

Projections of Libraries' 1997 Purchasing Strategies

The results of the 1997 OSC Quick-SPEC Survey on Cutbacks in Library Materials Purchasing show that while many ARL libraries are still undertaking sizable serial cancellation projects, the projected rate of cancellations for 1997 is substantially less than last year's estimates. According to the *ARL Statistics, 1995-96*, the unit cost of serials rose only 4% between 1995 and 1996, providing some relief from the 11% increase of the year before. This moderate price rise allowed libraries to increase slightly the number of titles purchased in 1996 (about 127 titles or 1% per institution) for an 8% increase in their total serials expenditures. Preliminary reports of 1997 expenditures at increases of almost 11% and projections of price increases of 10-11% for 1998, however, are keeping the cancellation cycle going.

Serial Cancellation Rate Decreases

Sixty-four libraries responded to the OSC Quick-SPEC Survey, which was sent to ARL members in December 1996. Of the respondents, 38 (59%) indicated that they intended to cancel serials during 1997. Twenty-nine of those libraries reported a combined serial cancellation target of \$5.4 million, or a per institution rate of \$187,844. This rate is 21% less than last year's projected rate of \$238,000 per institution, but significantly greater than the 1995 rate of \$110,000. Contributing to the sharp decline in the rate this year is the decrease in the number of institutions which have set cancellation goals of \$200,000 or more. For 1997, only 12 (41%) of the 29 libraries reporting monetary targets are in this category, while in 1996, 27 (64%) reported cancellation goals of \$200,000 or more. Individual amounts to be canceled in 1997 range from \$500 to \$600,000.

Asked if they were targeting specific disciplines for cancellation, 11 of the 13 institutions that responded yes indicated that they were canceling in the sciences. Five of the libraries indicated that they were canceling in the social sciences. A number of the libraries that are not actually targeting a specific discipline commented again this year that even though cancellations are to occur across the board, the sciences take the greatest hits by virtue of being the largest proportion of the budget and the most expensive titles. For example, one library reported that cancellation goals of 10%, 15%, and 20% were set based on the size of the journals' fund regardless of discipline; small funds did not have to cancel. Chemistry, physics, and biochemistry, which were the largest funds and those with the greatest percentage of price increases, were asked to cut 20%, while business, engineering, mathematics, and a number of biological funds were included in the 15% category. Another library reported that while they were not targeting the sciences, they were being hit harder because "that is where electronic alternatives to paper subscriptions are available on the largest scale." A positive note in the area of the humanities came from one institution which reported that a donor has agreed to support the increases for humanities titles for two years so none of the titles has to be canceled.

Monograph Purchases Increase

There is also modest good news to report for monographs this year. Only 16 (25%) of the survey respondents reported that they were purposely trimming monographic purchases during 1997. This is down from 43 institutions in 1996 (50% of last year's respondents). Data for 1996 from the *ARL Statistics* reported only a moderate increase in the unit price of monographs (3% over 1995). As a result, the typical ARL library was able to purchase an additional 543 titles for approximately 6% more in expenditures. Despite this "good news," monographic purchases are still down 21% from 1986 purchasing levels. Specific comments from the Quick-SPEC survey respondents included the positive report from one state institution that an additional half million dollars had been allocated by the university administration solely for monographs. Another reported increases of 10% to state-funded monographic budget lines. In contrast, one library has cut monographs by about \$50,000 and a second by about 20%. Libraries reported trimming monographic spending not only to support the serials funds, but also to purchase electronic resources and to subsidize document delivery.

Subsidized DD an Effective Strategy

In the area of document delivery, 36 (56%) of the libraries reported that they were using collections funds to support commercial document delivery services. The amounts reported by these institutions total \$1.18 million, an average of \$32,666 per institution. The amounts ranged from \$700 to \$80,000. Comments from respondents noted programs that completely subsidize article delivery for the academic community, to those that provide free copies of articles from canceled titles only, to those that are conducting pilot projects. One library noted: "We are surprised we have had so few requests for articles from serials we have canceled, using subsidized document delivery services. We have, for example, spent less than \$300 for articles from one serial, but saved more than \$6,000 by cancelling it." Two other libraries also commented that the demand for articles from canceled titles was much less than they had expected. One library noted: "document delivery costs have gone up significantly in the last 2 years," and another commented that increased expenditures in 1997 were anticipated. Despite these increases, subsidized document delivery appears to be a strategy that more and more libraries are using to trim their collections and support their community's needs.

Canceling Serials Part of the Routine

Serials cancellations continue to be a way of life for research libraries. Many who reported that they were not mounting special cancellation projects this year noted that titles would be canceled as a part of normal weeding, to enable the purchase of new titles, or to purchase alternative formats. One respondent indicated that they were already in the planning stages for a major cancellation project in 1998. Given the inevitability of the need for cancellations, one library stated that although cancellations were not being made this year, a "reserve bank" of \$300,000 worth of titles had been identified in case of budget cutbacks.

It is sometimes suggested that the serials crisis would be over if libraries were given additional funding. As one respondent so aptly characterized the current state of collection management: "It is no means a given that if we were to receive additional funds, that we would use those funds to maintain or increase our subscription to print serials. In terms of responsibility to current and future users, there may be better ways to spend this money and we are asking ourselves those questions."

The OSC Quick-SPEC Survey is intended to be only a best guess of strategies a library will undertake to manage its collections budget in the coming year. [This summary, as well as those of previous years' survey results](#) are available.

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