

FEATURE: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Unlocking Latin American Scholarly Content: A Collaborative Model

Melissa Gasparotto and Sócrates Silva Reyes, with Michelle Guittar, editor of Global Perspectives

From the Global Perspectives Editor

In addition to my administrative role at Northwestern University Libraries as Director of Learning & Engagement, I also serve as Latin American and Latina/o Studies librarian. I attended the panel that inspired this column at the 2024 Charleston Conference because it was one of the few that addressed global collections directly and somewhat uniquely—it included librarians, a book dealer, and a publisher representative. The panel and the project described here addressed the potential opportunities and challenges that result from a partnership to advance open access monographs in the Global South.

This column also provides useful context for understanding how changes for global collections at the Center for Research Libraries, including the dissolution of the region-specific Area Materials Projects (AMPs) and CRL's Global Resources Programs, could potentially affect librarians and bookdealers throughout area studies librarianship. While the Area Materials Projects varied in their size, budgets, leadership, and approval processes, one thing they had in common was the fierce advocacy of their membership for ongoing preservation and access to primary source materials whose inherent value may have been questioned or overlooked in favor of easy-to-access, easy-to-preserve, and easy-to-read English-language primary sources. As a member of the Center for Research Libraries, Northwestern was a voting member of the Latin American Materials Project (LAMP), which aimed to acquire, preserve, and maintain microform and digital collections of rare or bulky primary materials from Latin America for its members. The work of LAMP made my work as liaison for Latin American Studies infinitely easier, as Northwestern faculty and students benefitted from the availability of both microfilm and digitized collections from Latin America and elsewhere, access made easier due to Northwestern having indexed CRL's holdings within its NUSearch Primo discovery layer. The Latin Americanist Research Resource Project (LARRP), which became part



of CRL in 2006, had the slightly different aim of increasing free and open access to Latin American scholarship. LARRP was founded not just to provide US-based preservation and access to primary source materials paid for by membership fees—it also aimed to support researchers *in* Latin America by promoting open access materials that were widely discoverable. The democratization of knowledge across hemispheres was a promised benefit of the agenda for Global Resources Programs.

While other membership associations for area studies librarians exist, the support of LARRP was instrumental in launching the project highlighted in this column. LARRP's endorsement and promotion of the project LARRP reinforces the importance of this CRL community to Latin American Studies librarians. Area studies librarians must remain engaged with the new, revised Global Collections Committee structure at the Center for Research Libraries to ensure continued support—both financially and through endorsement—for the access and preservation of area studies collections.

Introduction

This column summarizes the panel *Making Direct-to-Open eBooks from Latin America Globally Accessible: A Collaborative Effort*, held during the Charleston Conference on November 14, 2024. In addition to Melissa Gasparotto, Deputy University Librarian at the University of Chicago, and Sócrates Silva Reyes, Head of International and Area Studies at the UCLA Library, panelists included Robert Sedgewick, Senior Editor in Content Development and Licensing at JSTOR, and Fernando Genovart, Directory of Library Relations for Librería García Cambeiro.

Latin America has long been a leader in transitioning scholarly journals to open access, with well-established repositories like SciELO (Scientific Library Online) and Redalyc (hosted by the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México) setting a high bar by providing secure platforms and ready integration with library discovery systems. These early open access repositories leveraged the opportunities the internet provided for disseminating and measuring the impact of scholarship, which had previously been restricted by unpredictable print distribution channels and largely omitted from bibliometric and discovery tools like Web of Science which leaned heavily to Anglo-American scholarship. SciELO and Redalyc made this scholarship more visible and, through their networks with editors and scholars, shifted publishing standards for journals in the region.¹ In contrast to the thriving open access model for journals, Latin American scholarly monograph distribution has traditionally been print based and financially strained, leading to fewer editions printed and rare second runs. US library acquisition of Latin American monographs has been further constrained by diminishing resources for international collecting alongside booksellers struggling to scale their businesses to these economic realities. Transitioning scholarly monographs to open access has proven to be a challenge, with fewer publishers offering e-books to begin with, and no firmly established business models that would support their production, hosting, and preservation. Attention in the US has typically gone to repositories focused on imprints in the Global North such as the European Union-funded “Online Library of Open Access Books” (OAPEN), or to US-focused pilot projects exploring new business models in support of OA such as the recently concluded “Toward an Open Monograph



Ecosystem" (TOME) project. The TOME project is a collaboration of the Association of Research Libraries, Association of University Presses, and Association of American Universities which established a \$15,000 per-title cost for supporting the publication of an OA monograph, rendering it prohibitive in resource-stretched environments like many of those in Latin America.

For those OA monographs that do exist, open access versions of long-form scholarship produced in Latin America present a unique set of challenges to North American academic libraries. Many of the existing OA books reside on unvetted servers in a state of tenuous availability, and monographic scholarship in the humanities especially has fallen outside of the scope of existing OA initiatives in Latin America, including the SciELO Books Network. Despite the availability of broadly scoped search interfaces and protocols for finding titles hosted on institutional repositories, university websites, or author pages, libraries do not typically have the established workflows to add these titles to their collections. In addition, collection development librarians have no way to understand what is missing from their collections because there is no picture of the universe of titles available.² These are some of the challenges that led a collaborative effort of librarians, an in-region book dealer and a secure platform provider to understand the costs, workflows and sustainability of supporting the transition to open access for Latin America's scholarly monograph output and to propose a new solution.

Project Background

In 2015, Angela Carreño, then Head of Collection Development at New York University Libraries, approached the Latin Americanist Research Resources Project (LARRP), a CRL Global Resources Network member organization, with a request for endorsement of a new proposal to collaborate on a sustainable, long-term funding model for library-led Latin American OA monograph publishing. The proposal aimed to achieve several goals:

- Further explore information on Latin American open access e-books,
- Work with an in-country bookdealer to negotiate permissions from publishers and relevant content producers and deposit content in a trustworthy repository,
- Produce metadata necessary for long-term discoverability of materials,
- Promote the accessibility of materials included in the pilot project, and
- Create a steering committee to prioritize materials for inclusion in pilot project.

Partners

LARRP was identified as a natural partner organization because of its mission to increase the availability of free and open access information in support of scholarship and learning about Latin America. Originally founded in 1994 but situated within the Center for Research Libraries beginning in 2006, representatives from member libraries, typically Latin American Studies subject-specialist librarians, met annually to distribute their shared funds to support a variety of digital accessibility and preservation initiatives. Although LARRP had not previously endorsed a project it was not supporting financially, seeking such an endorsement from LARRP membership was an important way to establish institutional support for the new initiative as it got off the ground.

What was then known as the Latin American Open Access Academic E-book pilot was a proof-of-concept effort to explore a collaborative approach to working with a book vendor who is knowledgeable about the local academic publishing environment to develop an OA monograph collection that would be hosted by a reputable partner with the ability to assure long-term discovery, access and preservation. At the time, HathiTrust was explored as a preferred platform for such efforts, but the steering team for the project ultimately settled on JSTOR as the right partner. JSTOR had an expressed interest in expanding their platform's global holdings, provided metadata accessible via major discovery platforms, and offered chapter-level search and download functionality. JSTOR had also previously worked with an academic institution in Latin America—the company had served as a key partner in digitizing out of print titles published by Colegio de México (COLMEX) and making them available as open access. COLMEX had a long reputation as a publisher of strong scholarship across the humanities and humanistic social sciences, but by the early 2000s, many of their important back catalog titles had fallen out of print. In 2018, JSTOR worked with COLMEX to secure a grant from the Humanities Open Book Program, a joint project of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation, to digitize and expand access to key literature in the humanities. The grant led to 680 books published by Colegio de México being made available open access through JSTOR.³ Conversations with the JSTOR team demonstrated continued willingness to experiment to better understand the broader ecosystem around Latin American OA through this new pilot project.

In addition to securing a stable platform host, it was clear from the outset that an established book vendor in the region would be a key collaborator to:

- leverage relationships with scholarly publishers who might be open to testing a new business model,
- interpret selection criteria established by librarians,
- secure appropriate licenses from the publishers, and
- follow the technical specifications for the ingest of book files.

The project team chose the Argentine bookdealer Librería García Cambeiro because of their interest in developing new forms of library support, and willingness to experiment with business models. Partnering with García Cambeiro, a long-established bookdealer for Argentine and Brazilian books for university and public libraries, ensured that an in-country book dealer with important publisher relationships could help identify scholarly publishers and negotiate the rights to deposit and distribute the materials.

With these partners in place, the project team developed a cost estimate that covered payments for the publishers, book dealer, and platform host, and began to seek funding from libraries with the understanding that the amount secured would determine the number of books that could be transitioned to open access each year. The partners discussed and piloted workflows to support the acquisition and ingest of files and metadata and began to assemble the pilot collection.

The first academic publisher selected was the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO), or the Latin American Council of the Social Sciences, a respected organization and network fostering research and open dissemination of knowledge in support of social policies. Working with frontlist titles from CLACSO for the first three



years of the project, over 400 titles were ingested with metadata and made available through the JSTOR Open platform. Additional publishers were added as funding allowed, including a research institute in Peru. In year four, the project expanded to include an Argentinian commercial publisher of scholarly content, Prometeo Libros, and added an additional 100 titles to JSTOR Open. The expanded collection included a mix of older and newer titles, as focusing solely on a commercial publisher frontlist would include out-of-scope items such as Spanish translations of titles originally published in English.

Sustainability and Impact

Impact of the project was immediately evident. JSTOR made available detailed usage data on a regular basis, which was shared out with the LARRP membership through meetings, and with the larger field of librarianship through conference presentations.

Remarkably, every title has been used, and usage is highest across Latin American countries, demonstrating the importance of supporting these types of partnerships—not only for the provision of a broad diversity of materials by Latin American scholars to US-based university libraries, but also to support researchers in-region as part of a commitment to equitable global access. Over the course of 2020 through 2024, the approximately 600 titles in the collection were used over 1.7 million times at more than 5,500 institutions in 224 countries. Transparently reporting out these usage statistics annually is a key measure helping to attract continued support from partner libraries and to secure new contributors.

Subject librarian advocacy for the project was a key contributor to its continued success.

LARRP's endorsement served as an important first step in securing librarian interest and support for new OA models, and fact sheets and press releases were distributed throughout years one through three of the project. Several general trends in libraries provided further support. The increasing availability of centrally managed funding within individual libraries for OA initiatives allowed subject librarians to draw from additional funding streams where their own budgets did not allow. Space pressures on libraries and the resulting shift to e-books in many libraries provided a further impetus to support OA monograph publishing. The promotion of this project as a good way of tapping into year-end funds at libraries also helped to secure additional funds.

Roadblocks

The goal of this project is to develop a scalable and sustainable model for collaborative work on open access books of significant scholarly interest published in Latin America Studies. Currently, two individuals, Angela Carreño and Melissa Gasparotto, carry out promotional work for this project on their own: they hold meetings, distribute informational content, and work with librarians individually to build support and secure funding. In the next phase of the project, an advisory board will determine how to fold support for the open Latin American monograph into JSTOR's existing marketing process. An additional sustainability question relates to pricing, which has previously been set based on institutional ability, requiring the team to develop a standard pricing model. The team

has also struggled with publishers, given the particularities of working with smaller Latin American organizations. For example, the leadership of CLACSO changed in year three of the project, and they were no longer interested in participating, necessitating a year-four focus on a different publisher. This challenge highlights the need to develop publisher agreements that are clearer and more sustainable, addressing issues such as project continuity across a more significant time period. The final challenge relates to organizational shifts at the Center for Research Libraries, which recently eliminated the Global Resources Network and replaced it with a Latin American Collections Committee within the new Global Collections Committee structure. The project team may need to work with other organizations, such as SALALM (Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials), to promote the project and generate additional interest.

Conclusion

The Latin American Open Access Books Project has demonstrated some of the challenges and opportunities with establishing a partnership-based model for opening access to and preserving the Latin American scholarly monograph. It fills a gap in OA monograph production and distribution by focusing on a particular geographic region in the Global South that has not received the attention of larger OA monograph initiatives based in the Global North. By usage metrics alone, the project has vastly expanded the audience of Latin American scholarly content, but it also established sustainability criteria for further work. The project team hopes that in future iterations, these experiences may provide a model that can be replicated in other world areas.

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Notes

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