

# ARL Statistics: Redefining Serial Counts and Remaining Relevant in the 21st Century

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The ARL Statistics 2006–2007 marks the 100th anniversary of the annual gathering of data established by James Gerould at the University of Minnesota. A landmark collection of data that has shaped the way research libraries have viewed themselves in the 20th century, the ARL Statistics are still relevant today thanks to the ongoing stewardship of the ARL Statistics and Assessment Committee. Through the work of the committee, the annual data collection was augmented in 1994–95 to include

elements describing services, and in 2003–04 to include expenditures for electronic resources.

Last year, the committee implemented another change that makes the ARL Statistics even more relevant for the 21st century: the definition for counting serials was changed from serial subscriptions to serial titles, emphasizing the scope of the content rather than the multiplicity of formats.<sup>1</sup> The scope of the content available

to library users is a more valuable indicator of a library's relevance to the research, teaching, and learning processes within a research university.

In earlier years, libraries were instructed to report the "total number of subscriptions, not titles, but electronic serials acquired as part of an aggregated package (such as MUSE or Academic's IDEAL) [were] to be counted by title." ARL library directors and other staff expressed concern that the serials count was problematic since many libraries engage in multiple consortial arrangements and the serials count was inflated by duplicate titles held in multiple packages. The

## Fast Facts from ARL Statistics 2006–2007

- Half of a research library's materials budget is spent on electronic resources.

- Both interlibrary borrowing and lending are decreasing as access to electronic resources is increasing.

- ARL libraries are adding a growing number of e-books to their collections.

new definition asks that titles be reported as electronic if available in both print and electronic formats, and that titles be reported as purchased if available through both purchased and non-purchased arrangements. Serial titles are more accessible when they are delivered electronically, thus, in the revised definition, the instructions highlight the primacy of the electronic format when eliminating

**A Comparison of Serial Titles in 2006–2007  
and Serial Subscriptions in 2005–2006**

	<b>Titles (2006–2007)</b>	<b>Subscriptions (2005–2006)</b>
Current Serials (median)	51,797 (n=113)	40,607 (n=113)
Purchased (median)	39,113 (n=101)	25,967 (n=90)
Not Purchased (median)	9,861 (n=101)	10,636 (n=90)
Average Unit Cost	\$192 (n=101)	\$241 (n=89)

Source: ARL Statistics 2006–2007 and 2005–2006.

duplication among print and electronic titles. If a title appears in both print and electronic form and a library has acquired it through several different providers, it would be counted as a single, electronic, purchased title.

This change has been successful in that more libraries are able to report data on serial titles (101 libraries) than were able to report data on serial subscriptions (90 libraries), indicating that the new definition is moving us in the direction of gathering data that are both collectable and useful. The accompanying table offers a comparison of the ARL Statistics data collected for serial subscriptions in 2005–06 and serial titles in 2006–07. The median number of serial titles reported (51,797) under the new definition is over 10,000 titles higher than the median number of serial subscriptions reported in 2005–06 (40,607). Most of the increase is in serial titles purchased (median: 39,113). As a result, the unit cost of serials has decreased as the definition shifted from subscriptions to titles. The number of serials not purchased did not change dramatically when the definition changed from subscriptions to titles. One should also note that there is a strong positive correlation between serial subscriptions under the old definition and

serial titles under the new definition. That is, in general, libraries reporting high numbers of subscriptions tend to report high numbers of titles. Some individual library figures may be questionable until the processes for implementing the new definition are standardized from institution to institution over the coming years. Overall, though, ARL is collecting serials data from more institutions, which indicates a shift in the right direction.

Modern technologies have made information so abundantly available that the size of a research library's collection is no longer the primary measure of quality that it used to be.<sup>2</sup> The vetted, scholarly, and authoritative information that the library provides, matched with the ability to deliver it effectively at the appropriate time and place, is one of the key elements that makes a research library distinct, effective, and relevant today. Being able to manage serial titles effectively by eliminating unnecessary duplication and enabling integration into library discovery tools is part of the process of enhancing the library experience for faculty and students as they engage in research, teaching, and learning. This new way of counting serials should help ARL libraries more accurately describe their contributions in the 21st century.

For more information about the ARL Statistics or to download the data files or a PDF of the publication, visit <http://www.arl.org/stats/arlstat/>. To order print copies of the publication, send e-mail to ARL Publications [pubs@arl.org](mailto:pubs@arl.org).

<sup>1</sup> See the ARL Statistics 2006–07 mailing materials, especially the FAQ and the instructions, <http://www.arl.org/stats/annualsurveys/arlstats/07statmail.shtml>; see also the ARL Statistics Webcast: Counting Serial Titles, December 10, 2008, <http://www.arl.org/arldocs/stats/statsevents/2008webcast/121008ARL.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Kyrillidou, "Reshaping ARL Statistics to Capture the New Environment," *ARL: A Bimonthly Report*, no. 256 (February 2008): 9–11, <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/arl-br-256-stats.pdf>; see also, Martha Kyrillidou, "The Impact of Electronic Publishing on Tracking Research Library Investments in Serials," *ARL: A Bimonthly Report*, no. 249 (December 2006): 6–7, <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/arlbr249serials.pdf>.

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