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Op Ed — Should Academic Libraries Ask for Bailout Too?!

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With the ever scrolling marquee of media proclaiming the downward spiral of both the domestic and global economy, I am sure by now you have heard enough about the gloom and doom of how this international recession affects every aspect of our lives. With the threat of no industry, organization, or institution free from the impending onslaught of cutbacks and proverbial belt tightening, the recession has been granted the right to prey on entities far too close to home, including academic programs, library funding and the ability to maintain and enhance library collections. The argument can thus be posed as to whether this monster we see feeding on the big corporations is a real economic meltdown on a global scale or if this chain of events is simply a natural market correction originating in real estate and the stock market.

In retrospect, we witnessed astronomical and unrealistic growth in both of these markets. Real estate values rose without any rational reason and values of stocks skyrocketed with no relationship to the actual value and asset of the firm they represented. As one of my former college professors often quipped, the stock market is legalized gambling. Sometimes you win and sometimes you can lose your shirt! Unfortunately, the financial institutions that benefited from this legalized gambling and later lost their "winnings" are now reaching to the government to save the day, and curiously, are being granted their wish! However, the bailout of financial institutions and the anticipated bailout of the major auto makers will change nothing! These courses of action will simply apply the Band-Aid! Perhaps, this is like a person with the common cold. One can take a variety of medications to aid the symptoms or let the body go through its natural course and cure itself! Where is the understanding of accountability; the notion of the inevitable ebb and flow of a fluid system? Have we lost sight of what capitalism actually entails? The risks it poses?

However, with this kind of environment, politicians and college administrators have been sharpening their knives to pare down the budget any way they can without really understanding the consequences of these actions. Research indicates that the need for effective academic programs normally rises during economic hardships, particularly in programs related to teaching, technology

and health care, reflecting some of the most essential functions of society. As explored in the research of **John Aubrey Douglass** in a November 2008 article of the *Research & Occasional Paper Series* from the **University of California, Berkeley**, access to higher education significantly increases in vital demand when the pursuit of socioeconomic mobility and a means to improve employment prospects must be realized.¹ Many of our fellow citizens who lose their jobs in weaker industries will return to higher education for additional training. One cannot underestimate the role that academic libraries play in these times, especially with an influx of people looking to better themselves and their current situations. Library collections are essential to the support of these programs and their ultimate goals of preparing the next generation of teachers, technology leaders, and medical workforce!

During the economic downturn, the essential need for innovations, new technologies, products, and services rises dramatically. It is during this period that firms amplify their efforts in areas of research and development (R&D). At the same time, organizations begin searching for ways to become more efficient and effective by utilizing technology and related tools. The ultimate result is extremely helpful to economic growth and prosperity. In a paper published in the **2005 Canadian Conference** proceedings for "A Plan for Growth and Prosperity," the researcher concludes, "Innovation contributes to economic growth by increasing efficiency and creating new products," they further state, "Innovative firms create jobs and ultimately provide higher wages," they also claim, "Countries at the forefront of innovation will be best placed to develop the high value added sectors that can provide new sources of growth."² Again, there should be no doubt as to the importance of academic libraries and their collections in support of organizations searching for innovative methods to managing their firms. Access to knowledge during economic hardship is as important as water for extinguishing a fire!

Despite the above realities concerning the utter importance of academic programs and library collections during economic hard times, the difficulty of convincing politicians and administrators to refrain from cutting the library budget, which always appears as the

easiest target, perpetuates a colossal negative impact on the financial recovery that everyone is striving for. Library leadership at academic institutions have two options, join the long list of different organizations asking for bailout and government aid or try to become inventive in how to get the most returns from the limited budget that they have. In the same way that other firms try to identify revolutionary technologies and methods to make their operation more efficient, libraries have the responsibility to look into all available and emerging technologies to achieve higher value, added bargains, and service.

Perhaps, academic librarians should look into different methods and technologies in increasing their return on investment. In the area of science, technology and medicine (STM) the willingness of users to employ online resources is far greater than other fields, "almost 90 percent of researchers said they went online first, then consulted print source."³ Academic librarians must consider this an opportunity to push for contents where they receive a greater value for the money they put in. Notably, libraries can obtain a vast amount of contents for a fraction of the full price of the print version when purchasing electronic materials, not to mention obtaining E-Content through consortia. Libraries could also sharpen their ability to bargain and negotiate with publishers. After all, the publishers are facing the same economic slowdown and need to keep up with the challenges of a slow economy.

In considering means to achieve a strategic and thrifty allocation of funds that enable libraries to invest more in contents, information communication technology (ICT) can assist libraries in two major areas; (1) Cost savings; using ICT in replacing some of the inefficient old-fashioned processes and procedures (e.g., Use of **Webinar** for conducting library related education programs, communication with all library patrons electronically, etc...); (2) Increasing service; ICT can be extremely beneficial in enhancing the efficient and effective level of services that a library provides to its patrons. The use of Web technology is highly recommended to allow almost everyone to have access regardless of their location. Library leadership must understand that the role of assisting library staff with the

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identification of novel uses of technology in support of managing library operations is very crucial. Therefore, the leadership needs to A) foster the culture of identifying innovative use of technology; B) encourage staff to look into new technologies and their applications; and C) recognize and reward those employees that identify ICT solutions.

As an additional and widely demanded measure, academic libraries should also expand their efforts in identifying open access sources enabling them to provide access to contents for those who are researching to identify innovations. There is a limitless number of open access repositories, publications and sites conducted and supported by governments, academic institutions, professional groups and individuals. Libraries should make the most of these sites and compliment their existing collection with contents from open access sites.

The role of educating administrators and policy makers about the importance of avoiding funding cuts for academic programs and library collections is the responsibility of everyone in the academic community. These

efforts should not be limited to only local administrators but rather it should be carried out at all levels of local, state and national governments. I feel certain that national professional library organizations, such as **American Library Association (ALA)**, understand their critical role during these challenging times. Instead of seeking a bailout, rely on educating policy makers about the importance of investing in knowledge acquisitions, and making information available to researchers, educators, and knowledge seekers. In a time when everyone is fighting for a share of the funding, library leadership should fight for their fair share as well.

The role that library collections and librarians play in aiding the floundering economy should not be underestimated. The best remedies for an ailing economy are education and knowledge. This does not mean that educational programs and access to knowledge are not important during economic prosperities, but that these resources are much more essential and have a substantial impact in periods of economic strife. Unfortunately, society does not generally understand the importance that libraries play in upholding the basis of human civilization, communication, knowledge and innovation. Perhaps, the kind of care that

librarians provide to the ailing economy could be equated to that of nurses in assisting patients through illness. With all things considered, now is a time to act, preserve, and persevere. Let's do our part to help aid the recovery! 🐼

Endnotes

1. **University of California, Berkley, Center for Studies in Higher Education**, "College vs. Unemployment: Expanding Access to Higher Education Is the Smart Investment During Economic Downturns", November 2008, <http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/publications.php?id=324> (accessed December 10, 2008).
2. **Department of Finance Canada**, "Advancing an Innovative Economy," A Plan for Growth and Prosperity — Chapter 5, November 2005, <http://www.fin.gc.ca/ec2005/agenda/agc5e.html> (accessed December 9, 2008).
3. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Students and Faculty Members Turn to Online Library Materials Before Printed Ones, Study Finds," October 2002, <http://chronicle.com/free/2002/10/2002100301t.htm>. (accessed December 9, 2008).

ATG Special Report — Some Considerations in Selecting Scientific Journal Backfiles

by **Ann Bolek** (Physical Sciences Bibliographer, Science & Technology Library, The University of Akron; Phone: 330-972-6264) <bolek@uakron.edu>

Library users expect us to provide them with access to more and more of their content in electronic format, including journal backfiles and archives. Researchers already liked to trace the history of their topic by looking up the articles cited in the articles they were reading. *Beilstein* and *Gmelin* have always indexed chemical information back to the 1770s, and *GeoRef* indexed geological information from 1785 to the present. Now, several other indexing and abstracting services have added earlier content to their databases, including *Biological Abstracts*, *Chemical Abstracts*, *Web of Science (Science Citation Index)*, *COMPENDEX (Engineering Index)*, and *INSPEC (Physics Abstracts, Electrical & Electronics Abstracts, and Computer & Control Abstracts)*. The searching of these databases by our users now also creates a demand for the earlier journal literature. But, the budget to pay for that earlier content competes with the budget for recent content, and priorities must be made. This article covers some of the issues in selecting the earlier content and is intended for both librarians and publishers.

For librarians, a determination needs to be made in what is requested the most, what is available, and what is affordable. Most likely, users are requesting what is already available in the library's collection in paper

format, microform, or storage. But, if the organization's research focus has changed over the years, users may even be requesting articles not in the original collection. At **The University of Akron (UA)**, we have a strong research interest in polymers. UA belongs to the **OhioLINK** consortium, which includes most of the colleges and universities in Ohio. **OhioLINK** has loaded the full-text of many publishers' journals on its own server, although, for the **American Chemical Society (ACS)** journals, it has loaded only the metadata, and we access the full-text at the **ACS Website**. The **OhioLINK** server makes it easy to obtain usage statistics, and it is no surprise to us that the journal, *Polymer*, has the highest usage. Therefore, I assumed that there might be a great interest in the backfile for this title. The journal, *Macromolecules*, actually may be used more, but I do not have ready access to the **ACS** electronic journal statistics, and even though **OhioLINK** tracks the usage on this title through the metadata on its own server, many users access it directly at the **ACS Website**. **OhioLINK** purchased the **ACS** backfile, and so I did not need to consider that publisher for purchase or lease, or make the extra effort to get accurate usage statistics for **ACS** journals.

The next step is to determine if the backfile for the journal, *Polymer*, is available. Indeed,

it is available, but in a package with 107 other **Elsevier** materials science journals. Most of the scientific publishers make their backfiles available in packages with one or two exceptions, such as *Lancet* for **Elsevier**, and *Angewandte Chemie International Edition* for **Wiley**. It is likely that you will be paying for titles that have lower usage along with the highly used titles. To make a fairer, but certainly not perfect comparison, you should look at the usage on all of the titles in one package and compare it with the usage on all of the titles in another package. You might also look at the number of years available in the backfile for the highest used titles. And, if available, you might look at the usage on your paper, microform, and storage collections and interlibrary loan statistics.

For **The University of Akron**, the table on the next page shows which 30 journals had the highest number of downloads on the **OhioLINK** server in 2006. The publishers appearing most often in the list of the most downloaded journals are **Wiley**, **Elsevier** and the **American Psychological Association (APA)**. The **OhioLINK** server already includes the backfiles of the **APA** journals.

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