

# *Removing Walls of Distrust*

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## **Abstract**

Multiple serials cancellation projects have sometimes contributed to faculty distrust of the library and its staff. This was the case at Andrews University until librarians and faculty formed a team to deal with the serials crisis and develop a new climate of shared understanding and collaboration.

## **Introduction**

The serials crisis has received major attention from academic librarians during the past ten years or so. Its economic impact on library budgets, often leading to multiple journal cancellations, is well documented. What is not so well documented is the effect of the crisis on faculty attitudes toward the library and librarians. Some articles dealing with the economic issues and strategies allude briefly to faculty disenchantment with journal cancellations. One such comment: "Any bibliographer, selector, or collection development librarian that has gone through a major serial cancellation project bears the scars inflicted by faculty who feel that their favorite journals are the target of unenlightened cost containment efforts."<sup>1</sup>

A few articles have reported significant faculty involvement in serials management. Three that report positive faculty response deserve mention. Paul Metz, in a 1992 article, describes a serials cancellation project at Virginia Tech where there was extensive faculty involvement.<sup>2</sup> In 1997,

librarians at Louisiana State University published results of a landmark serials restructuring project.<sup>3</sup> And more recently (1999) an article by Richard Fyffe and Paul Kobulnicky describes and analyzes a serials strategy at University of Connecticut, again with faculty involvement.<sup>4</sup> In his 1992 article Metz notes that "when a variety of criteria are used in a flexible manner (i.e., with sensitivity to human judgment), and when faculty are consulted, the library can both minimize damage to its collections and avoid unnecessary strife or loss of its status or authority. . . . The fear some faculty have of what those idiots in the library might do if left to their own devices can be our most powerful source of leverage in motivating faculty participation."<sup>5</sup>

## **The Crisis at Andrews University**

Located in southwest Michigan, Andrews University is a private Seventh-day Adventist university, founded in 1962 when a liberal arts college and a seminary were amalgamated. Approximately 3,000 students are enrolled in five schools (Arts and Sciences, Education, Business, Seminary, and Technology) and a Division of Architecture. There are numerous graduate programs, including Ph.D. programs in religion and education. Several distance education programs serve students beyond North America. The James White library consists of the main library and two branches, and a total staff of 29 plus student assistants. Collections number

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about 700,000 print volumes, besides an extensive array of electronic resources.

From 1989 to 1998 the campus endured ten years of multiple serial cancellation projects, due to a periodicals budget which failed to keep pace with price inflation. By the end of that time the faculty were weary of cancellation projects and some schools and departments were openly critical and suspicious of the library's collection development agenda. Distrust was especially apparent within the science faculties.

Although the serials cancellation episodes were undoubtedly the main factor in undermining trust, there were other contributing factors. Inadequate communication of book order spending and budget allocation bred misunderstandings in some departments. A sleepy and ineffective faculty library committee, lacking representation from the corridors of power, simply yawned when major issues were presented. Meanwhile, the library was undergoing a metamorphosis that involved administrative reorganization, a new "ownership plus access" paradigm, and new service models. These changes were not well understood by most faculty, in spite of informative newsletters and occasional presentations at meetings.

Sensing a deteriorating climate, the library began to implement new initiatives in 1997. A librarian liaison system, matching librarians with all schools and departments, encouraged regular communication and consultation in matters of collection development, and received a positive response on both sides. The weak faculty library committee was replaced by a much enlarged James White Library Council with school deans among its members. Chaired by the VP for Academic Administration, it became pro-active in dealing with library issues.

But the major assault on the walls of distrust came in 1999 after yet another journal cancellation project. In September the library director proposed that a twelve-member team of librarians and faculty be appointed to analyze the serials crisis and come up with a plan to resolve it. The idea was well received and within a month the Periodicals Task Force, composed of seven librarians and five faculty, and chaired by the library director, had begun its work. The team was asked to respond to several issues: the periodicals budget crisis, reduced access to scholarly information, the special needs of off-campus programs, and opportunities created by digital technologies.

### **How the Task Force Functioned**

At the first meeting it became clear that while the librarians

understood the serials crisis and its implications fairly well, the faculty team members did not. To remedy this, all team members accepted specific assignments to review recent literature dealing with the serials crisis, so that the team could reach a shared level of understanding. All but one took the assignment seriously and reported back to the group on the article(s) they had read.

Members quickly realized that the serials crisis was having a profound effect on their library's resources. The combined effect of three elements—the explosive growth of scholarly publishing, the steep inflation of journal prices, and an almost stagnant budget for periodicals—meant that the James White Library owned a rapidly declining percentage of available periodical resources.<sup>6</sup> It was not realistic to expect the university to fund annual budget increases equal to journal price inflation, and even if that were possible, it would merely maintain the status quo. There would still be no money for adding new titles. Unless a way could be found to expand access to scholarly literature, the library would continue to be a depleting reservoir of information.

The task force turned its attention to electronic resources. Again there was a gap of understanding within the team, so the group scheduled a session in the instruction lab, seeing demonstrations of the library's full-text databases and the recently acquired JSTOR. Members learned about "rental versus ownership" and issues of image quality, content reliability, preservation and guaranteed access. They also studied the possibilities of document delivery.

It became apparent that guaranteed access to journal information was important for some schools and programs, but not others. The seminary, with its doctoral programs, wanted nothing less than full ownership of resources, while several undergraduate programs were satisfied with "renting" access to current full-text. It seemed that a line could be drawn from "archiving" at one end to "rented access" at the other, and each department or program would find its niche somewhere along the continuum between the two points. Diverse needs might be met by designing tailored packages of options ranging all the way from print subscriptions through e-journals, electronic back-files, full-text access, and document delivery.

In February 2000, after four months of intensive work, the task force submitted "Periodicals Plan 2000" to the library's Resources Development Committee. The bold and innovative proposal outlined a twelve-point plan for serials management and growth, with an emphasis on meeting specific needs of departments and programs.

### Key Elements of "Periodicals Plan 2000"

Ultimately the challenge of the task force was to figure out how any plan could be fiscally successful. Without a strategy here, the serials crisis would simply continue in a modified form. So the plan called for several budget initiatives. The first involved broadening the periodicals budget to include, in addition to print, e-journals, full-text databases, and document delivery. This would replace separate budgets for periodicals and electronic resources.

Next, the plan proposed a shift of funds from the book budget to periodicals. Historically, James White Library has enjoyed a generous book budget<sup>7</sup> while periodicals have stagnated with an average annual increase of only 3 percent. So in fiscal 2001 the James White Library Council approved a transfer of 10 percent of the current book budget to periodicals after it was shown that no academic department would receive less than its actual average book expenditure during the preceding three years. This assurance was particularly important to the arts and humanities departments.

Of critical importance to the plan would be a commitment by the university to provide an annual increase in the serials budget equal to half of the published average price increase for all periodicals. Without this commitment the plan would founder. The university budget committee accepted this objective and immediately provided a 5 percent increase for the 2001 fiscal year. A major test came in November 2000 when, due to an enrolment decline, the committee decreed an across-the-board reduction of all budgets in fiscal 2002. In spite of this directive, however, the committee approved a 6 percent increase for the periodicals budget.

A key element of the plan involved collaboration with faculty in profiling needs of individual academic departments. Librarians would seek meetings with individual departments to discover how the plan could best work for them. Cooperation from faculty was needed in developing a profile of a department's library needs, and in reviewing its current subscription list. Faculty would be asked to review all high-inflation, low-use journals for potential replacement with self-service document delivery from a much broader array of journals than the library could ever afford by subscription.

### Implementation of the Plan

It was clear from the start that the new plan could only succeed if faculty embraced it. It was also important for all librarians to fully understand the plan and support its imple-

mentation. Library departments directly affected would be Periodicals, Information Services (instruction and interlibrary loan), and Bibliographic Services (cataloging). The following were steps in implementing the new plan.

- The library's Resources Development Committee received the plan and recommended it to the James White Library Council. The council's approval was an important first step.

- A 10-minute PowerPoint program was prepared and presented at meetings of each school faculty, usually with time for questions. These presentations were a team effort by the library director, periodicals librarian, and librarian liaisons, and were well received. Other opportunities for publicity included the library's newsletter *Unclassified*.

- All liaisons were involved in training sessions, in preparation for meetings with academic departments.

- Appointments were sought with individual department faculties. Most chairs were cooperative in scheduling either a special meeting or allotting time during a regular meeting. The periodicals librarian led in the presentations, assisted by the liaisons and sometimes the director. These meetings were time consuming, but were important to assure that faculty understood the crisis and the dynamics of the new plan, to gain their help in profiling their dependence on periodical resources and their participation in title evaluation. Getting the surveys back within a defined time frame was a daunting task, and in most cases there was only partial faculty response. This stage of implementation was scheduled for completion in May 2000, but it was October before the majority of departments had been successfully visited.

- Once the profiles and surveys were done, the periodicals librarian worked with the director and the liaisons in putting together unique resource "packages" for each department. From the library's menu of resources, librarians selected a mix of products relevant to the department. Product options included print, e-journals, JSTOR back-files, full-text databases, current awareness services (Current Contents profiles and UnCover Reveal), and unmediated document delivery.

- Once a package was developed, the periodicals librarian and liaison again sought a meeting with the department. Reaction to the packages ranged from mild appreciation to enthusiasm. Small modifications were sometimes made during these visits. Training sessions in the use of current awareness and document delivery services were also scheduled at this time, either in the department or the library instruction lab. By December 2000 about one half of all

departments had their “packages”, and faculty training sessions had already been conducted for several groups.

**Is the Plan a Success?**

Although implementation is far from complete, all the indications are that the new plan is a success. From a fiscal perspective, the plan will meet its target during its first year, and the outlook for 2002 is very encouraging. The combined strategies of book money transfer to periodicals, voluntary journal cancellations, and on-target budget increases, has already allowed funding for two JSTOR modules, Current Contents online, several new journal subscriptions, and a document delivery service. The Ariel system has been installed for the interlibrary loan unit.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the plan has the confidence and support of university administration and the faculty at large. Although the James White Library has been subscribing to a number of full-text databases for several years, these were not understood by faculty as possible alternatives to their print subscriptions. The new plan represents a real paradigm shift which is increasingly understood and supported by faculty, as they perceive that the library is no longer losing ground as a result of the serials crisis and title cancellations.

Most departments have been very cooperative in adapting to the new plan. Offers of free current awareness and document delivery have sometimes acted as “carrots” for approving cancellations of high-cost, low-use journals. Initially we encountered suspicion from arts and humanities faculty who feared that their book budgets were being slashed to provide more journal resources for the sciences. The fear was allayed when it was shown that no department would receive less book budget than its average expenditure during the preceding three years.

Finally, and most gratifying of all, new relationships of trust and collegiality are being forged between librarians and faculty. By involving faculty, first in the Task Force and then in the implementation process, we have learned a great deal about faculty use of library resources. We have discovered that disciplines are extremely diverse in their use of scholarly information. This knowledge is helping us serve

them better in ways beyond the periodicals plan. Several faculty have been vocal in appreciation for what the library is doing for them. In other cases hostility has been replaced with a degree of respect and confidence.

Implementation is ongoing. Half of the campus departments have been set up with new resource packages, including sciences, education, business, behavioral science and social work. Little has yet been done with the seminary, arts and humanities, and some health science departments. These were less urgent in terms of the budget crisis and their electronic resource needs. A formal evaluation of the project will begin in the summer of 2001.

**Notes**

1. Donald B. Simpson, “Solving the Challenges Presented by Electronic Resources: Creating Opportunities Through Inter-Institutional Collaboration,” *Journal of Library Administration* 24, no. 4 (1997): 51.
2. Paul Metz, “Thirteen Steps to Avoiding Bad Luck in a Serials Cancellation Project,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 18, no. 2 (May 1992): 75–80.
3. Jane P. Kleiner and Charles A. Hamaker, “Libraries 2000: Transforming Libraries Using Document Delivery, Needs Assessment, and Networked Resources,” *College & Research Libraries* 58, no. 4 (July 1997).
4. Richard C. Fyffe and Paul J. Obulnick, “Negotiating the Soul of the Library: Change Management in Information Access and Local Collection Development,” *Journal of Library Administration* 28, no. 4, 17–35.
5. Metz, 77
6. Brian Hawkins presents a dramatic illustration of the effects of the serials crisis in his “The Unsustainability of the Traditional Library and the Threat to Higher Education,” in *The Mirage of Continuity: Reconfiguring Academic Information Resources for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Council on Library and Information Resources and the American Association of Universities (1998): 135.
7. For several years the Andrews book budget has exceeded in actual dollars the book budget allocations of all but one of Michigan universities (public and private) with enrollments of 10,000 or less. That conclusion is based on *Michigan Library Statistical Report* published at intervals by the Library of Michigan.

