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No Crystal Ball: Planning for Certain Future Cuts When the Future Is Uncertain

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Abstract

This paper is a combined presentation from the University of Nevada, Reno Libraries and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Many academic libraries have to make decisions about journal and database subscriptions before the university releases the upcoming budget. Often, it is necessary to not only make decisions for the following fiscal year without a final budget, but to plan ahead and forecast for an additional year. The University of Nevada, Reno Libraries approached it with a comprehensive collection review, covering print and electronic journals, journal packages, and databases. A wide range of data from various sources was brought together using Excel and Access. General assessment criteria were established. Communication, review, and the decision making process involving liaison librarians and faculty were managed with a combination of an online guide, SharePoint, Excel spreadsheets, and workshops. The goal was to correctly eliminate the journals with low demand to allow smart purchases of high-demand resources in the future. The presenters will address the methods used to plan for cuts in an uncertain future as well as present challenges to these methods and future efforts.

The Library at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) formed a Collection Development Team with members from several invested departments who could divide into subgroups, analyze data, and return quickly with proposed cuts. Different scenarios were identified, and a proposed plan for cuts was created for each potential scenario. This data-driven process provided CPU, circulation, and other data to assist the team in making decisions. Timelines were created to allow for ample input from liaisons and departments, including time for departments to react to the proposed cuts in their areas and to swap out items. To make better monograph purchasing decisions, the Library is moving to DDA for approval plan books, where three uses will trigger an order. To manage user needs to journal titles being cancelled, the Library is investigating use of pay-per-view options to allow “rental” of cancelled titles.

University of Nevada, Reno Libraries

In any fiscal year, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) Libraries often faces challenges of managing unpredictable materials budget to cover unpredictable material expenses. In July, the UNR Libraries typically receive information about the next fiscal year’s library materials budget allocation amount and begins allocating to specific fund accounts. Right after the fall semester begins, student enrollment numbers are gathered and posted, which may mean additional funding from student tuition fees. In April, sometimes

there could be end-of-year infusions of one-time monies from unspent university funding sources. Library material expenses are also unpredictable due to inflation rate, standing orders, demand-driven-acquisition expenditures and Interlibrary Loan’s Copyright Clearance Center fees. Additionally, there are always some unexpected expenditures that crop up and need to be addressed. It is all a balancing act; some costs go down while others go up to offset the savings.

Collections Budgets

The University of Nevada, Reno is a medium-sized, state-funded public university offering over 145 degree programs including masters and doctoral degrees. It is a major research institution in the state of Nevada and has a student body of over 21,000. The University Libraries include the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, serving as the main library on campus, as well as a number of branch libraries. Approximately 90% of the Libraries' \$4 million annual collections budget is spent on digital resources.

Due to a marked decline in monetary support from the State of Nevada, the UNR Libraries' budget allocations from the University have been reduced or remained flat for the past seven years from 2007 to 2014, resulting in a \$350,000.00 decline in the annual collections expenditures. In order to accommodate these shortages, the UNR Libraries have implemented subscription cancellation projects and relied more heavily on the student tuition fees and donor gift funds to help offset the shrinking funds.

Continuing this trend, the 2014–15 budgetary appropriation projections and expenditures, analyzed in mid-spring 2014, indicated a substantial library materials funding deficit of approximately \$412,546.00. This required the UNR Libraries to make some major subscription cancellations in order to balance the budget for the coming fiscal year.

Collection Review Strategy at the UNR Libraries for Fiscal Year 2014–2015

In order to address the projected deficit, a three-phase collection review strategy was developed. The three-phase strategy included a comprehensive journal review, a journal package review, and a database review.

During the comprehensive journal review in Phase One, all of the UNR Libraries' active journal subscriptions were reviewed and assessed to uncover the most likely journal cancellation candidates, including individual titles, mini-journal packages, memberships, and combination subscriptions, which were handled primarily

through the UNR Libraries' two major subscription agents. In Phases Two and Three, large journal packages and databases subscribed to directly through publishers are looked at on a month-by-month basis by the Assistant Dean of Libraries for Collections as they come due.

Comprehensive Journal Review

The comprehensive journal review included all active individual journal subscriptions. The reason for looking at all journal subscriptions and not just database subscriptions is that the UNR Libraries have already focused on database cancellations and broken up the majority of the large journal packages during the last few years due to budget shortages. The goal was to incorporate into the review process all of the library resources with low demand to allow for smart purchases of high-demand resources in the future. Additionally, this all-encompassing cancellation push allowed liaisons to be made aware of all of the resources in their subject areas to better facilitate their outreach efforts with faculty on campus.

In an effort to provide an objective method for identifying the most likely candidates for cancellation by subject liaisons, the Assistant Dean for Collections established a set of criteria and key indicators. A title was flagged for liaison review if it met at least one of the following criteria:

- Greater than \$5 per use.
- Used less than 50 times per year.
- Total cost greater than \$400 for print journals; \$1,000 for e-journals.
- Overlap with other resources.
- Monographic series to be cancelled.

In order to create a smooth review process and to encourage participation by liaisons and faculty, the Electronic Resources and Acquisition Services (ERAS) Department developed a seven-step process to manage the journal review project:

- Step 1: June 1–July 7 (~5 weeks)—ERAS prepared and compiled data for the upcoming journal review process. ERAS prepared two master lists for all active

journal subscriptions, one for print and one for electronic. The master lists were posted on SharePoint for liaisons to access so that they could mark the journals in their subject areas for the first round of cancellations.

- Step 2: July 8–July 21 (~2 weeks)—Liaisons reviewed their own subjects and marked their decisions on SharePoint for first cut. During this period of time, the liaisons could seek additional information from ERAS staff to aid them in their decision-making process.
- Step 3: July 22–August 5 (~2 weeks)—The Assistant Dean for Collections reviewed the liaisons' decisions and talked with most of them about additional titles for possible cancellations in their subject areas. A final list of candidates for cancellation was developed.
- Step 4: Aug. 6–Aug. 12 (~1 week)—ERAS prepared two new "lists of journals to be cancelled" in SharePoint and a combined list for posting on a LibGuide, so that academic faculty and library liaisons could view them in order to dispute any titles on these lists.
- Step 5: August 13–Sept 5 (~4 weeks)—This was the dispute period for academic faculty to review all of the journals marked for cancellation and to register a dispute through library liaisons if they wanted to retain the journal(s).
- Step 6: Sept. 6–Sept. 14 (~1 week)—The Assistant Dean for Collections finalized the journal cancellation list, allowing some titles to be added back in.
- Step 7: Sept. 15—ERAS notified subscription agents and individual publishers of the journal cancellations for fiscal year 2014–15 and provided them with an Excel spreadsheet for inputting into their own systems. The due date to subscription agents for the annual renewals was graciously extended from the end of August to the middle of September 2014 this year.

Data Groups

In preparation for the two master journal lists, the ERAS staff compiled a list of data required by the established review criteria and other considerations. The staff gathered the needed data from various sources and presented them in a way that would allow liaisons to only focus on reviewing content. The goal was to present as much needed data as possible, organized logically in one spreadsheet, to facilitate the review and decision making process for liaisons. As a result, the two master journal lists included seven data groups as follows:

1. Review Indicator Group: This group included the predefined criteria as mentioned in the previous section of this article. A title was flagged for liaison review if it met at least one of those criteria.
2. Liaison Decision Group: This group allowed liaisons to register their review decisions and to make comments.
3. Basic Data Group: Cost amount, usage statistics, cost per use, subject, title, and publisher were in this group.
4. Title Relationship Group: A thorough individual order record review and data cleanup effort was made and all titles in relationships (such as memberships and separated order records for combined print and online subscriptions) were linked so that subject liaisons would see all of the included-in titles during their review and recommendation processes.
5. Title Links Group: Links were provided for liaisons to look up the title in the library online catalog and in the electronic journal portal for overlap checking.
6. Additional Data Group: Supplemental data in this group included bibliographic record number from the integrated library system, ISSN, and vendor code.
7. Administrative Data Group: This group of data was for ERAS staff use only.

Complete guidelines and instructions for each of the two master journal lists were provided for subject liaisons to follow when making their subscription renewal recommendations.

Project Management

There were four components in managing the comprehensive journal review project: data source, computing, workflow management, and communication.

Based on the identified data needed for the project, the ERAS staff determined the best sources for obtaining those data elements. The integrated library system served as the primary data source for most of the information collected. Subscription agents' journal renewal lists and local usage statistics system served as additional data sources. The computing applications deployed in the project included Microsoft Excel, Access, and SharePoint, which were used to manipulate the collected data into master journal lists. To manage the seven-step review process and workflows, the ERAS staff used SharePoint Lists, with its multiview functions, to centralize data input by all of the participants including subject liaisons and the Assistant Dean for Collections. To facilitate communication about the project, the Assistant Dean for Collections created a LibGuide on the library website containing all of the pertinent information needed by liaisons and separate links to two master journal lists on SharePoint. He also conducted two group meetings with liaisons explaining budgetary reasons for running a complete subscription review project and the steps for marking their decisions within these SharePoint Lists.

Overall liaison librarians were pleased with the journal review process. However, some of them expressed concerns about potentially losing a significant amount of content through journal cancellations. They wanted to know what journals would still be available in their subject areas after the cancellations. To address the concern, the ERAS staff provided, from the Libraries' journal knowledge base, a complete list of all the full-text e-journals available to library users, including back files and open access titles. A pivot table was further created from this list to display online

journals by subject, allowing liaisons to filter journal titles across packages and platforms by subject.

In addition, since liaisons were instructed to focus on reviewing content only, they were not assigned a specific percentage to cut across subjects. To ensure cancellations were shared by all subjects, the ERAS staff monitored how much cancellation amount was proposed by each subject liaison in each of their subject areas.

Project Results

The review project was completed in about three-and-a-half months. It resulted in cancellations of 554 journal subscriptions, of which 340 were print and 214 were electronic, which represented 47% of the print journal subscriptions and 19% of the electronic journal subscriptions. It realized approximately \$200,000 in savings and represented substantial progress toward covering half of the projected materials budget short fall for fiscal year 2014–2015.

Right after the journal review project was completed with significant savings in mid-September, the student enrollment number for the fall semester of 2014 was announced. It has increased by 9.5% from last year, meaning additional funding from student tuition fees for the University. As a result, the UNR Libraries would receive a 2.5% ongoing increase in the overall budget as well as a one-time additional amount to be used for library collections.

The news of additional funds came as a pleasant surprise as it reduced the pressure for the planned journal package and database reviews in the next phase of the collection review strategy. In response to the new budget changes, a new focus was placed on reconsidering liaisons' wish lists for high-demand materials purchases and on better filling users' needs for articles from unsubscribed journals. For the latter, the UNR Libraries started to use Get It Now from Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) to provide library users with speedy fulfillment of full-text articles from unsubscribed journals. In addition, the ERAS staff continued to work with Interlibrary Loan staff to monitor requests for cancelled journals in order to

identify titles for possible reinstatement. Overall, this requires a balancing act between continuous reviews for cancellations and smart purchases of new resources.

Conclusion

The comprehensive journal review project did not proceed without challenges. For example, communication with liaisons and faculty required careful planning in terms of content, messages, communication venues, and timeliness. Data collection and presentation involved a huge amount of work and some advanced technical skills in the computing tools used. Since liaisons were not assigned a specific percentage to cut across subjects, whether the savings would cover budget shortage remained a question throughout the review process.

Looking into the future, conducting a cancellation project of this magnitude yearly or periodically

University of North Carolina at Greensboro Library

Planning for and responding to changes in library budgets is an integral part of every collection manager's responsibilities and skill sets. Too often, in the 21st-century academic library, the budget changes involve making cuts, rather than additions. When budget cuts are announced, collection managers are often asked to present their proposed cuts in short time. The task of making quick budget decisions is challenging enough, but, at times, the collection manager is informed that a budget cut is imminent, but that the amount of the shortfall is not yet known. How can collection managers and libraries accurately plan for the future when the future is uncertain?

Librarians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) faced this very dilemma while planning for the 2014–2015 budget year. Universities across the state all initially informed that budget cuts were coming, but that amounts per school had not yet been decided. In September of 2013, UNCG learned that their share of the institutional budget cut would be 12.5 million dollars. However, the Libraries did not

does not appear to be a sustainable approach. Instead, incorporating collection review activities into regular workflows appears to be a better alternative. As such, a better collection review system is desired with future efforts in three areas: reporting collection usage and cost analysis, assessing impact of cancelled journals on ILL article borrowing requests, and managing wish lists for new purchases. Another lesson learned from the journal review project is that if there is a need to conduct cancellation projects outside of regular workflows, it would be most beneficial to start the projects early in the year.

Planning for certain future cuts when the future is uncertain has proved to be a moving target at the UNR Libraries. To meet the challenges of pursuing the moving target in the future, the UNR Libraries has found it essential to position itself well by establishing a sustainable collection review system while remaining flexible in response to unexpected budget fluctuations.

anticipate learning the amount of their share of the cut until the spring, upon which cancellations would need to be immediately made to meet fiscal year deadlines. So, decisions would need to quickly be made, even though the amount of our needed cuts was unknown. This article will address how UNCG Libraries rose to the challenge of making cuts with an uncertain future.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro is one of 16 university campuses across the state. Its Carnegie Classification is Doctoral Intensive University 1, and as a research university with high research activity. The University's FTE is 18,500. Our collection consists of 2.8 million items (books, government documents, and microforms), 42,666 electronic journals, and over 250 electronic databases. The Libraries had survived several rounds of previous collections cuts. In 2009–2010, the budget was cut \$300,000 for books, \$240,000 for journals, and \$130,000 for databases. In 2011–2012, the Libraries incurred an additional round of cuts: \$296,000 for books, \$260,000 for journals, and \$130,000 for

databases, or a total of \$1,056,500 over a two-year period. In 2012–2013, there were no additional cuts, but nor were there any gains, as the Libraries were given a flat budget. Thankfully, one-time monies funded inflationary increases. The 2013–2014 budget was also flat, but there were no monies for inflation, thus essentially becoming a 4-5% cut. At this time, additional cuts to the collection were deemed too damaging, and the Libraries gave up four open positions to meet budget goals.

Needless to say, when the budget cuts to the University were announced, library staff were concerned. At this point, the “fat” had been well-trimmed, and cutting further resources would start to trim the bone. With time deadlines looming, a plan needed to be quickly proposed and implemented. The number of stakeholders with interests in collections was quite large, and involving all invested staff would not have allowed the nimbleness required. As there is already an existing Collection Management Team with members across departments, this team was a small but distributed group of librarians who were assigned with proposing a solution to the budget problem.

The timeline for the Collection Management Team was tight: the first meeting was scheduled for October, and cuts needed to be implemented by July 1. During most of the planning process, the team would not know the extent of the cuts. During the first meeting, the team agreed upon a plan of action. The Libraries were told that cuts

could range from 15-25%. The team decided to create 15, 20, and 25% cut scenarios, so that librarians would be prepared in all cases. The team also created a timeline to ensure that cuts would be ready to implement by July 1. It was decided that the group could move at a greater speed if three small subgroups were created to work on proposals for the areas of books, databases, and journals. November was designated for creating the 15, 20, and 25% scenarios, and December would be allotted for these small groups to do their work, after which the big group would reconvene and refine the proposals. Though there was not sufficient time to involve all subject liaisons in initial scenario planning, it was crucial to include their input. The team decided that in January, the scenarios would be presented to the subject liaisons, who would provide their reactions and suggestions for modification, and would be given until February to give final feedback. In March, the finalized proposals would be sent out to campus at large, with faculty departments given a deadline of May 16 to provide their input. The Libraries expected that the final budget cut amount would be decided before the step of sending out proposed cuts to the faculty, so that adjustments could be made.

During the October meeting, the Collection Management Team began by deciding what percentage to cut the major areas of the collections budget. It was decided that books could take a larger hit than serials. The allocations were as follows:

		15%	20%	25%
Books	\$ 693,340.00	\$ 154,000.00	\$ 205,333.33	\$ 256,666.67
Serials	\$ 1,723,597.00	\$ 173,886.00	\$ 231,848.00	\$ 289,810.00
DBs	\$ 869,204.00	\$ 160,000.00	\$ 213,333.33	\$ 266,666.67
Other	\$ 133,099.00	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 33,333.33	\$ 41,666.67
	\$ 3,419,240.00	\$ 512,886.15	\$ 683,848.20	\$ 854,810.25

Table 1. Dollar amount of cuts by scenario.

	15.00%	20.00%	25.00%
Books	22.21%	29.62%	37.02%
Serials	10.09%	13.45%	16.81%
DBs	18.41%	24.54%	30.68%
Other	18.78%	25.04%	31.31%

Table 2. Percentage that each group was cut by.

During this same meeting, the group discussed what data was already available and what additional data was needed to make decisions on what to cut. This needed to be done between October and November, so as to adhere to the timeline. The group decided to pull cost for journals and COUNTER JR1 Statistics for 2011 and 2012 for all journals costing \$100 or more. The amount of labor required to pull these statistics for titles under \$100, as well as the time to analyze, was prohibitive. Additionally, the print

journal and continuation usage statistics would be gathered, along with database statistics from the A-Z database and print journal/continuations usage statistics. The necessary statistics were distributed to each subgroup.

The journals group pulled together CPU statistics where they were available and began the process of creating cuts for each scenario. The initial scenarios were created:

	Cost	% cut at 15%	15%	20%	25%
Online plus P+E	\$240,280.23	33.4%	\$80,194.00	\$96,500.00	\$96,500.00
Print only	\$46,249.30	64.9%	\$30,000.00	\$37,500.00	\$37,500.00
Newspapers	\$6,820.12	60.0%	\$4,092.07	\$4,092.07	\$4,092.07
Continuations	\$67,128.50	56.6%	\$38,000.00	\$47,500.00	\$47,500.00
Memberships	\$29,225.00	29.4%	\$8,600.00	\$10,750.00	\$10,750.00
Microfilm	\$22,893.49	43.7%	\$10,000.00	\$12,500.00	\$12,500.00
Big Deals	\$1,306,908.00	0.2%	\$3,000.00	\$23,000.00	\$ 80,967.93
TOTAL	\$1,719,504.64	10.1%	\$173,886.07	\$231,842.07	\$289,810.00

Table 3. Cut scenarios.

Clearly, the cuts were not evenly distributed by percentage. At the 15% level, Big Deals would only be cut by \$3,000, while these deals were cut by \$23,000 at the 20% level, and \$80,967.93 at the 25% level. The reason for this is that cutting Big Deals is always problematic. Key titles would have to be added back in, and the publishers often price these titles at a level where savings are minimal. So, the decision was made to make a minimal cut to Big Deals at the 15% level, while a couple of more expensive packages were identified as potential cuts if necessary.

The journals team looked at CPU for electronic titles and sorted by lowest CPU to highest with a running total column, that had markings at the 15, 20, and 25% cutoffs. The Print Only category was

targeted for higher cuts, as users prefer electronic, and it is difficult to assess use with print titles. Continuations were also heavily targeted, after circulation data was presented for each title. Most of the continuations at the Libraries were not heavily used. Titles were sorted by use with a running total, with the least used continuations targeted for cancellation. The list of newspapers was small, so the entire group made title by title decisions. The group agreed that certain titles could be canceled regardless of the scenarios, so \$4092.07 was immediately identified for cuts. Memberships required the input from the Dean of University Libraries, who identified the memberships that were strategically important. Cancellation targets were set at \$8600

at 15% and \$10,750 for 20 and 25%. Microfilm was also heavily hit, as users scantily use it.

The Databases subgroup also gathered CPU statistics and created a running total sorted by use. Canceling solely based on CPU was not necessarily an option for the group, however. Some subject disciplines had multiple core databases, while others had only one. Where multiple databases in a subject area were available, the decision to cut was based on CPU and coverage. When there were multiple similar databases, journal title coverage was considered. Some databases did not provide usage statistics, and the subgroup had to decide how important the availability of usage statistics were in making decisions on what to keep and what to cut.

The book subgroup met to decide their strategy for budget cuts. The decision was made to cut \$90,000 right away from the approval plan, and to further cut all firm order accounts in disciplines that rely more on journals. Some departments have traditionally never spent all the allotted book monies available, so it was determined that cutting book budgets in those subject areas were not likely to be painful.

The larger group came back together to meet and put all the scenarios together. On January 17, the Collection Development Team presented the plan to all subject liaisons. Immediate feedback was that a few of the databases identified as potential cuts were essential. The liaisons proposed that the Team put \$40,000 back into the databases budget line and take those funds from books and serials. So, the subgroups met again to adjust and work with the new figures. The Journals subgroup cut \$3,000 more of print journals, cut an extra \$11,000 in continuations, and \$6,400 in Microfilm. The Databases subgroup went back to the original list and looked at statistics and other factors. The Book subgroup cut the approval plan again by \$20,000.

The new plan was proposed, and the Subject Liaisons let the departments know that future cuts would be made in February. In order to present a more positive message, the emphasis was on what things the Libraries would be keeping, rather than on what would be cut. A budget web page was created for the faculty to consult, and at this point, the Team waited for the final budget cut news.

In March, the budget news for 2014–2015 was released. The Libraries would only have to take a 9% cut, or \$362,000. This was a much better scenario than even our best-case proposed budget. The Collection Development Team reconvened and readjusted the plans, and then sent the budget website out to faculty to receive feedback. Faculty were able to keep proposed cut titles if they were able to offer up a cut elsewhere.

The departments were told that they could make adjustments, but would need to swap out similarly priced titles for others. After all the feedback was collected, and any adjustments made, the list was finalized, and the cuts were made.

In the end, though our cuts were smaller than expected, the Team's hard work was worth the time spent. The Libraries now has a basis for additional cuts, and much of the upfront work for cuts in the next few years has been done. This was an excellent exercise, too, to articulate the Libraries' collections priorities, as well as the priorities of faculty. The budget for the 15–16 fiscal year will probably be about 7%, and the work done for the 2014–2015 budget cut will assist with making decisions. It is more difficult to plan for budget cuts when the future is uncertain, but, with extra work and creation of scenarios, libraries can be prepared when the time comes.