Review in Motion: Multi-Year Electronic Resources Review at UTA Libraries

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Abstract

With a flat budget and ever increasing inflation for serials, UTA Libraries chose to embark on a

multi-year electronic resources review process. Targeting low hanging fruits, the first step was to

review subscription journals included in aggregator databases. This initial review process was

also a relatively straightforward step to help new liaisons in a newly created Outreach &

Scholarship department to get their "feet wet" with collection development. As liaisons become

more acclimated, the second step in the following year is to review all single e-journal

subscriptions, distributed amongst all liaisons. Guidelines and metrics are created to facilitate the

review in addition to liaisons' empirical knowledge through their engagement with users. The

third step is to review all databases and sustain a regular database review interval going forward.

In the presentation, we will share with you our findings, guidelines, and metrics of the process.

Background

University of Texas at Arlington Libraries has operated under a flat materials budget for the past

five years. During these years, however, serial prices steadily increased and, in some cases,

increased dramatically (Bosh & Henderson, 2012). With inflation added to the baseline each year,

it created a snow-ball effect, making it more and more challenging to sustain existing serials, let

alone acquire new resources. Four years ago, 80% of our material budget was for serials. The

number keeps going up, and is now at 97%. We have shrunk the monographic budget to shore up

serials each year and implemented multiple DDA programs to meet users' needs for books in

time. More needs to be done, especially on the serials' side. Although we were not preparing for

a "Budget-ocalypse" (Enoch & Harper, 2015), we had reached a point of unsuitability of our

resources. We chose to embark on a multi-year electronic resources review process where we

first reviewed subscription journals also included in aggregator databases. The following year we

reviewed all subscription journals. The third step will be to review all databases and sustain a

regular database review interval going forward. We are very attentive to any impact on our users.

The multi-year review plan is designed to minimize impact and create gradual buy-in from

campus especially faculty.

University of Texas at Arlington Libraries went through a library-wide reorganization in 2013 to

realign the library with the university's vision. We placed a strong emphasis on engaging with

faculty and students. The Outreach and Scholarships department was created to facilitate library

liaisons' efforts with faculty. However, many liaisons were new to their role and did not have

any collection management experience. Collection management in many ways is a science as

much as an art. Close knowledge of how faculty and students use our resources give meaning to

the usage and cost data. Building relationships with faculty and gaining such knowledge takes time. However our budget situation demanded immediate action.

Opportunities

We decided to start with a low hanging fruit: the De-duplication Project. Over the years, as titles were changed or transferred, and as companies changed ownership, many our subscription journals also appeared in aggregator databases. There are some cases where such duplication makes sense, for example, embargoes on extended content. But in many cases, they do not. We pay for access twice to aggregators and publishers in addition to processing fees to subscription agents. With the instability of aggregator title lists in mind, we may potentially re-subscribe when requested by users to meet their need "just in time." Another reason for this initial approach was to use it as a training opportunity to help new liaisons get their "feet wet" with collection management. They learned more about databases in their subject areas and how durable titles were in these databases. For the review, they evaluated coverage and embargo information and made a decision on whether or not to keep the subscription. The serials team identified subscription journals, which also appear in aggregator databases, by comparing subscription titles against our full-text titles in our link resolver's knowledgebase. The following fields are set up in an Access database: title information, cost data, fund codes, subscription agents, decision checkboxes, and notes. Figure 1. Liaisons queried the database and identified titles based on fund codes in certain subject areas. They then recorded their decision, as well as notes. Using an Access database offered the advantage of allowing multiple staff to work on it concurrently; and progress and decisions could be easily queried and tracked. Project guidelines (Appendix A) and training sessions were offered to help liaisons understand the project's objectives and familiarize them with Access tables and queries.

The review went smoothly; there were only a few titles which needed additional deliberation. Results were given back to the serials team before the subscription renewal deadline. $75,000 in savings was generated from cancelling duplicate subscriptions as a result of the review. Also, liaisons were exposed to additional evaluation factors, such as COUNTER usage data, cost-per-use, interlibrary loan requests, and so on. They now have a stake in the collection management process.

For the Serials Review we initially wanted to consider all online subscriptions, outside of our largest "big deal" packages. We definitely wanted to get the biggest "bang for our buck" regarding the number of subscriptions evaluated versus potential savings. The serials team pulled our subscription lists from our two subscription agents and realized that the process would go much more quickly if we skipped membership or combination titles for now and returned to them at a later review. We also realized how many smaller packages we carried with our subscription agents, such as the University of Chicago and the Royal Society of Chemistry, and removed those as well. We were then left with a list of about 530 individual subscriptions which cost about $600,000.

The Outreach & Scholarship Department brainstormed six thresholds of criteria (Appendix B) to evaluate for the Serials Review. With the idea that if a subscription met one threshold it would move onto the next, but if the subscription did not meet a threshold the evaluation ended there. Liaisons were encouraged to consider any duplicated access at the first threshold level, in case the De-duplication Project from the previous year missed any stragglers. If there was complete overlap in access, such as within an aggregated database, they were told to cancel the individual subscription. However, if the access overlap was partial, such as with an embargo period, the liaison was encouraged to consider if the potentially missing content was vital to its related

discipline. More often than not, liaisons decided partial overlap with another source did not justify cancelling the standalone subscription. Other thresholds included the number of UTA faculty publishing in the journal as well as JCR/SJR rankings. For the JCR/SJR rankings, journals ranked within the top 10% of their discipline were initially promoted to the next threshold within the review process. However, after 2-3 test examinations, it was decided to change the percentage to 5%. The change prompted about 10 more title cancellations and about $10,000 more in savings. In the end, from this first run of the Serials Review, we cancelled 100 titles and saved about $120,000. In the future we will evaluate online memberships, "big deals," and print serials.

For the Database Review we want to consider all databases or database-like (in function or cost) resources. Large e-journal packages will likely be considered in this review. Although the metrics for a database review may seem endless, we will focus on audience, impact, and relevance. Due to our organization's re-organization and change in leadership within the past five years, our databases in particular have not been holistically reviewed in several years. In the interim we gained a new university president and our largest academic programs, Engineering and Nursing, have substantially grown. With the Database Review, liaisons will be able to connect on a deeper level with their faculty and departments based on their prior review experience. This will also be a new opportunity to discuss how to best steward our financial resources to meet growing or new programs and initiatives on campus.

Conclusion

With a flat budget and ever increasing serials inflation, UTA Libraries has successfully embarked on multi-year savings projects. Online access redundancies were addressed with the De-duplication Project and Serials Review, while the upcoming Database Review will be the spring cleaning action which the majority of our collections' budget has not had in years. These review projects have been instrumental in teaching newly minted liaisons within the recently formed Outreach & Scholarship department the basic tenets of collection management. These cost saving measures have also provided them fodder to forge new relationships with their departments and opportunities for fostering innovative partnerships. Designing the multi-year review process has instigated new workflows, such as an ongoing/annual Database Review and a complete overhaul of the workflow for resource suggestion. Technical services staff members within Access & Discovery have benefitted from the increased data population within their recently implemented electronic resource management system and have learned how to offer better internal customer service. Having proactively experienced varying collection review cycles, liaisons can now handle incoming requests from faculty with ease and are more familiar with their subject areas' strengths, weaknesses, and pressing needs. Due to the small bit of cushion present in this fiscal year's budget, a new knowledge management review committee has been formed to evaluate how the savings can be best spent.

References

Bosch, S. & Henderson, K. (2012). Coping with the Terrible Twins. *Library Journal*, *137* (8),

28-32.

Enoch, T., Harper, K. (2015). Planning for the Budget-ocalypse: The Evolution of a Serials/ER

Cancellation Methodology. *The Serials librarian*, 68 (1-4), 282-289.

Appendix A

Criteria for De-duplication Project

- Review the various information parts of the Access form related to each title, especially the following:

    o Title format (print, online or print + online

    o Access date coverage

    o Publisher Access Model and Access Model Notes

    o IP Authentication

    o Open Access

    o Perpetual Access

    o Review three tabs (Database Coverage EBSCO E-STATS EBSCO PRINT STATS)

    o Need to check current database links in the Summon E-Journals tab, as titles may have left one database for another since the SFX harvesting was done last October

    o Liaison Decision

        ▪ Liaison Decision options are: Keep / Cancel / Pending

        ▪ If choosing to "keep" or "cancel", put into the "Notes" box a brief reason why, so in the future if we need to justify a decision, we will know.

        ▪ If working independently and the "pending" option is chosen, put into the "Notes" box reason that a consultation is needed and select the librarian you want to "consult" with using the drop down arrow in the "Consult" box. Then send an email regarding why you need to consult with them.

Appendix B

Outreach & Scholarship Threshold Criteria for Serials Review

- Threshold 1: Cost per use in the previous year

    o Cost per use is less than $50

- Threshold 2: JCR ranking

    o JCR ranking is less than 20

- Threshold 3: # of total uses in the previous year

    o # of overall uses is greater than 40

- Threshold 4: # of UT Arlington faculty publishing in the journal

    o # of UT Arlington faculty publishing in the journal is 3 or more

- Threshold 5: Liaison knowledge of research in their discipline

    o Liaison justifies keeping the journal despite the metrics by providing discipline

       specific evidence. These will be reviewed by O&S Department Heads.

Figure 1