University Library Committee 2008-09 Annual Report

Submitted by Gordon Sayre, Professor of English and ULC chair
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The University Library Committee had an active agenda this past year, with a number of important issues to discuss. The necessity to again cut serials subscriptions was one task, but the committee spent a larger part of its meetings discussing ways to protect the rights and interests of faculty authors, and promote Open Access scholarly publishing. In the internet age scholarly communications has been changing very quickly, and the University library must position itself so as to benefit from these changes, rather than suffer from them.

Serials Cancellations:

In recent years, costs for collections and access overall have risen 7-9% annually, and prices for many journal titles have grown at an even faster rate. Growth in the library's budget has been much more modest. Hence the need to cancel serials is not the result of a sudden crisis, but has taken on aspects of a routine. However, the cuts were very severe this year, 25-30% in most budget lines. Also, the structure of the library's serials purchases has changed since the previous round of cancellations in 2003-04. Today, 90% of the journal titles in our collection are electronic only, and many are provided through large packages such as Project Muse and Science Direct. The separate fund lines for various disciplines are no longer truly separate.

The serials cancellation process was carried out primarily in February through April, with input from subject specialists, departmental library representatives, and the faculty as a whole. As a faculty member in the humanities, I am very concerned at the concomitant cuts in the library's monograph acquisitions budget.

Library Web Page:

At our November meeting the ULC previewed the new Summit and UO library web interface that has since gone live. The new page, designed by OCLC, provides much better integration of World Cat and Summit resources with the UO's own collections, and offers features which frequent users of Amazon and Googlebooks have come to expect. It is among the most visible changes for UO library users in recent years. The ULC endorsed this expenditure, even in the face of the serials cuts mentioned above.

The "Big Idea" of Undergraduate Research:

In 2008 the Provost's office, first under Linda Brady and then James Bean, initiated a process of identifying Big Ideas that would guide the UO's fundraising and academic excellence priorities for years to come. The development of these ideas was lively during the fall term, and in December and January members of the ULC decided to draft a "Big Idea" and submit it to the committee chosen to select the winning ideas. Ours came to be called "Undergraduate Research: Teaching the Scholarly Method." Its goals were to encourage faculty teaching large-enrollment undergraduate core courses in many disciplines and majors to integrate research methods into these course syllabi and assignments. It was inspired in part by a similar initiative at the University of California at Berkeley. Although the idea ultimately was not selected by the committee, the process was a worthwhile exercise.

Open Access Resources:

Many librarians and faculty agree that the best long-term solution to rising serials costs and diminishing library collections is open access publishing, controlled by faculty authors and editors, rather than by for-profit publishers. The UO library has tried hard to be at the forefront of the open access movement. One aspect of this effort has been to encourage UO faculty to choose to publish their work in open access journals or to retain some of their copyrights following publication. This goal requires ongoing education and outreach efforts. In December, a delegation from the UO, including JQ Johnson (Director Scholarly Communication and Instructional Support), Dev Sinha, (Professor of Mathematics) and myself, attended an ARL/ACRL Institute workshop on Scholarly Communication held in Portland. Methods of reaching out and educating faculty about scholarly communication issues was a major theme at this meeting, along with the use of institutional repositories as a vehicle for electronic publication. In some disciplines, electronic publication of preprints or working papers, whether at a central archive such as arXiv.org or on a researcher's own webpage, has become the dominant method of scholarly communication. In light of this development, one might well ask why universities continue to pay large sums for journals where the same research is subsequently "published." The function of journals as validating the research they publish has become separated from the function of dissemination that we generally associate with publishing. Can universities sponsor electronic archives that will both disseminate and legitimate their faculty's and students' work? The UO's institutional repository, Scholars' Bank, has grown relatively slowly and faces many of the same challenges as those at other universities.

During spring term, the library committee helped design and implement an Open Access Publishing Support Fund, using $50,000 appropriated by the Provost. These monies are awarded to faculty who publish articles in open access journals, and go to pay the page fees that many such journals charge, fees that often exceed those for traditional subscription journals. This program serves to raise faculty awareness about scholarly publishing issues. However, there was concern on the committee that it exacerbates inequities between the humanities, where journals generally do not charge page fees at all, and the sciences, where such fees have become "a cost of doing business" and thus often a budget line on grant applications. For the 2009-10 year, I plan to lead the committee in discussions of how to redress this inequity. One possibility may be to create a similar fund to help pay the subvention costs charged by many publishers of scholarly monographs.

My predecessor as ULC chair, Dev Sinha, has been a leader in a related open access initiative, the creation of textbooks for large enrollment courses, such as in his home department of Mathematics, that would avoid the high prices, pointless new editions, and lack of control that plague the textbook industry. Dev has made progress with this effort, and we hope to monitor developments over the coming year.