

# Serial Cancellation Rates Increase After 1995 Drop

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After a year when less than half of the reporting libraries indicated their intent to cancel serials, ARL's Quick SPEC Survey on Cancellation Rates for 1996 reveals that 57% or 50 of the 88 responding institutions planned to cancel serials. In 1995, only 40 out of 90, or 44%, had indicated their intent to cut subscriptions (*ARL* 177). The 1996 results are more in line with those for the preceding years when well over 50% of the respondents indicated their intent to cancel (*ARL* 153, 159, 166, and 172). The 1996 Quick SPEC Survey was sent to ARL member libraries in January 1996 and attempts to estimate only in the most general sense an institution's early plans for managing its materials budget.

For those libraries planning to cancel serials, the brief survey asks for the approximate dollar value. Forty-two libraries reported a total amount of about \$10 million. If all 50 of the canceling institutions canceled at this rate (\$238,000 per institution) almost \$12 million worth of serials would be cut. In contrast, the average cancellation per institution according to last year's survey was \$110,000. This year's targeted amounts ranged from \$30,000 to \$600,000. Twenty-seven libraries reported goals of \$200,000 or more.

In general, the canceling libraries were not identifying titles of specific publishers. Eighteen noted, however, that they were targeting specific disciplines. Of those which specified the discipline, eight responded that they were canceling titles in the sciences, four in the social sciences, and one in the humanities. Many others commented that while they were canceling across disciplines, they would by default cancel the most dollars in the sciences. In comparison to other disciplines, science journals have the highest prices and the greatest cost increases and represent the largest portion of the serials budget.

In addition to cancellation, another strategy to support serials purchases is to trim the monographic budget. Just about half, 43 of the 88 responding libraries, indicated that they would in fact be reducing the funds available for monographic purchases. One respondent noted that this was not "as much a conscious decision as one of necessity." Another commented that they "expect to continue to see the small but constant erosion of monograph purchases overall as costs rise in other areas of the budget." In one very extreme case, the library's materials budget was reduced by \$1.5 million leaving virtually no monographic budget except for a fund of \$40,000 to fill faculty requests for reserve materials. For the responding libraries not reducing funds for the purchase of monographs, however, the picture is not much brighter. Most are facing static monographic funding which, with the increasing prices of monographs, results in the purchase of fewer titles.

From the various comments of respondents throughout the survey, it is clear that annual serials cancellation has become a way of life for research libraries. Many of those without targeted goals have a one-in/one-out policy. Several respondents speculated on the need for alternative approaches to providing articles and were particularly interested in cost-benefit data for subsidized document delivery services. When asked whether ARL can fill an informational role about serial cancellations, several respondents commented that the information is useful if only to show the faculty that their library is not alone in confronting this problem.

The final accounting of 1996 serials cancellations by ARL members is just now underway. The results will be published in the [1995-96 ARL Statistics](#) due out in February 1997.

Survey tabulated by [Marianne Seales](#), Program Assistant, Office of Management Services

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