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Balancing Information Needs with Serials Value and Costs

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Background

Bowling Green State University is located in rural northwestern Ohio. Sixteen thousand undergraduates pursue twenty-three undergraduate degrees in over fifty majors. Combined masters and doctoral degrees are offered in fourteen fields; twelve masters degrees (with no doctoral program) and two specialist graduate degrees are also offered. Approximately twenty-five hundred graduate students are enrolled. The faculty numbers just over seven hundred.

The University Libraries include 1.8 million volumes; 5100 periodical subscriptions; 1500 standing orders. The libraries' materials budget is approximately \$2.1 million. **Innovative Interfaces, Inc.** provides the libraries' integrated library system.

Bowling Green State University Libraries was one of the early participants in **OhioLINK**, the statewide library consortium of over 40 public, private colleges, universities and community colleges throughout Ohio. OhioLINK is funded by the state legislature and provides a number of resources on a statewide basis:

- 60+ databases and reference sources;
- central catalog of all member libraries holdings;
- UMI Power Pages fulltext tied to citation databases;
- Patron initiated borrowing and delivery by courier.

OhioLINK is working on patron-initiated article delivery. Before that becomes a reality, solutions to various problems need to be found:

- patron interpretation of library holdings statements in the central catalog;
- sufficient local staff to honor incoming requests in a timely fashion;
- means of complying with copyright guidelines.

As we reviewed serials for cancellation, the Ohio Board of Regents was conducting an evaluation and review of Ph.D. programs at state-supported universities to eliminate duplication. Some of the Ph.D. programs at the university were in jeopardy. Understandably, some departments were reluctant to recommend journals for cancellation when graduate programs were under scrutiny.

Teaching faculty have been accustomed to a major role when it came to spending the library's budget. This may have been fine in the past when money was more

available and went further. However, in times of tight budgets, the library has found it necessary to retain more control of exactly how those resources are spent and which serial subscriptions are purchased. Faculty were consulted, but ultimately, librarians needed to make final decisions.

1996 Cancellations

Before I begin describing the process for setting priorities and making cancellations, I need to let you know something of the situation we faced in Fall, 1994. We had seen little significant materials budget growth since the mid-1980's; In 1992/93, the library's budget was cut. We were spending more than 70% of the materials budget on serials. Virtually no new periodical subscriptions had been placed in several years. Finally, we expected an in-

significant materials budget increase for fiscal year 1995/96.

Our conclusion was that to prevent the monographs budget from further erosion, and to allow for a modest number of new subscriptions to support changing curricular and research needs, we needed to cut serials subscriptions, effective with 1996 subscriptions.

Shortly after this decision was made, the Dean resigned to accept a directorship elsewhere. In November, 1994, we met with the Interim Dean to discuss the budget and the need for canceling serials. The Interim Dean agreed that periodicals should be cut across the board. He further agreed that science titles should be cut heavily. Previous serials cancellations in 1986 and 1992 had affected only humanities and social science titles, despite the

fact that, in 1995, science periodicals accounted for 30% of subscriptions and 73% of the dollars expended.

The library planned to cancel subscriptions and to subsidize article delivery from a commercial document delivery vendor, based on **Chuck Hamaker's** experience at **Louisiana State University**.

It was assumed that science faculty would need to rely most heavily upon document delivery for access for two reasons: 1) science/technology/medicine titles are most widely available from document delivery vendors; 2) for the most part, faculty in the science departments have office workstations and may be more comfortable using electronic resources.

We established four goals for cancellations:

1. Stay within budget, allowing for inflation;
2. Provide faculty and students the information they need for coursework, teaching, and research;
3. Begin some new periodical subscriptions;
4. Conserve funds needed for monographs.

The Interim Dean sought the approval and support of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the College Deans, the Department chairs and the faculty Library Advisory Committee. A survey was sent to all faculty asking them to list the journals they need and rely upon for teaching and research. Further, faculty were asked to indicate whether a subscription to the journal or electronic access to tables of contents with document delivery of articles would meet their needs.

Our overall survey response rate was about 20%, but varied from department to department. Many responses were appropriate, complete, and well thought out. We did receive several individual responses from faculty representing themselves as the spokesperson for the entire department. In addition to these, some faculty listed the one title most closely tied to their research area. Others claimed they could not possibly predict what journals they might need.

Several strategies were employed to increase response rate. The Interim Dean contacted the Dean, Arts & Sciences, science department chairs, and all faculty in selected science departments, to request that surveys be returned. Subject selectors

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continued to work with departments to clarify the library's need for information from the faculty and to solicit return of the surveys.

The response rate improved somewhat, particularly from the science departments. In considering the survey data, we had to make judgments based upon departmental response rates. We relied less heavily on survey information if departmental responses were not truly reflective of the entire faculty.

To facilitate the identification of priorities for retention and cancellation of individual titles, we entered into each order record on our integrated library system, the faculty responses; periodicals use data, gathered from October, 1994 forward (a re-shelving count); and undergraduate and subject core designations. By using a management function and combining variables with Boolean operators, we were able to create lists of high or low priority titles, based on faculty need, level of use, core status, and cost. During 1991/92 a periodicals use study was also conducted. Those data were in paper files only. We chose not to enter this into the ILS, but did use the 1991/92 data to identify titles for cancellation for 1996.

At the same time as we were surveying faculty, we surveyed and tested several document delivery vendors, and considered a number of factors: electronic table of contents access; journal coverage; ease of searching and document ordering; delivery response; and cost. Based on the information we gathered, the choice was narrowed to two vendors.

In July, 1995, our new dean arrived. We saw a period of transition from the Interim Dean to the incoming Dean. In Fall, 1995, we invited two document delivery vendors to demonstrate their table of contents and delivery systems. As a result, **UnCover** was selected. We decided to purchase a customized gateway which would give us the ability to load our holdings and to block article delivery requests for materials held in the University Libraries.

In Fall, 1995, after some consideration, the new Dean made the decision to cancel periodicals over a span of two years. It was decided that for calendar year 1996, all titles for which no use was recorded during both use study periods — 1991/92 and 1994/95 — would be canceled. This enabled us to send non-renewal decisions to our serials vendor by their deadline. This also decreased our periodical expenditures sufficiently for the 1995/96 fiscal year so that we were hopeful that total serials expenditures would not exceed 1994/95 levels. The result was that we

	% titles cancelled	% dollars cancelled
Sciences	45%	76%
Social Sciences	31%	20%
Humanities	24%	4%

Table 1. Percentages of titles and total dollars canceled in 1996 and 1997 combined, by broad discipline.

canceled 298 titles; 114 of these were later reinstated, giving us net cancellations of 184 titles. This did allow us to stay within budget for the 1995/96 fiscal year.

1997 Cancellations

In winter, 1996, we moved to the second phase of review — prioritizing titles for retention and cancellation for 1997.

We requested recommendations of titles to cut from subject librarians and from teaching faculty. For the Science disciplines, cancellations totaling a minimum of 20% of expenditures were requested. Any cancellations made for 1996 (excluding any titles reinstated) could be included in the 20% targeted for 1997 cancellations.

Recognizing the need to begin some new periodical subscriptions, we asked faculty for recommendations for new periodical subscriptions. To give us some hedge on inflation, only one half of the dollars resulting from cancellations recommended over and above the 20% minimum were applied to new subscriptions.

First, using order records on our library system, we created lists of periodical titles for which no use or low use was recorded during the 1994/95 use study period. For these lists of zero and low use titles, we checked **OhioLINK** and **UnCover** for availability and copyright royalty fees. The lowest priority for retention were those titles that received very little use, were costly, and were available via **OhioLINK** or from **UnCover**. Then, these lists of zero and low use periodicals were distributed to subject librarians and teaching faculty for consideration for cancellation. If requested, we also provided entire lists of periodicals in a discipline, with cost and use data included for each title.

We protected titles designated as undergraduate core or subject core, as well as the high and very high use titles. Some high cost medium-use titles were canceled, depending on the specific number of uses.

Results

Since many journals in humanities and social science disciplines had been canceled in 1986 and in 1992, many disciplines had very short lists of zero or low use titles; some had no zero or low use titles. It was unfair to require these departments to recommend 20% of periodicals

in these disciplines for cancellation. However, if they wished to submit any recommendations for new serials, they needed to recommend titles for cancellation. Some departments recommended as much as 20% to 30% for cancellation.

The science departments did make recommendations for cancellations of 20% of expenditures. Each department made recommendations carefully and also made certain that every other science department was getting the same treatment. Table 1 (above) illustrated the levels of periodical cancellation by broad discipline.

While subject librarians and teaching faculty made a good-faith effort to identify titles that could be canceled, as we progressed, it was clear that the level of periodical cancellations would not be great enough to accomplish the goals we had set. Librarians were asked to recommend continuations, i.e. standing orders, for cancellation. Teaching faculty were consulted as needed. However, lists of continuations were not distributed among teaching faculty as we had done with periodicals. As with the periodicals, those titles that received little circulation and were most costly were the lowest priority for retention. Further, we made a policy decision not to duplicate information in different formats. We canceled many print reference sources in cases where we provide electronic access to the information. The result was that 14% of all standing orders were canceled.

Through **OhioLINK**, we provide access to fulltext of selected journals indexed by two of **UMI's Power Pages** databases — **Periodical Abstracts** and **ABI Inform**. We considered canceling titles in our print collection that were available via **Power Pages**. Upon review, we discovered that nearly all of the duplicated titles had high recorded use levels, both of paper journal issues and **Power Pages** copies. We did not make any blanket cancellations of these high use and moderate-to-low-cost periodicals.

Alternatives to Ownership of Print

Along with setting priorities for retention and cancellation, we needed to consider ways to move towards making more information available through non-traditional means, including electronic access. Based upon **Chuck Hamaker's** experi-

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Total uses	Requests- BGSU owned	Request- BGSU not owned	Total requests	Amt. spent articles owned	Amt. spent- articles not owned	Total spent	Avg. cost per article
215	15	43	58	\$199.20	\$598.55	\$797.75	\$13.75

Table 2. *UnCover Pilot — article requests and expenditures.*

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ence at Louisiana State University, we believed that that savings would be considerable if we canceled seldom-used, expensive titles and subsidized access to the few articles needed from those journals. Further, we could provide electronic access to a far greater number of titles than we could ever afford in purchase in print. We settled on five strategies:

1. From March through Fall, 1996, we set up a pilot project to allow faculty in selected departments try out the **UnCover** table of contents and document delivery service. We established a single direct connection to UnCover and provided a deposit account for the use of faculty in six departments. Table 2 (above) summarizes the results of that pilot.

Management reports showed that 25% of articles requested from UnCover were

5. The University Libraries, in cooperation with the **University of Michigan Libraries**, subsidizes the cost of University of Michigan library courtesy cards for faculty and graduate students. This provides researchers with use of a major research collection a little more than an hour's drive from Bowling Green.

Goals Review

To review our original four goals for cancellations, established in 1994 and consider how those were or were not met.

1. Stay within budget, allowing for inflation. During fiscal year 1995/96, we saw a 1.5% increase in total serials spending over fiscal year 1994/95. The table below provides the average cost of a canceled title and of a new subscription, by broad discipline. The journals that we have canceled are more costly than those to which we have begun subscriptions.

We also are striving to make our seri-

trates the spread of new subscriptions across broad disciplines.

4. Conserve funds needed for monographs. While we have not been able to increase spending for monographs, we have not had to make cuts in subject area allocations for book purchases.

What might we do differently?

1. We need to remember that moving to document delivery access and ejournal access requires that faculty change their research methods and habits. Changing human behavior takes time. We need to work closely with faculty through training and support as they learn to use these alternative means of journal access. Once they become more accustomed to alternative means of access, they may provide stronger support for options other than a subscription to paper copy in the library.

2. In a more ideal situation, we might cancel some periodicals every year, rather than mounting an across-the-board serials cancellation project every few years. A few departments could be targeted and librarians could work more closely with teaching faculty to set priorities for retention and cancellation, considering all alternatives to ownership. Faculty concerns could be more effectively addressed if a librarian is considering priorities for cancellation and retention in only one or two areas, rather than in all areas of subject responsibility.

3. Select a document delivery vendor early on and demonstrate or test document delivery service with target departments, making sure that key faculty are included. To better provide information needed by researchers in a timely fashion, we could also consider using a variety of document delivery vendors, identifying those that would supply journal information for niche areas where we've determined that UnCover journal coverage is not adequate.

4. We will continue to place journals with highest use as highest priority for retention, and balance cost of subscription with level of use when setting priorities. We

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	Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities
Cancelled journal	\$703	\$261	\$65
New subscriptions	\$424	\$107	\$58

Table 3. *Average cost of a canceled journal and a new subscription, by broad discipline.*

owned by the University Libraries. These articles accounted for 25% of the costs for article delivery. These data confirmed the decision to set up customized gateway for UnCover with holdings loaded so that UnCover can block orders from periodical volumes held by the University Libraries.

2. We were able to negotiate a limited access contract with Lexis-Nexis that fit within our budget. We now offer Lexis-Nexis access to faculty and, as a mediated search, to students. To date, the departments within the College of Business Administration (which includes Legal Studies) has shown much interest in Lexis-Nexis access. Chemistry Department and the Center for Photochemical Sciences use the files for their patent searches.

3. We created links from the University Libraries Web page to free scholarly electronic journals. These journals are also fully cataloged, including a link to the URL from the local cataloging record.

4. In fall 1996, we began to provide electronic access via OhioLINK to all Academic Press journals online.

als costs more predictable. In addition to the cancellations made, we negotiated a single invoice from our major serials vendor. We hope that by eliminating or decreasing supplemental serials billings, that our serials expenditures will be more predictable, thus making the materials budget more manageable.

2. Provide faculty and students the information they need for coursework, teaching, and research. Though we made cancellations of print subscriptions, we have initiated the five alternatives to print ownership outlined above.

3. Begin some new periodical subscriptions. We have begun subscriptions to a small number of journals requested by the teaching faculty. Table 4 (below) illus-

	Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities
Dollars spent	57%	34%	9%
Titles ordered	23%	52%	25%

Table 4. *Percentage of titles ordered and dollars spent for new subscriptions, by broad discipline.*

Profiles Encouraged:

Linda Brown

In the beginning: Born in Houghton, Michigan, which is in the scenic and remote Keweenaw Peninsula, at the top of the scenic and remote Upper Peninsula. I know snow. Lived there until venturing with my family to Helsinki, Finland, where my father had a Fulbright research fellowship. Then to New England to attend the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where I earned (but not before spending another year, this time on my own, in Finland when I was a junior) a bachelor's of science degree in outdoor recreation. Moved to Vermont to complete an internship. As part of that I researched and wrote a canoeing guide to the reaches of the Winooski River from Montpelier to Lake Champlain. Stayed in the Green Mountains for the next six years.

First library job: At age 11, earned 50 cents per hour shelving books at the Portage Township Library in my hometown.

Current position: Collection management coordinator at Bowling Green State University Libraries in in balmy northwest Ohio, the furthest south I've ever lived.

Stops along the way: Waited tables during legislative session at the Tavern Motor Inn, the home away from home for Republican legislators. Several clerical and para-professional positions with the Vermont Department of Libraries, including work in the state's audio-visual services unit while working on and completing a Master's in Library Science at Simmons College, Boston. First professional position was as a reference librarian at Colby-Sawyer College in New London, NH. I moved again to upstate New York to take a position as reference librarian and later, head of reference at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY.

Family: Married to David Dupont, itinerant newspaper man and contributor to the jazz and blues magazine, *Cadence*, stirrer of soups, baker of breads, tender of children, and willing trailing spouse. Three children, Erik, 12, and six-year-old twins, Alma-Lynn and Philip.

Pet peeve: Whiners and complainers, be they 6 or 76. I'll cut those younger and older a little slack.

Points of interest: Knowledge of Finnish and love of all things Finnish. (My mother grew up in close knit Finnish community and spoke Finnish as her first tongue.) One of 2 percent of U.S. households without a television. Weaving. Gardening, especially now in a place where tomatoes have a chance of ripening on the vine, not in a box-in-the basement wrapped in newspaper. Cross-country skiing in places with real hills and snow — not usually a place where tomatoes ripen on the vine. Music, mostly listening, but also playing piano, often as duets with husband's trombone, and now elder son's French horn.

Literary tastes: Contemporary narrative fiction. That is, novels with plots and characters you care about, and detective fiction, preferably of the feminist kind, as an escape.

Best advice: The devil's in the details. Take care of the little stuff and the big stuff will take care of itself.

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need to count and tabulate periodicals use data on the integrated library system rather than manually. The bound periodicals collection will be barcoded by early 1997 to make this possible.

5. Since the University Libraries is a member of the OhioLINK consortium, we need a mechanism for effectively sharing cancellation and retention information throughout OhioLINK — before cancellations are made, not only after the fact.

6. The results of UnCover pilot indicate that faculty want convenience. 25% of the titles ordered were titles owned by the University Libraries. It was easier for faculty to have the article faxed to their office or department than to go to the library to read or photocopy it. The library might consider adding an on-campus document delivery service to faculty for materials from collections to better meet faculty needs and possibly increase faculty use of local collections. A delivery service also could foster a better working relationship between the library and the teaching faculty.

Future concerns/directions

1. University libraries need strong resource-sharing and consortial agreements as well as speedy, efficient delivery methods. We can't always rely upon the commercial sector to provide document delivery.

2. Libraries need the ability to share periodical holdings and retention priorities among peer institutions. To accomplish this, we need a common database which includes priority status for retention coded into individual institutional records. We also will need to clarify any legal issues this might raise.

3. Librarians need to make electronic access and formats work for us without generating costs that drive us out of business. This should include working with vendors to negotiate pricing and delivery models that meet both vendors' and libraries' needs.

4. As we move to access of electronic journals and other electronic texts, we face not only subscription costs, but major investments in hardware and network connections. The entire university needs the network connectivity and hardware for all to access these electronic resources. This campus-wide network infrastructure is crucial if the university's library is to fulfill its mandate to provide information resources to the university community.

5. There are trade-offs. As we move to consortial access of electronic resources, dollars committed from local budgets to a consortium for access to these resources take away local control. We need to find a balance between the wealth of access that

can be provided through a consortium and the point at which consortial resources cover a broader scope than is necessary to meet local needs.

6. Who holds responsibility for archiving of an electronic journal or other electronic text? How will that archive be accessed?

7. Will our print journal collection become a core of journals heavily used by undergraduates, with faculty and their graduate students relying upon alternative means of access to the more specialized titles?

8. Will we see a narrowing of the scope of print journal collections? If a new title is recommended, will we need to consider what similar or equivalent titles are already present, and which title or titles best support the needs of researchers, canceling some to make room for others? Are we moving nationally towards building more homogeneous collections? What will be the degree of overlap five, ten years down the line? For that matter, what is our current degree of overlap?

Conclusion

There may not be a single "right" way to set priorities for serials access and ownership. What's important is that priorities are set and articulated. A library's serials cancellations decisions are wrapped up in university, and sometimes state government, budget and politics. Ultimately, canceling serials is as much or more a public relations mission for the library as it is a collection evaluation and a mechanism for balancing the budget. 🌿

NB: This paper was adapted from a presentation at the 1996 Charleston Conference Preconference on "Prioritizing Serials Acquisition."