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Money Talks: But Can It Listen? How We Found Out What Our Faculty Really Need

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

Money Talks But Can It Listen? — How We Found Out What Our Faculty Really Read

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Anyone who has to prepare a budget for Library materials knows that feeling of wondering if this is going to be the year when it isn't going to work. There will be no money for monographs; invoices will pile up. The Administration will be furious and the faculty will hate us. How will we stretch the budget to cover everything, preferably without canceling anything? At the University of New Hampshire (UNH), we've been through three big cancellation projects in the past decade and, to hear the faculty tell it, we are at bare bones. Collection Development has a box full of requests for new subscriptions. At

this point, it is even hard for faculty to find a title to cancel in order to substitute for a new title. Serial publications are taking an 80%

chunk out of our acquisitions budget. Yet, it is the portion of the collection that we know the least about. Why are we getting these titles? What made us subscribe to them in the first place? When did we first subscribe? Who initiated the first order? Are those people still around? We have been running around telling everyone who would listen that our 6,000 title subscription list was too low, yet, did we really know that? How much more did we need? What was that need? What dollar figure would Collection Development give the

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If Rumors Were Horses

Wow! Just as we were "in press" — what exciting news! **Dan Tonkery** has been named President and COO of **Faxon North America Subscription Services!**

Heard from the always smiling **John Long** <jlong@springer-ny.com> — does he ever get depressed? After 4 1/2 years at the **Institute of Physics**, John has moved from IOP to **Springer-Verlag NY, Inc.**, as of Jan. 27. He will continue to work with the North American Library Community and with major book vendors (non-medical) as a Library Sales Mgr. Here's his new phone: 401-467-8567 and fax: 401-467-8644.

Wrote **Elsie Pritchard** (Morehead State University) <e.pritch@morehead-st.edu>. Felt guilty bugging her about **Doc Aquis** with all the horror stories of the flooding in Kentucky! She said that she and her family are on high ground, and her county wasn't badly hit by rain. **Mary McLaren** (U. of Kentucky) <MCLAREN@UKCC.UKY.EDU> is fine too. She says that they had water in the basement where they never had before — came in through the walls and even "bubbled up" through cracks in the cement floor! And, on top of all that, **Winn Thierl** worked on **Doc Aquis** in spite of having her twins in the hospital with pneumonia. So, y'all better turn — quick — to read **Doc Aquis**, this issue, page 73.

Word is that **Joseph Branim** is the new director of the **University of Central Florida Libraries**. Congratulations, Joe!

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Administration if they ever asked how much more we needed?

In the fall of 1995, the Collection Development Librarian finally decided it was time to try a new approach and, at the same time, find out who was reading which journals. She and two other members of the Library faculty decided to ask the faculty what they read and how. The group's vision was a 100% return rate on our questionnaire and a sense of how our present collection was used, by whom, what kind of interdisciplinary use it was getting, how many more dollars were needed to provide a "better" collection, whether or not document delivery and ILL were acceptable solutions to what we didn't have, and finally, and only finally, were there titles we'd subscribed to years ago but might be able to cancel now.

SURVEY

We developed a survey form and pre-tested it on the Library faculty. Then, with some revisions, the forms were sent out to all 600 members of the faculty on March 8, 1996. At the same time, memos were sent to all the Department Representatives enlisting their help in reminding their colleagues to fill out the surveys. On March 13 we got our first 10 responses. March 19 was a banner day — 25 responses. The surveys were due

on April 5 and by that day we'd received 128 back. More dribbled in the next week.

We sent our first written "reminder" out at the end of the month and told faculty to call us if they needed another copy of the survey. We followed that up with some direct phone calls, reminded faculty about the survey when we saw them in the halls or around campus, and asked the Library Liaisons to add a reminder when they could. Then we sent email requests to all the faculty who hadn't yet responded and suggested that if they didn't have the time or had misplaced their survey, they could just send us an email response with a list of journals they read whether we subscribed to them or not. We began to think of this gentle, repeated harassment as "nagging theory," especially as we found that more and more of our meetings were devoted to a discussion of how to get more surveys back without being obnoxious. The email request, as it turned out, was quite effective. We set ourselves a deadline of July 15 at which time we felt we had to stop nagging and begin to build our database and analyze the results. We felt we needed a 50% return in order to make any meaningful assessments and so we were pleased with the 51% we got by July 15.

For comparison, we looked at the results of another survey that was distributed by the Faculty Senate Parking Committee around the same time as ours. This was a survey which, by anyone's guess, should have had an extremely high return rate since parking is one of the few issues that generates more heated argument than even the library budget. Yet, the return rate on that survey was only 30%. Our "nagging" must have worked!

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The survey itself included a letter explaining our purposes and telling the faculty that our intent was NOT to compile a list of titles to cancel. The purpose of the study was to learn more about the collection we have and how it is used. We asked them to list the journals they read. We didn't send them any "core" or subscription lists to go over. We asked them whether the copy they read was a library or a personal/departmental subscription. We asked them why they read the title — for research, to support teaching, for keeping current, for book or other reviews. We asked them to tell us how much of each issue they read — cover-to-cover, selected articles, table of contents, browse. Finally we asked if they contributed to the journal

"The journal is much more than just individual discrete articles."

in any way such as serving as an editor or on the editorial board, whether it was a journal in which they had published or written reviews, or anything else. Then we asked them a series of general questions which will be discussed later.

We probably asked too much and even though we said in our cover letter that it took only about 30 minutes to complete the survey, it was no doubt too daunting for many to bother with. It certainly was daunting when we set about to begin reading the surveys and compiling the data.

We decided to start with a database that would simply include specific titles listed on the surveys and whether or not the Library subscribed. We kept track of each faculty member and his or her department for each title listed. If the title was one we didn't own, we tried to obtain the cost of a subscription. We ended up throwing out some titles because they were illegibly written or were standing orders.

Before getting to a discussion of the titles that faculty read but we didn't own, let's look at some overall results. The faculty members who responded wrote down 3,513 journal titles of which 2,098 were "unique" titles. UNH subscribes to 1,593 of those listed. UNH does not subscribe to 349, and 156 were unverifiable in Ulrich's

or the printed Ebsco list of periodical titles, were illegibly written, or were classified as serials in our library.

The 1,593 that are subscribed to by UNH is a figure that needs further consideration. We actually have a subscription list of around 6,000 titles. Approximately 4,400 were, therefore, not mentioned by our faculty who responded. Why? Of course, we need a greater return to see how many more of those titles show up, but what if nobody owns up to reading even 1/3 of the titles we subscribe to? Does that mean we don't need them? We'll need to find out if these are titles that are read frequently by another group of patrons or because they are indexed in the more commonly used general and discipline-specific indexes we subscribe to. Some are general interest titles and so well known that no one thinks to list them, like *Time* or *The New Yorker*. And some are so specific that the one or two who may read them were among the faculty who didn't respond to the survey. We intend to follow up on this question.

The issue that first sparked our interest was a desire to know what exactly the faculty, who were clamoring for more journals, did need and what it would cost to fill that need.

We have around 6,000 titles right now. We wanted to make sure that we were being reasonable when we said that figure was too low. When we took a quick look at the number of holdings in the *American Library Directory* for our official comparable institutions, we discovered that only two of the 15 institutions subscribed to fewer periodicals than UNH did and both of these have approximately 5,000 fewer students than we do. This indicates that 6,000 subscriptions is low for an institution our size.

To try to come up with a reasonable figure, we first added up the titles that were listed by at least two of the faculty and that we didn't subscribe to and found that the total number came to 31 and that the cost of subscribing to these titles would be \$17,848! Was it possible that this was all it would take? If the other half of our faculty came up with another \$18,000 worth, would \$36,000 worth of new titles make our collection "perfect"? We didn't think so.

So, we took the statistics from Interlibrary Loan for titles that we had ordered so frequently that we now had to pay copyright fees for them and added those on. That came to another 36 titles and brought the total subscription cost to \$51,935. Finally, we added titles that had been ordered from CARL UnCover and also listed at least once on the survey and/or on the ILL list. That added 13 more titles

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costing \$7,934 and brought the total up to around \$60,000.

The most expensive title on the list was *Brain Research*. Though that had been listed on three surveys and requests had exceeded the fair use limit for Interlibrary Loan, it is still probably more economical for us not to subscribe to this title. None of the faculty who listed the title said that they needed to read the entire issue. However, another title, *Smith College Studies in Social Work* was listed two times on the survey, over the fair use limit for ILL, and ordered once from *UnCover* at a cost of \$16.00. This journal costs \$16.00 to subscribe to. Obviously, *this* is a journal we should have.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

For one thing, we now know a lot more about the periodical collection at the University of New Hampshire.

We know that it is possible to engage the faculty in this kind of study, despite the need for lots of follow up and "creative" nagging. It will be interesting to resubmit these lists and ask the faculty for updates, and to attempt to get responses from the less than half of the faculty who did not respond.

We've been able to link individual titles to individual faculty and to see some surprising interests in common among faculty who are not in the same departments.

There is enough overlapping of titles among departments that we're beginning to think that assigning journal titles by college might be more useful than assigning by department.

We've learned — as we suspected — that core lists are not a sound and solid way to have a journal collection that meets the needs of a particular faculty. The "core" definition will always be idiosyncratic to each faculty member, each department, college, and university. The "core" will need to be reexamined and shifted frequently. The old notion of hanging onto a title for historical reasons, because "you've been getting it since vol. 1, no. 1," may not be a good enough reason to continue if the title isn't being used.

We learned that document delivery is NOT a fully adequate solution to getting journal information. The journal is much more than just individual discrete articles. Some researchers need to see the whole journal, or just look at the tables of contents, or, as we've discovered, just read the ads. If we follow up this study with graduate students, we suspect we'll find that needing to see the whole issue is a very important part of their education and

acculturation into their specific disciplines. With the proliferation of electronic journals, this may, of course, change.

Finally, we learned that for only \$60,000 more, we could order enough new journal titles to make a lot of faculty happy.

IN-DEPTH STUDY OF ONE DEPARTMENT

We decided to focus on one department, *Animal and Nutritional Sciences*, for an in-depth study. This department was chosen for two reasons. First, it represented a mixture of basic and applied research that is typical of a land grant university like UNH. It was also the department with the highest response rate, 82%, of a total of 16 faculty members. We soon discovered that this very high rate wasn't entirely due to a very high level of enthusiasm for the study among the faculty in that department. In spite of our best efforts, one faculty member got the idea that the Library was planning to cancel all titles that faculty members did not list on the surveys. He had his department chair write a letter to the faculty strongly encouraging them to complete the survey with dire consequences if they didn't. We discovered this was going on because some of

to dispel the "core list" myth. This is the idea, in its most extreme form, that there is one core list of titles for each department or subject area and that this list is shorter than the list of titles currently subscribed to by a particular library. Therefore, the goal of collection development is to discover what the core list is, develop a rationale for it, and cancel all the titles the library subscribes to that aren't on the list. This idea doesn't fit the facts. In this study, for the one department, no titles were read by all faculty. Only 31% of the titles were read by more than one faculty member. The maximum number of faculty that read one title was 5 out of a total of 16. This makes sense because each faculty member teaches different courses and has different research interests. New faculty are hired to build a well-rounded and diverse department. In reality, there may be a core list for each individual faculty member not each department. We would suggest that it may be more practical for university libraries to discuss lists of journals with individuals or with larger units such as colleges or schools than with departments.

The use of survey data such as ours to build a large database has a lot of potential benefit for departmental liaisons and bibliographers. It is very easy to create a subset of the database for one or more departments. An individual bibliographer can then expand the small database with additional data. It would be interesting to add, for example, use data for each title to the database. This could answer the question: what is the difference between what journals faculty read and what is used by them and by others in the library. It would also be interesting to add data from *ISI's Journal Citation Reports*. This could answer the question: what is the difference between what is read locally and what is cited in the larger literature. It may well be that each department's combined list is unique to that department.

We will now need to follow up this analysis with similar ones for other departments to see if the pattern we discerned with *Animal Sciences* holds across the board.

THE MULTI-DEPARTMENT VIEW

After looking at the titles we do not subscribe to and an in-depth examination of one department's responses, we then went on to look at the journals we do subscribe to that were listed on the surveys. By examining what journals were read across departments, it was possible to get a look at the interdisciplinary use of the collection by the faculty. Practically every department showed use of at least one, if not more, of its journals by faculty

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"In reality, there may be a core list for each individual faculty member not each department."

the chair's letters were returned with the our surveys.

All together, the department listed 132 unique titles, 86% of which the Library subscribed to. We asked each faculty member to answer four specific questions about each title they listed. The first question was, "What is the your source of this journal?" Sixty-four percent of the time, it was the UNH Library and 32% of the time it was a personal subscription or membership. The second question was, "Why do you read this journal?" Ninety-two percent of the time the reason was keeping current, 86% of the time it was for research, and 77% of the time it was for teaching. Although we had expected that different titles would be read for different reasons, it appears that most titles are being read for all three reasons. The third question was, "How much of each issue do you read?" The answers were: 79% of the time, selected articles; 65% of the time, the table of contents or browsing; and 28% of the time, all articles. In other words, faculty in this department seldom read every article in every issue. The fourth question was, "Do you contribute to this journal?" Sixty-six percent of the time the answer was no. About 28% of the time the answer was "publish in" or "serve as a reviewer."

We feel the results of our survey help

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from other departments. We tabulated the number of titles subscribed to by each department that were used (1) by the department's own faculty, (2) by faculty from other departments within the same school, and (3) by faculty from departments outside the school.

For example, journals associated with departments in the **College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA)** had the highest rates of use overall. Reading of journals associated with individual COLSA departments by faculty from the same department was 35%, the highest of all schools for which journals are related to specific departments. Faculty from departments within COLSA read 18% of the titles subscribed to by other departments within the school. Faculty from departments outside COLSA read 15% of the titles subscribed to by COLSA departments. The other school divisions — Engineering & Physical Sciences, Liberal Arts—Humanities, Liberal Arts—Social Sciences, and Health & Human Services — showed usages by faculty from departments within each of their own schools ranging from 1% to 7% of their journal titles. Reading by faculty from outside these schools ranged from 3% to 7% of their journal titles.

This analysis furthered a number of our original goals for the study. We gained additional knowledge about our collection and a greater appreciation of its uniqueness to UNH. The extensive use of the biological sciences journals reflects in part the importance placed on the land-grant mission of the university and in part the underlying pervasiveness of biochemical methods. In addition, this analysis indicates that journal deselection and selection cannot occur only on a departmental level, that there are other users who must be considered and whose input into collection management discussions should be invited because of the broad interdisciplinary interests of many of our faculty. This information is valuable to the liaisons/bibliographers to give them a better picture of how journals are used and to keep in mind the interests of others outside the departments for which they are responsible. We also see these results as providing useful background information in the orientation of new liaisons/bibliographers whether they are new to the library or new to the area for which they will be responsible.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

The survey included a number of general questions about journal use or journal seeking behavior as well as questions about journal-related services. These questions required more subjective answers. The first

was an open-ended question: how do you keep up with the published literature in your field? Responses ranged from "try to" and "As best I can" to "Ha!", "It's almost impossible" and "I pray a lot." While prayer might be valuable for some faculty, just over half took a more worldly view and used a variety of reading, scanning, and browsing journals to keep up. The use of indexes, abstracts, and bibliographies was the next most common method cited by about a third of the respondents. Other lesser-used means included going to conferences (17%), talking with colleagues (8%), using listserv/email queries or discussions (6%), or serving as an editor or reviewer.

Faculty were asked how they obtained copies of articles from journals not available at UNH. As expected, ILL was the overwhelming response from the list provided, chosen by 83% of the respondents. A little more than half asked a colleague. While we know that faculty use other libraries, some of us were surprised, considering the time and distance to other major library collections (1-1/2 hours to Boston and 2 hours to Dartmouth), by the number of respondents (45%) who named going to another library as a method of retrieval. Some of this may be explained by faculty who live closer to Boston so the commute would not be as great as it appears. We also don't know how often individual faculty go this route as opposed to alternative methods. Only 13% of the respondents said they used commercial suppliers. However, we don't always inform our faculty how we get their articles when they submit a request through ILL.

Concerning electronic journals, 82% of those who responded said they hadn't used them. However, some of the responses tallied as negative were actually expressed as "not yet" indicating the possibility of future use (whether through desire or inevitability).

Moving away from actual use and behavior, we wanted to get a feel for what journal-related services would be of interest to faculty and provided a list of six items. Five of the six services were desired by two-thirds or more of the respondents. These included desktop access, electronic ILL, selected table of contents, automatic searching based on selected keywords (profiling), and online fulltext. With the assistance of the Library Systems Department, we have instituted electronic ILL requests (via the use of Internet forms) starting this past September. We estimate we get about 30 requests a week from both faculty and students. The one service listed which received the least interest was express article delivery, chosen by only 42% of the faculty responding. One reason for the lower response rate is that faculty may not understand what this service is.

The next question was interesting: we asked faculty whether they would be willing to use materials budget money to supply any or all of the above services in lieu of new or current subscriptions. Responses were evenly split between "yes" and "no" with 43% of the respondents each. Another 12% answered "maybe" or "don't know." Many of the respondents added comments elaborating their thinking on this topic. Some of the positive responses included concerns about maintaining a service once it is begun, reliability, ease of use, availability of fulltext, and availability to students as well as faculty. Other "yesses" were qualified by comments about what might be cut or lost, concerns about an already limited budget, and changes in how "keeping up" would be done. Overall, comments related to the negative responses seemed stronger based on the phrasing used and emphasis given in the written response. A number of respondents in this group indicated that existing services and collections (both journals and books) were already "woefully inadequate" or "sparse" as a couple of faculty put it. If services were to be added, additional funding should be found or provided. Several commented that book budget money could be used, but not journal funds. Several pointed out the benefits of paper copies of journals, for example, the quality of photographs; others expressed a simple preference for printed journals, both for their own and their students' use.

We also asked what percent of their journal needs were satisfied by the Library. Responses ranged from 0-100% with an average of 63%. We have not yet tabulated responses to the question of whether satisfaction levels have increased or decreased. A tabulation from one of the pretests indicated no clear response pattern to this question. We also asked how often faculty used the Library in a semester and have not reviewed those responses yet.

Overall, we got a sense of what our faculty are doing and thinking about these issues. From their responses, we can see that they appreciate the difficulties in making choices about where and how to spend materials budget dollars and would like an opportunity to participate in those decisions. The results reaffirm the importance of communicating the issues involved in making these decisions. They also confirm the importance of advertising and continually informing faculty of the services that are available or are being developed.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This survey was just the start of an ongoing process. We have already discussed some of our results and conclusions with the library faculty who serve as

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tain good history, and trend-setting of where libraries have been and what directions they are taking.

Gordon Graham has created a single theme issue of *LOGOS* (volume #7, #1, 1996) on the "Book in the United States Today". This ambitious collection of 20 papers by many leaders in the library and publishing industries and edited by **Richard Abel** covers reflections on the range of American publishing today. We learn about religious publishing, juvenile literature, textbooks, online and Internet products used in schools and by end users, the paperback era, distribution and sale of books to libraries and bookstores, the role of the book club, what distinguishes reference and medical publishing from other types, the specifics of scholarly publishing and we get an overview of electronic publishing with special focus on journals and serials and the changes in libraries to accommodate new formats and technologies. This is a wonderful read — a compendium of contributions by the leaders of this generation involved in publishing and making books available to readers in schools, libraries of all kinds, and the bookstore. In the postscript, Graham alludes to all that is missing from this volume — yes, no paper is included about the author, editor, translator, designer or illustrator; but still it captures a very sentimental spirit as it recaps how the book and journal got

to be where they are today. With so many changes in how we create information, channel it, distribute it, sell it, preserve it, manipulate it, this volume reminds us of all the steps we as librarians and publishers have taken independently and together to work in this new electronic arena and it is our collective wisdom and ideas that keep us busy and active.

These three works are all different but they weave very common themes and address many similar concerns and issues. Each predicts a very strong future for the book and publishing but cautions that institutions and readers alike will continue to develop a new mindset as we come to depend on information in different formats and release many more electronic products and watch the World Wide Web continue to develop. As Graham eloquently concludes, "...it became clear to me that the book and the non-book would cohabit. The author remained crucial; the publisher was still useful; and the library was still necessary. And now booksellers are seating their customers in front of terminals." Everyone interested in books, publishing, libraries and the acquisition and preservation of materials, will find each of these books good choices to read. We now look forward to the Autumn 1997 conference to be convened by the **Association of Research Libraries** and the **Association of American University Presses** to continue the dialog on the **Future of the Book**.

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liaisons to the various departments. The next step is to convey the results with the department representatives and faculty. We will be sending a letter to the appropriate administrators describing the need for additional funds for selected new journals and the relatively small increase in allocation to the Library this would entail. The results of the survey allow us to better demonstrate the extent of the need for additional journals that would be used.

Longer-range plans include using the survey information (along with other data) to formulate a more formal policy for periodical collection development. We expect to expand the survey to other groups. We have already given the survey to new faculty starting September 1996 and approximately a quarter have responded to date. We would also like to survey graduate students. We also plan to ask faculty to update their list of "read" journals on a regular basis; part of this activity will involve trying to determine a method that is easy and does not consume much time, both on the part of the faculty member

completing it and on our part in tabulating the results and updating the database.

Along with the usage data we collected from the survey we would like to integrate data on pricing, holdings, format, citation analyses, indexing, circulation, and so on in a database that can be manipulated in any number of ways to help provide information to make informed choices about subscriptions, document delivery or other means of access. This would help us achieve one of our original (and loftiest) goals: the creation of what we like to call "the world's largest serials management database." We hope we can complete this before the year 3000.

NB: This paper was adapted from a paper presented at the 1996 Charleston Conference.