



## ***ARL Bimonthly Report 218*** **October 2001**

### **The Impact of Serial Costs on Library Collections**

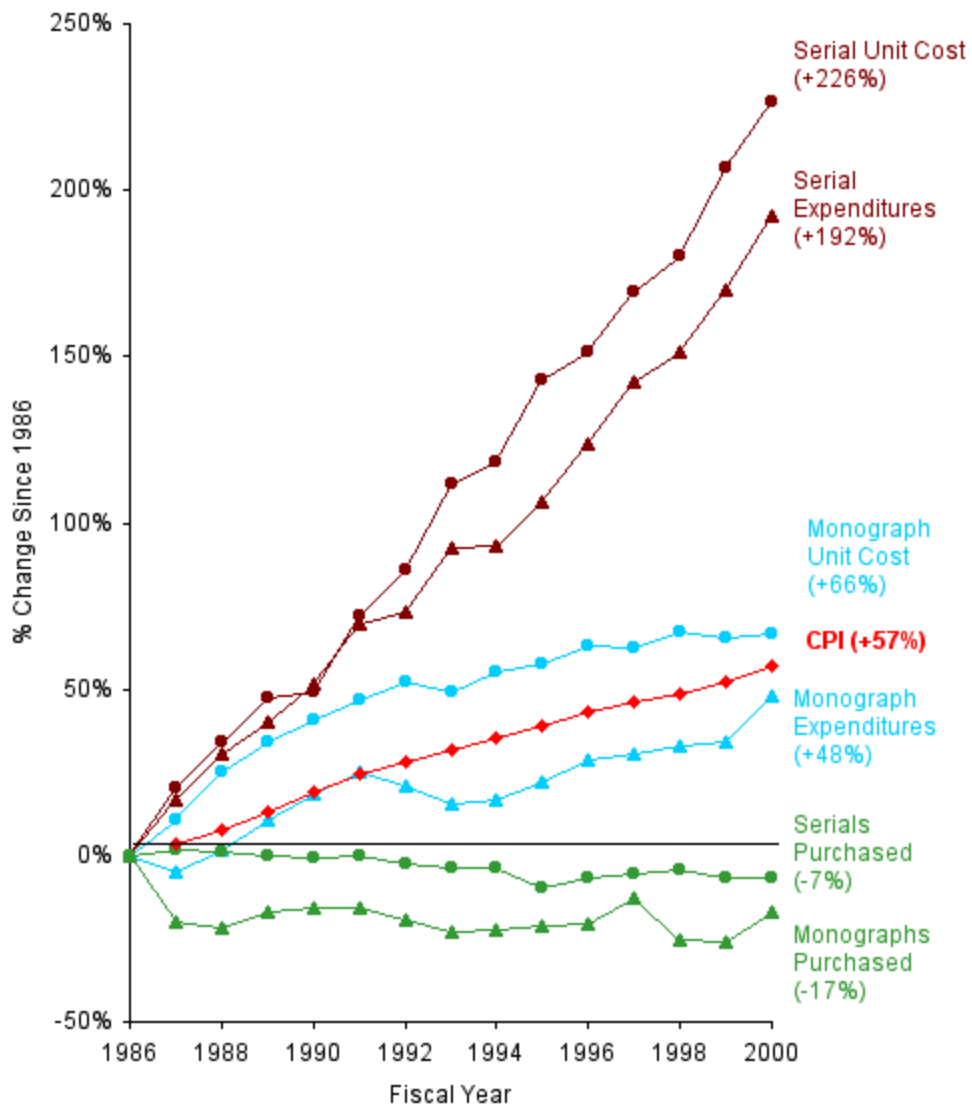
As Jean-Claude Guédon points out in his article, libraries were among the first to feel the pain of escalating prices that came as a result of the commercialization of scholarly journal publishing. For the last 14 years, ARL has collected data from member libraries to track the costs of serials and monographs and their impact on library collections. Since 1986, the average annual increase in the serial unit cost for an ARL library was 8.8%—amounting to a total serial unit cost increase of 226%. The result is that in 1999-2000, ARL libraries spent almost three times as much on serials as they did in 1986 and yet the number of titles acquired was 7% fewer. This seemingly moderate reduction in serial holdings reflects a certain amount of damage control; that is, many libraries have shifted funding from other parts of their budget to lessen the impact on serials. Monograph acquisitions, for example, have fallen from a median of 32,697 titles purchased in 1986 to 27,059 titles in 2000—a 17% decrease overall. On average and based on 1986 purchasing levels, this adds up to over 90,000 monographs forgone in each research library. (See accompanying graph, [Monograph and Serial Costs in ARL Libraries, 1986-2000](#).)

Not all journal titles are equally expensive. Studies have shown that there is a "profile" of expensive journals that routinely post extraordinarily high rates of price increase. For example, the title is typically in the science-technical-medical (STM) area, where journals are the primary vehicle for the communication of scholarly information. Its publisher is likely to be a for-profit company as opposed to a not-for-profit society or association. More commercial publishers are finding how profitable journals can be: some social science journals are posting annual increases even greater than those in STM areas (see table, [Average 2001 Prices for Journals in Selected Disciplines](#)).

Every year, journals eat up more and more of the libraries' acquisitions budgets. A straight-line projection suggests that the average journal title, which cost \$125 in 1986, will cost \$1,158 in 2012. Simply to maintain serials collections at present levels, the average journals budget, currently \$4 million, would have to increase to \$14.28 million by 2012—over \$3 million more than what the budget would be if it continued at its current rate of increase. Clearly, this price tag is not sustainable by the library market.

*-- Mary M. Case*

### Monograph and Serial Costs in ARL Libraries, 1986-2000



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### Average 2001 Prices for Journals in Selected Disciplines

Discipline	Avg. Price per Title (2001)	% of Change 1997—2001
Physics	\$2,011.13	30.47%
Chemistry	1,918.09	34.29

Engineering	1,142.84	43.20
Astronomy	1,083.91	16.94
Biology	1,064.33	34.53
Math & Computer Science	1,018.57	31.66
Technology	1,013.34	42.18
Geology	914.51	27.37
Zoology	866.03	39.21
General Science	830.55	48.30
Botany	790.28	25.93
Food Science	731.26	54.37
Health Sciences	728.14	38.89
Geography	682.29	38.87
Agriculture	529.22	19.77
Business & Economics	500.94	51.17
Psychology	326.00	46.73
Sociology	297.18	50.53
Anthropology	256.68	25.55
Political Science	254.19	54.34
Law	159.91	29.88
History	120.05	27.89
Art & Architecture	109.53	8.83
Music	79.94	19.40

Source: Born, Kathleen, and Lee Van Orsdel, "41<sup>st</sup> Annual Report Periodical Price Survey 2001: Searching for Serials Utopia," *Library Journal* 126.7 (15 Apr. 2001): 53-8. The data was derived from analysis of over 6,000 titles included in the three key Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) citation indexes.

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"The Impact of Serial Costs on Library Collections." *ARL* 218 (October 2001): 9.  
<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/218/costimpact.html>

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