law Library

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THE NATIONAL VIRTUAL ACADEMIC LAW LIBRARY

*[Much of the information provided here comes from a document entitled **Sharing Resources Among Canadian Academic Law Libraries: A National Plan**. Submission to the Canadian Council of Law Deans by the Canadian Academic Law Library Directors. November 26, 1993]*

The idea of a National Virtual Academic Law Library began to germinate in November 1991 when the Directors of the 20 Canadian academic law libraries met for the first time in Ottawa at the Morisset Library, University of Ottawa. It grew out of the realization and acceptance that individual academic law libraries would no longer be able to continue to duplicate one another's collections given the explosion in quantity of publishing, dramatically rising prices, especially for serials, the shrinking acquisitions budgets at all the libraries concerned, and the decreased Law Foundation funding.

The Law Library Directors began to formulate a co-operative plan which would help guarantee that materials thought to be necessary to support the study, teaching and research taking place in each university would be held by at least one academic law library within Canada and therefore accessible to all. The underpinning of this co-operative plan was a national resource sharing scheme which assured delivery of (loanable) materials within 24 to 48 hours at no cost to the patron. This resource sharing scheme is working quite well and is a great benefit to the library users.

The National Resource Sharing Agreement was formed within the following context:

Any national scheme would be built upon local and regional co-operative agreements using experience at those levels to inform choices.

Any national scheme would be flexible enough to allow individual libraries to respond to local budgetary pressures as required.

Technology would be used as appropriate to improve document delivery.

Knowledge of the collection strengths of each institution would be developed.

Tools would be created to improve access to the resources currently held at each institution and to increase the speed and efficiency with which materials could be provided through interlibrary loan and document delivery.

Following are some of the current initiatives being undertaken.

Subjects Strengths of National Significance

A list of major and minor collection strengths of national significance is currently being developed. A major strength is defined as being (a) at the NCIP Level 3+ but also including 60-74% of the scholarly monographs published in the last 15 years, a strong but not comprehensive collection of scholarly journals and at least 50% of the loose-leaf services or (b) at the NCIP Level 4 or (c) at the NCIP Level 5. A minor collection strength is defined as being (a) a subject which is unusual (i.e. is not typical of the subjects of most of the academic law library collections), (b) A Major Microform Set which does not fit into one of the major strengths of a given collection or (c) an unusual jurisdiction or (d) a non "major" subject where collection is in a language other than English or French.

Library Commitment to Individual Titles

In an attempt to rationalize and coordinate collections, each academic law library is in the process of making an initial five year commitment to subscribe to certain titles.

This strategy allows the law libraries to demonstrate rationalization and co-operation re library resources to finding bodies, and by perhaps freeing up funds, allows libraries to respond to emerging teaching and research demands.

The following union lists will form the basis for subscription commitments. Titles marked with an asterisk are incomplete.

Periodicals Held in Canadian Academic Law Libraries

- * Non Canadian Commonwealth Law Reports
(England - current subject Reports plus all other Commonwealth Reports complete)
- * Non Canadian Law Reports from Civil Law Jurisdictions
- * Public International Law/Treaty Materials
- * Foreign and Comparative Law Subject Serials
- * Non Canadian/Non U.S. Statutes and Regulations Currently Received
(both official and non official)

These lists of committed titles will be reviewed annually by the Canadian Academic Law Library

Directors.

Database Control

Queen's Law Library has undertaken to create and maintain a database of nationally committed titles. The database will include locations and the duration of the commitment. It will generate lists sorted by title, by province or region and by individual library. It will also track titles where no commitment has been made within Canada.

Canadian Council of Law Deans

The Canadian Academic Law Library Directors have requested and received support for this national plan from the Canadian Council of Law Deans to which they report annually.

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