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Little Red Herrings -- What Do Academic Library Deans Do?

Mark Y. Herring

Winthrop University, herringm@winthrop.edu

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Book Pricing Update — Book Price Inflation Highest in Years

Column Editor: **Tom Loughran** (Manager, Approval Systems, Blackwell's Book Services, 6024 SW Jean Road, Bldg. G, Lake Oswego, OR 97035; Phone: 877-270-4338) <tom.loughran@blackwell.com>

This year, book prices appear to be heading toward a double-digit inflation rate on average. So far, at the end of seven periods of fiscal year 2005-2006, book prices have risen 9.62% over the same period one year ago. To put this in perspective, in only two out of the last nineteen years have book prices increased more than 10% in a single year: from 1991 to 1992 (up 12.51%) and from 1996 to 1997 (up 11.65%). Since we still have more than a quarter to go in this fiscal year, I am predicting that we will see inflation hitting 10% or more.

Most high-inflation years have been followed by years with relatively modest increases. For example, 1992 was followed by four years in which inflation didn't exceed 2%. 1997 was followed by six years of low inflation, and even one year of deflation. Nevertheless, at \$75.55, a new benchmark in the price of the average monograph has been set.

Please see the following table for pricing details from 1988 through the first part of 2006:

Book Price Inflation 1988-2006

Year	Price	Pct Change
1988	39.81	*
1989	42.25	6.13%
1990	44.28	4.80%
1991	46.29	4.54%
1992	52.08	12.51%
1993	52.98	1.73%
1994	53.85	1.64%
1995	54.05	0.37%
1996	54.32	0.50%
1997	60.65	11.65%
1998	61.82	1.93%
1999	62.72	1.46%
2000	62.88	0.26%
2001	61.29	-2.53%
2002	61.79	0.82%
2003	62.94	1.86%
2004	67.44	7.15%
2005	68.92	2.19%
2006	75.55	9.62%

* Base year

Little Red Herrings — What Do Academic Library Deans Do?

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

A recent discussion apropos of nothing set me to a thought-experiment: what is it deans of library services (or, as is often the case when I'm introduced, dean of library sciences) do? If one were to write up a short list of some of the most important general attributes of an effective dean, what would they be?

The danger in an exercise such as this is palpable: as surely as one thing is named, five are omitted. Readers will peruse the contents and announce it as lacking as **Belshazzar**, mene, mene: you left out this; why didn't you mention that — and you call yourself a professional! These disclaimers notwithstanding,

here's my aporematic in fulfillment of the thought-experiment, and I hope an ushering in of a wider conversation on same:

Deans must strive for participatory governance;

Deans must be proactive;

Deans must be flexible; and,

Deans must be fund-raisers.

Now, what do all of these mean?

Deans must strive for participatory governance. This must begin any such conversation since no dean can, or should attempt to,

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accomplish everything on his or her own. Libraries are run by teams that must be assembled in such a way to achieve the challenges thrust upon them. For 21st century librarianship, these challenges are formidable. Each team member brings to the workplace some important, key ingredient to the calculus of success whether it is an acquisitions team member, a cataloging team member, one from reference or another from archival concerns. What must not be lost, too, are those important patron needs and concerns to which everyone, *including the patrons themselves*, contribute to. Each one in this equation is essential to the success of participatory governance. And so the term "dean," by synecdoche means all the component parts. Without each assuming his or her called-for role, the library cannot hope to be successful. Without all contributing, the library will remain as uncertain as a table with uneven legs.

Having said all that, I am reminded of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, wherein Dogberry argues, "well, ...[when] two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind." Participatory governance does not mean everyone is polled about every issue everyday. Not everyone can (or even should) hold the reins. This brings to mind the old saw about a camel being a horse designed by committee, and sometimes participatory governance creates too many camels. Deans, again by synecdoche, have been handed these reins and so hold them for all. While the direction is arrived at by consensus, it is the role of the dean to take the reins and lead the team. Deans who fail to do this fail their libraries. Staffs that do not understand this *equally* fail in their charge, and their libraries. Deans are *primus inter pares* — first among equals — and that may best explain this important relationship. We cannot all lead nor should we want to. Whether we "win" or "lose" given scenarios, when the consensus is decided, we must be willing to follow the lead, even if it means following a viewpoint that hedged out our own.

All of this assumes the relationship calculus among library staffs and between those staffs and their deans is in grand harmony. We know better, don't we? But that's a topic for another column.

Deans must be proactive. At no other time in library history have libraries been faced with having to do so much with so little. The knee-jerk reaction to this may be to complain, seeking refuge behind an all too familiar whinge: We need more funding! We need more funding! While it's true that funding, or its lack, distinguishes good libraries from mediocre ones, deans must be proactive about where the funding goes and for what. Budgets that remain unexamined from

year-to-year to fund the same things without forethought may *generally* be said to create their own funding crises. Being proactive, however, is not only about this.

Deans must be proactive about libraries, both in specific and in general, and the general part may be the most important of all. They must state honestly where their library is, where it must go to meet specified needs, how it will get there, what is required to get the library from A to B and beyond. Sure, an important database here may not make the budget cut but that does not mean the library is hopelessly lost. Deans must respond, once funding is in place, to say how much (or how little) of what has been set as a goal will likely be achieved. This last statement may be as important as anything else: since no library can do everything, saying what one can do or will accomplish is paramount. Browbeating your budget, or budget administrators, get a library nowhere fast.

Successful deans must seek to establish the boundaries of his or her library. The dean must state categorically (having established the case by participatory consensus mentioned above) where the given library under command will go with its funding, what it will do with that funding, what it can no longer do, and what it intends to do about future funding needs. Having said that, it is incumbent upon the dean to make certain a) that a level of solid funding is achieved and b) that additional, external funding is vigorously pursued by all library faculty (see below). Deans must remind the community that funding will never be adequate in the sense that all needs will be met. Libraries are financial black holes and as such deans are required to specify limits.

Finally, proactive deans must seek ways to help others understand *why libraries have not been made obsolete by the Internet*. It's astonishing to me how often I hear this, and how often, much to my dismay, *it's repeated by librarians!* I'm not sure if these well-meaning individuals do not understand that by defending the arguments, they are in fact creating the queue for their own desecurement. The Internet with its accompanying services is a fabulous tool, but to make even a slight case that it is a library is a case made to the detriment of libraries. Moreover, it's simply untrue. This point must be made clear, routinely, and at every opportunity. The Internet is a tool, not a panacea.

Deans must be flexible. When I entered the profession nearly a quarter of a century ago, one could assume a set agenda, revisit it from time to time and proceed apace. This is no longer true. As technology and modes of delivery of information change, as access moves from just-in-case, to just-in-

time, to just-for-you, management must change with it. The Internet has made access different while forcing libraries to collect in both traditional and non-traditional ways. Deans must use their offices as bully pulpits to defend print resources while advocating new modalities of access as they appear. Finally, deans must be ready to change predetermined courses of action when such changes are required. It is an uncertain but most exhilarating time to be in librarianship!

Deans must be *flexible* or they will be routinely unhappy, as will their patrons. For example, less than ten years ago, librarians were told that gold-plated CDs would last 500 or more years, bringing instant claims of the end of microfilm. Not many years ago it was discovered that the printing on CDs inquinated their data, including gold-plated ones. Furthermore, we discovered that machines bought today could not always pull up data successfully on disks purchased ten or more years ago. Bandwidth is a continuing concern, as is mutual connectivity and the ubiquitous copyright act, whether in its conventional print form, its new digital advent, **DMCA**, or the omnipresent **TEACH Act**. A set jaw on how to address these matters will be quickly broken by extenuating and uncontrollable external forces.

It goes without saying that it's a rare library staff that knowingly pursues an unworthy goal. Rather, what is more common are library staffs that do not or will not prioritize goals, that fixate on goals set *years* ago, or set goals without reference to the protean present or the flummoxed future.

For instance, we all know that virtually few academic libraries will purchase all or even most of the 50,000 academic titles published annually, *in any format*. In this case, it's easy to see how some choices are made that preclude, or eliminate, others. What's not so easy to see is how this applies to every database, every outreach offered and every library service proffered. Not many library staffs are ready to prioritize them, but all must. The library must be ready to change with trends or be undone by them. It also means that every service must be reassessed for its effectiveness *every* year.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *Deans must be fundraisers*. This *most definitely* does not mean that the dean is the only library employee pursuing fundraising. It does mean that the dean is the chief advocate of external fundraising, using his or her role again as bully-pulpit for same, while vigorously pursuing grants him or herself, or enabling others to do so. Pursuit of funds is not something most librarians are comfortable with beyond a Friends group. Yet this may be the most important and most effective pursuit any library can undertake. In academic settings, a library faculty can be its own worse enemy. For example, tenure (assuming its presence) may place higher significance on scholarly writing than it does grant-writing. Nothing could be odder yet with surprising frequency such

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anomalies occur. Scholarship is important in librarianship; external funding, however, is not only more important, but is also much more to be preferred in these tight and declining budget times over obscure articles on so many extraneous statistics. If grant-writing is not of first-most importance, that academic library is still in denial about its status in its new information world.

Deans must not be shy about this process, or exhibit tunnel vision. *Multiple* fund-raising outreaches must be pursued, and in many ways, through many avenues. Each avenue must be more than self-supporting: each must achieve its own measure of funding success. Deans must lead their libraries in "branding" and selling their libraries and services, not just to students, faculty and staffs, but also to the community at large in which the library resides. Naysayers may complain that this cheapens the library but those who do not "brand," or something very like it, will find the sledding very tough during the often long budget winters of our discontent. Every community member is enriched by an academic library in its midst. But not every community has been made as fully aware of this as it must be. Once this is fully known, library budgets will begin to take as prominent a place financially, just as they do in general parlance.

Participatory, proactive, flexible, and fund-raising sum up for me four important activities to which a dean must turn his attentions first. By remembering these the dean can assume the challenges of 21st Century librarianship, confident at the very least that she will not be undone by them and may, with a strong supporting team, conquer more of them than not.

Of course I'm not benighted enough to think this ends the matter. Surely this is but the beginning of a much wider conversation?

anomalies occur. Scholarship is important in librarianship; external

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Case Studies in Collections and Technical Services

Case Study Three: The Ticking Clock of Tenure: The Case of the First Article.

Column Editor: **Anne Langley** (Head of the Chemistry Library, Duke University, Box 90355, Durham, NC 27708-0355; Phone: 919-660-1578; Fax: 919-681-8666) <anne.langley@duke.edu>

Melissa was worried. She had learned a lot during her first two years at her very first professional job at **Big Southern Research University Library**, and had gotten glowing reviews from her immediate supervisor **Robert**, for her work thus far. But since she was on the tenure track she still had some things to do before she felt secure in her first position. She had yet to publish one article. And she needed to have something to show for her promotion and appointment review coming up in 12 months. What could she do?

Multiple times **Melissa** had sat in front of a new blank document waiting for the ideas to come, yet so far, nothing had. She often woke up from a deep sleep, sat up in her warm cozy bed in her very own apartment worrying over her lack of publishing. Her supervisor had been encouraging when she had approached him on the subject, but had given her no ideas. **Melissa** was at her wits end and she knew that time was running out.

How ought **Melissa** get down to business and publish an article?

The experts speak:

Melissa is catching her problem in the nick of time. Luckily she still has a little while before she is in big trouble. We suggest a four-prong approach to getting started on her first article. First, she will need to find a writing partner/mentor. Second, they need to brainstorm about what to write about. Third, she and her partner need to think of various publications to send their article to and then contact the editor. Finally, she (they) needs to actually write the thing.

Finding a Writing Partner/Mentor

Obviously **Melissa's** direct supervisor is not the person to look to for help. **Melissa** needs to do some background checking on her colleagues at **Big Southern Research University Library**. She needs to find out who on the library staff has published, and better, who

has published recently. Once she figures out who the writers are among her colleagues, she needs to start networking. If there is no one on staff who has published recently who she might feel comfortable approaching, an alternative is to get on her library school alma mater's listserv, and put out a call to her fellow alumnus for possible writing partners. Best would be if her prospective partner had published something before, and could therefore serve not only as a writing partner, but also as a mentor to help guide **Melissa** through the process. Once she figures out who to approach, the next step will be to initiate a conversation by phone or email. Something along the lines of:

"Sally, Hi. This is **Melissa**. I have a favor to ask, and if you can't do it right now perhaps you could suggest someone who can. Here is my request: I am up for promotion next year and am struggling with the publishing part of

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