

Managing Journals by Committee

Edith M. Starbuck
University of Cincinnati, edith.starbuck@uc.edu

Sharon A. Purtee
University of Cincinnati, sharon.purtee@uc.edu

Charles P. Kishman
University of Cincinnati, kishmacp@ucmail.uc.edu

Kristen L. Burgess
University of Cincinnati, kristen.burgess@uc.edu

Leslie C. Schick
University of Cincinnati, leslie.schick@uc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

An indexed, print copy of the Proceedings is also available for purchase at:

<http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston>.

You may also be interested in the new series, Charleston Insights in Library, Archival, and Information Sciences. Find out more at: <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston-insights-library-archival-and-information-sciences>.

Edith M. Starbuck, Sharon A. Purtee, Charles P. Kishman, Kristen L. Burgess, and Leslie C. Schick, "Managing Journals by Committee" (2013). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315265>

Managing Journals by Committee

Edith M. Starbuck, Information Services Librarian, Health Sciences Library, University of Cincinnati

Sharon A. Purtee, Technical Services Librarian, Health Sciences Library, University of Cincinnati

Charles P. Kishman, Information Services Librarian, Health Sciences Library, University of Cincinnati

Kristen L. Burgess, Clinical and Research Informationist, Health Sciences Library, University of Cincinnati

Leslie C. Schick, Director, Health Sciences Library, University of Cincinnati

Serials collection development has seen numerous changes over the last 5 years. What used to be a process of deciding what new titles to add and what titles to cut has become a complex endeavor of reviewing formats, cost per use, package composition, embargoes, platforms, interlibrary loan restrictions, and discovery system inclusion. The Health Sciences Library (HSL) at the University of Cincinnati has experienced this transformation and addressed the serials collection development needs in a manner born more of necessity rather than design. However, this has become a successful prototype for group decision making.

In January 2010, the Serials Collection Librarian retired; cuts to the 2009–2010 budget had determined that upon her retirement, the position would be permanently cut from the personnel lines. That meant beginning in 2010, we would have no one with the sole responsibility of serials selection, contact with faculty, managing packages, or handling issues relating to connectivity. One key element is that in 2008, the Health Sciences Library had been administratively reorganized as a branch library of the main academic library. Their technical services department handled the clerical aspects of the serials (ordering, canceling, and payment). The HSL staff retained responsibility for receiving the paper issues and most of the vendor contact.

For the 2011 subscription year, the Director of the HSL determined that there was no one librarian on staff who had the time or the expertise to handle the complexities of the annual serials review and cancellation. She assembled a committee consisting of two reference librarians, a technical services librarian, and herself. We began meeting in May; the first order of business was to decide how we would proceed as a group. In the past, with one person handling all of the

functions, it had been streamlined and compact. Faculty contact and decision making had been coordinated by one individual. The rest of the librarians weighed in when the “finalized” list was posted for comment. Our collection mix of titles had been locally shrinking and moving slowly to online content. But by and large, the title composition had changed little in the previous 5 years; we had added very few subjects/topics even as the curriculum had changed and the research areas had expanded or had even been eliminated.

In many ways, this change came at a good time; the Medical Center had a new dean, the University had a new provost who was pushing a larger research agenda across all academic specialties, but particularly in medicine, the curriculum at the medical school was undergoing a complete redesign, and the Academic Health Center and the University Hospital were strengthening ties which would add a new service population. Looking at serials collection development through a new lens would keep us relevant and make us responsive to these paradigms. We decided to take a somewhat radical approach and ask the faculty and graduate students what journals they would like to see in the HSL collection; after all it is their collection that we manage.

Our director crafted a short e-mail and sent it out to the populations in the four colleges that we serve—Medicine, Allied Health, Nursing, and Pharmacy; responses came in immediately. As one of the faculty stated, “being able to tell you what we want is like feeding stray cats.” We received 98 requests; however, we already had access to 24 of those titles. Since the director received the requests, she assumed responsibility for creating the spreadsheets from which we would work. For

the titles to which we had access, she contacted those individuals; in many cases they had been going directly to the publisher's site and bypassing our home page links to Serials Solutions and/or PubMed. It was a great marketing opportunity, and she made a number of new contacts within the Medical Center.

We also worked with Interlibrary Loan to obtain a list of titles that had been requested by our patrons over the most recent fiscal year. We saw what titles were in excess of copyright and what titles we needed to consider that were not already requested.

We additionally had a list of all of our print subscriptions created by the staff in the main library. We divided the list and checked each title to determine whether it could be canceled outright (if it was a duplicate title with another campus library, available in more than two databases or in the OhioLINK Consortium's Electronic Journals Center, or out of scope for the current research agenda of any of the service populations) or if the title could be switched to the online format if the title was an important part of the collection. We canceled approximately \$70,000 worth of print titles and switched the format of 40 titles.

When cancellations were being processed with the vendor, some had to be pulled from the list for reasons including: a change in platform, the rights changed and we could not get the license signed in time, needing to purchase a package (at a significant cost increase) to get one title that we wanted, or the switch to online was 10 times the cost of the print.

The new titles that we were able to add were a combination of package collections (e.g., some titles from the Clinics of North America), titles from the Interlibrary Loan list, and the best balance of clinical and research titles from the faculty request list. Were we able to add them all? Of course not, but the faculty and graduate students felt that we had listened to their requests, we had kept them informed during the process, and that their opinions mattered. We also told them that if we made a mistake in any of the titles that we had elected to cancel, we would

revisit our decision and reinstate the subscription if necessary.

About a month after the cancellations and additions were submitted to the main campus staff, we had a debriefing meeting to assess what needed improvement. The first item on our list was to start earlier. While we had anticipated that 3 months would be adequate for the project, we underestimated the amount of time to work on lists, get information back from vendors, and to manage the volume of information that we generated. One other significant change was improving the communication with the staff who would be working with the lists for canceling, switching format, and using a preferred vendor. While we followed their protocol and they ultimately were able to cancel and place orders, they were not prepared for the sheer volume of work. Our director decided to meet face to face with the department manager as well as the individuals who would oversee the tasks once the 2012 spreadsheets were completed so there would be no future misunderstandings about our decisions.

In March 2011, the serials collection development committee reconvened for year two, with the addition of our newly hired Clinical Informationist. The committee iterated many of the previous years' procedures; we requested a list of the print subscription from the main library's technical services department, the director sent out a letter to the faculty and graduate students asking for their suggestions, we created a spreadsheet of their requests, departments, and contacted individuals who requested that we purchase titles to which we already had access. We also contacted the Interlibrary Loan Department for the list of titles requested since the previous year, focusing on those titles that were in excess of copyright. However, for this year, we knew that we would have to look at cutting more than print subscriptions. We were going to have to look at databases and electronic journal titles. Up to this point, we had considered the electronic format immune from cuts. However, the budget was flat, which, while still equivalent to a cut, was an improvement over the true cuts that most other University departments had seen.

The Informationist had particular skills in data sets and data manipulation, and she worked with the electronic resources librarian at the main library to create a number of spreadsheets of our purchased electronic journal content. They included not only titles, vendors, and costs, but the use statistics from whatever source we could obtain them. In some cases, we obtained the same title from multiple sources (as does almost every other library), so cumulating the actual use of the title can be a daunting task. We are a member of OhioLINK, so many titles we purchase are done so through this consortium and we have no options in maintaining our subscriptions. We also are included in packages that are purchased at the University level and, again, have no option but to maintain those subscriptions.

We were able to compute (for the most part), the cost per use of our electronic journal collection. This was the first time we had generated these numbers. Some high-cost titles that were in the University's Centers of Excellence subject areas showed very little use. Some general interest titles had numerous hits and, therefore, were just pennies per use. The final decision was to cut two titles and place an additional 16 titles on a watch list. We cut 113 print titles, finding some that were now in databases, some available online from the publisher or did not have to be purchased in a print/online bundle, or others were just no longer needed due to a change in research direction or curriculum.

We also decided which titles we would add. While we had canceled titles, the amount saved was not enough to purchase the new content. However, with some creative budgeting, new monies that came into the library due to reorganization within the Academic Health Center and redirected budget lines, we were able to purchase most of the titles that had been requested by the faculty.

Before meeting for the first time in year three, we made good on one of our long-standing promises to the faculty and graduate students. That was, if we made a mistake and canceled a title that was necessary, we would add it back. We wound up adding back two titles, much to the delight of faculty and Interlibrary Loan staff. As we reconvened, there were almost no print titles to

cancel, and the bulk of deleted titles that would provide funding for new additions to our collection would have to come from electronic resources as, again, there was no new funding for serials. We agreed to reassign some additional monograph funds, but that was going to provide only marginal funding.

As in previous years, we worked from the list of print titles as well as the list of electronic serials that we purchase outright. We asked Interlibrary Loan for the list of titles that they had obtained over the previous year, but this time we also asked for the date of the publication of the requested article. This gave us a much better view of the patterns of title use when we might consider adding them later.

Another change we made this year was that the Technical Services Librarian assumed full responsibility for reviewing the list of print materials. She fully annotated each title with relevant information; having one person attack the list made it much easier as there was consistency among the annotations.

Additionally, this year, we included the (Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) Impact Factor and the Scopus Evaluation Scoring for each journal that we considered for cancellation or addition. We wanted to be sure that the titles were appropriate within their subject fields. The director asked the half-time Information Services Librarian to review all of the subject areas taught in the four colleges and make sure that we had access to the top five journals in each of those fields; we wanted to ensure that we not cancel any title that was in the top of its field even if it was not getting used or fail to add a title through oversight.

We painstakingly reviewed the watch list of electronic journal titles from the previous year and decided to cancel a few. Some of them showed significant increases in use over the year justifying our decision to wait. We cut additional titles from the e-journals list due to the increasing cost-per-use ratio. We subsequently cut almost all of the print titles that did not directly support the curriculum or did not appear to show any use in

the last year. Lastly, we converted a few of the print/online titles to online only.

This year, we added relatively few new titles. Interestingly, none of the titles requested from the faculty matched the highly requested Interlibrary Loan titles, so we did have to do a bit more balancing between the two lists. Having the dates of the articles requested helped significantly. It enabled us to determine whether the content requested was current and embargoed or retrospective. In cases of current embargoed content, we then looked at the cost of the subscription versus the cost of the number of articles that had been requested.

Now that we have completed three cycles of collection review, cancellations, additions, and working with the faculty, there are definitely some lessons that we have learned.

The first lesson is that no matter how great our online catalog or discovery layer products may be, many of our faculty and graduate students do not use them, nor (they insist) have they ever heard of them. In their defense, there are databases, whole groups of journals, as well as much local content that is not included in the indexing, so it is confusing to know where to go to look for content. Every year approximately one-fourth to one-third of the titles suggested are ones to which we have access, so this is a rather large problem for our users and for us. Another issue lies in the design of library web sites. It is often very difficult for individuals to find out what journals a library “has.” They do not understand the fine lines between ownership and access—all they want to know is, “can I get articles from this journal?” We need to do a better job of putting that information in one place, whether it is the catalog or the discovery layer. Too many clicks are frustrating for everyone.

A separate but related lesson is that if the library does not subscribe to the one journal that the faculty member wants, the library does not have enough electronic journals.

It is extremely popular with the faculty and graduate students that we ask them what they want us to add to the library’s collection of journal

subscriptions. However, that does mean that there will be titles on that list that are out of scope. Often it reflects a personal interest, and the individual does not want to pay for a subscription. The HSL serves a large population of clinicians, researchers, professors, and students from PhD and MD to freshman undergraduates. Serving their unique information needs and matching them against limited collection dollars is a delicate balancing act, so weeding out requests that are out of scope is a very important part of collection development.

Not so much a lesson learned but an impact felt is that publisher embargoes are getting longer. Formerly, 6 months was fairly standard. In 2010, we would often “pass” on a new title we were considering if it had a 6 month embargo. Now, it is not uncommon for titles to have embargoes of 18 months or longer on newly published content. Especially in the medical field, that becomes an untenable situation since the current information is in the highest demand and we will certainly go over the copyright limits very quickly in many situations. Consequently we have decided to purchase many titles although we have access to the older content in databases; purchasing the individual articles was far more expensive than buying a subscription to the journal, if only to get the first 1.5 years of content.

In parallel though, we have decided to cancel some low use titles with high subscription costs or even with fairly low subscription costs and use those funds to pay for other content, either article by article or another title.

Another twist that will soon start to influence subscription decisions is the extra layer of cost that some vendors are now adding for proxy access. It is no longer possible to support both VPN (virtual private network) and proxy access for already costly packages. When off-campus access is confusing, they think there is no access at all. The final lesson is that the ground is constantly shifting. Each of the 3 years that we have engaged in this endeavor, we have approached it with the same goals in mind: cut print, switch to online, make sure the titles meet the needs of our users, and spend the funds efficiently. The activities we undertake to achieve these goals become more

complex and involved as we learn more about the collection, the industry, and our users.

Next year, we will face some of our most challenging decisions yet as there are only electronic journals to cut. It will only be through an infusion of new funds that we will be able to add titles; cutting will barely cover inflation and publisher increases. The one hope for the HSL lies in the creation of a Dean's Task Force on Collection Funding whose charge is to review

funding allocations across all libraries. It is our fervent hope that the HSL will benefit from recommendations made by this Task Force.

No matter what happens, though, our Serials Collection Development Committee will canvas our library's users and make the best decisions about the collection composition based on the evidence of use, cost, and impact that we can obtain and apply. After all, that is what librarians do.