

An Absence of Allocations

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An Absence of Allocations

Cathy Goodwin, Head of Collection Management, Coastal Carolina University

In fall, 2010, academic departments at Coastal Carolina University were notified that they would not receive a defined allocation from the library for monographic purchases. Faculty were encouraged to request materials to support their courses, and were advised that requests would be filled on a first come, first purchased basis. At the end of the academic year, faculty were surveyed to determine satisfaction with an "absence of allocations."

The imposition of a flat budget on a library with significant fixed costs means that "something's gotta give." For most libraries, and certainly for us, the "giving" resulted in a monographic budget that was reduced by 33% from 2009-10 fiscal year and 42% from 2008-09.

Until the 2010-11 fiscal year, the library applied an un-weighted allocation formula to the monographic budget. The formula used number of faculty per department, credit hour production per department and average book price for the discipline. This was applied to funds remaining after we encumbered all recurring costs (90% of budget) and library costs (6%.) While the formula attempted equity, it did not include a "use" factor; as a result, programs with high enrollment and high average book price but which were not monograph-dependent had relatively high allocations, while monograph-dependent programs had low allocations. As the monograph budget shrank, the formula-derived allocations for these departments became almost negligible. They were also meaningless; unused funds for other departments were ultimately used to purchase materials for departments who exceeded their allocation. Furthermore, departments with larger allocations sometimes rushed to spend their allocation with the misunderstanding that it "had to be spent." This resulted in a spate of requests at the end of the ordering cycle for materials that did little to support the curriculum. These same concerns were acknowledged on a listserv discussion (newdirmmentor-l) summer 2010, in which several posters related a positive experience with abandoning allocation formulas. Until then, discussions of allocations on listservs and conference presentations had focused on getting the right formula, weighing variables, or adjusting allocation formulas to accommodate a particular goal. This listserv thread confirmed that abandoning

allocation formulas was a viable approach to addressing allocation issues. At this time, we also knew that our materials budget would be the same as the previous year, and that allocations to departments would have to be reduced to accommodate anticipated price increases in recurring expenditures. Based on these circumstances, we determined that a formula-based allocation for departmental expenditures should be abandoned, that departmental monies would be evenly distributed across departmental funds, and purchase requests from faculty be filled on a first come, first purchased basis until the spending approached the universal allocation. Unfilled requests would be ordered at the end of the faculty ordering period (mid-February) as funds were available, or held until the next fiscal year.

In fall of 2010, the Collection Management Department sent a letter to all faculty, stating that departments would not receive an allocation for the year. We were careful to indicate that this did not mean there were unlimited funds or no funds, but that the monies available to departments were general rather than fixed. We also outlined the reasons for this change. The letter was resent to individual faculty members several times during the year as questions about allocations arose.

Within our ILS, we allocated \$2000 to each departmental fund. We monitored the funds throughout the year, and held orders as departments began to exceed the \$2000 benchmark. When the faculty ordering period ended in February, any remaining requests were ordered. Two requests were denied due to cost: a music CD available from a foreign vendor but at three times the cost when purchased in the United State, and one request for multivolume series over \$2000 (of which we already owned several volumes.) We responded that we could not purchase the set, but would purchase

individual volumes if purchase requests were submitted (they were not.)

At the end of the fiscal year, faculty were surveyed on their reaction to the change in allocations and their ability to request materials. We had instituted an online monograph request system in the fall of 2010 and wanted to gauge satisfaction with this new process as well. The survey was reviewed by the University's Office of Institutional Research and first sent to all faculty and staff in mid-July. Response rate was expected to be low during the summer semesters, so the survey close date was extended to coincide with the start of fall semester, since faculty would be more likely to monitor email as the semester began. Liaisons were also asked to send a reminder email to their departments. Of 613 faculty (346 full time, 267 part time), there were 66 respondents. The majority of respondents were from humanities (44.6%) and sciences (30.8%), with low response from education (3.1%) and the University College (4.6%). Business faculty accounted for 17% of responses.

In response to the change in allocations, 30.3% (19) were not aware of the change and 27% (17) stated that they did not usually request library materials. Thus, the change in allocations had no impact on over half (57.6%) of the respondents. Of the remaining respondents, 22% (15) liked the change, and 19.7% (13) found the absence of allocations confusing. Almost half of the respondents indicated that they were able to purchase the materials needed for their courses, and though only 14% disagreed, 39% responded that they requested materials but didn't know if they had been ordered. Therefore, over a third of the respondents expressed some dissatisfac-

tion with some aspect of the ordering process. This latter concern was strongly reiterated in the comments; fourteen respondents stated that there was not adequate feedback from the library on the status of purchase requests.

The survey indicated that 80% (57.6% + 22%) felt no negative impact from an absence of allocations and most (85.7%) were satisfied with the online request process. Additionally, departments spent 65% of the *total* departmental allocation for the year, and this is consistent with previous rates of expenditure; percent of expenditures to allocations were 67% for 2010-09 and 62% for 2008-09. The main concern of faculty was not with the change in allocations but with lack of feedback on status of orders, though this may have been exacerbated by the ambiguity associated with an absence of formula-based allocations. The concern also may be a consequence of the new online ordering system, which does not allow the requestor to keep a record of materials requested, nor does it notify the requestor when orders are placed or received.

We are using the same process for departmental funds for the 2011-12 academic year. A meeting with librarians and department representatives was held shortly after the beginning of the 2011 fall semester to discuss departmental allocations and to answer any questions faculty had about the budget or ordering process. To address the lack of feedback on purchase requests, we determined that liaisons would provide lists of titles ordered to department representatives in December and April, several months before the faculty ordering period ends, and near the end of the fiscal year.

Library Allocation Survey 2010-2011

1. For the first time last year, academic departments did not receive an allocation for library expenditures.

	#	%
I found this confusing - I like having a budget	13	0.19697
This worked much better - I could purchase what I need	15	0.227273
I was not aware of the change	20	0.30303
I don't usually request library materials	18	0.272727

2. I was able to purchase the materials I needed for my courses.

	#	%
Agree	25	0.462963
Disagree	8	0.148148
I requested materials, but don't know if they were purch	21	0.388889

3. I requested materials that were not purchased. They were not purchased because items were (check all that apply):

	#
Out of print	0
Out of stock	1
Could not be located for purchase	0
Was not available in the format requested (print, ebook,	2
International supplier	1
Too expensive (library denied)	3
Did not support curriculum (library denied)	0
No reason given	11
Other	11

4. Concerning the online request forms:

	#	%
I preferred using paper request forms	4	0.071429
I am satisfied with the online request form	48	0.857143
I am dissatisfied with the inline request system	4	0.071429

9. Please provide any comments about the online ordering system, library allocations to departments, or purchase of library materials.

10. I am associated with the:

	#	%
College of Business	11	0.169231
College of Education	2	0.030769
College of Humanities and Fine Arts	29	0.446154
College of Science	20	0.307692
University College	3	0.046154