



# ACCESS

## NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AT NOTRE DAME

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### Scholarly Journals: Needs vs. Costs

by Maureen Gleason

Library journal collections are being seriously threatened in both quality and quantity by the diminishing ability of libraries to meet the escalating cost of serials. Consider these statistics:

\*Between 1971 and 1988, the median price of a serial rose 250%; the Consumer Price Index rose 182%.

\*Between 1986 and 1989, increases have been averaging over 9% per year for U.S. journals and 18% per year for journals published abroad.

\*Between 1978-79 and 1988-89, the median number of serials held by U.S. research libraries increased only 9.4%, while the median expenditure for serials rose 153.6%.

\*Between 1973 and 1987, while the number of serials published worldwide grew by 55%, the average of this number held by research libraries fell from 30% to 26%.

\*At the same time the percent of their materials budget devoted to serials went from 40% to 56%.

Discouraging as these figures are, the cost projections for this year are even more alarming. U.S. journals will probably cost 9-12% more; journals published abroad, 25% to 30%. Notre Dame has been notified of increases like these:

*Applied Economics*: \$425 to \$730 (71.8%)

*Computers & Fluids*: \$375 to \$825 (125%)

*Gene*: \$1721 to \$2461 (43%)

*International Journal of Fracture*: \$437 to \$1,112 (154.5%)

*Journal of Applied Polymer Science*: \$1,295 to \$2,243 (73.2%)

Southern Speech Communication Association: 4 journals, each \$45 to \$90 (100%)

The journals of a major journal publisher, Pergamon, will cost 90% more next year. This means that 25 publications for which we paid \$16,980 this year will cost \$32,642 next year. These include *History of European Ideas*, *Government Publications Review*, *World Development* as well as *European Journal of Cancer*, *Tetrahedron* and *Water Research*.

Why is this happening?

Widespread research activity, the development of new specialties and the pressure to publish to gain recognition and tenure has produced a swelling stream of articles. New journals have consequently sprung up, older ones have put forth "twigs" or have added issues. In the latter two cases, libraries have no choice but to pay higher prices if they want to continue to receive the original journal. Publication by university presses and societies has decreased in favor of profit-making publishers. A few of the latter almost monopolize the publishing of prestigious scientific journals. In 1987 Louisiana State University did a study of three publishers, Elsevier, Pergamon and Springer-Verlag, responsible for supplying more than 1,300 journals, and found that they accounted for 2% of LSU's subscriptions, but 20% of its serials costs and 43% of the annual increase in serials costs.

Is there excessive profit-taking? The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) commissioned a study in 1989 which concluded that the subscription prices charged by the four publishers examined increased much more rapidly than their costs. The publishers dispute this, pointing to the high start up

costs they incur, the limited audience for specialized titles as well as a variety of inflation-affected costs not sufficiently accounted for by the study.

Another influential factor that cannot be ignored, since so many expensive titles are published overseas, is the weakened dollar. Some estimates say that unfavorable exchange rates account for as much as 50% of the increases in cost for foreign serials.

No matter what the causes, the situation is moving from difficult to untenable. Journal publishers have assumed that because scholars need the information their journals contain, pressure will be put on libraries to pay the price. In many cases even our largest libraries are no longer able to do so. Here are actions taken by three among the ten largest university libraries in the United States, two state-controlled, one private. One library canceled \$420,000 worth of serials between July 1 and October 1, 1990. About a quarter of the money went toward supporting a monograph budget that had been eroded to an insupportable level, however, another 12% cut in serials next year is likely. They speak of a new concept of their library, no longer a national resource but one supporting its primary clientele. Another library, forced to cut \$370,000 in serials over the past four years, accepts the diminution of some of their outstanding collections. Most recently this library canceled 400 titles, 70% the only copy on campus, and 60% of these science titles. The chief collection development officer of yet another major university library recently met with the university's science advisory committee to propose a radical solution. Since this university's particular distinctions are in humanities fields, he asked them to think about alternatives to the \$1.6 million serials budget, such as purchase of copies of articles as needed, or sharing support of a nearby university's serials collection and emphasizing enhanced document delivery. Neither of these paths may be taken, but clearly all will not be as it was, and the discussion is continuing as to how to achieve academic goals in an affordable manner.

Broader, more long-range solutions are also being sought. The ARL study of serials prices recommended a concerted effort to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation, including a "consumer report" on serials prices and publisher practices, research on costs and alternatives, education and publicity, targeted protest actions and promotion of cooperation. The Association is actively working with scholarly organizations in a variety of fields to mount a joint attack on the problem. Other recommendations were that non-profit channels such as universities, scholarly organizations, government agencies be encouraged to publish the results of research. Obviously, any such independent publishers must be able to at least achieve the academic quality and speed of publication of the commercial publisher at an acceptable price. ARL is

committed to assist such entities to locate subsidies for start up costs. Experimentation with the publication of electronic journals has also begun. Reduced pressure on faculty members by universities or granting agencies to submit large numbers of publications for grant applications and tenure would also help. Finally, libraries are encouraging each other to make their views known to those publishers whose cost increases are exorbitant, by refusing to subscribe if possible. The ARL Office of Scientific and Academic Publishing has distributed lists of faculty members on advisory boards of these publishers so that their assistance can be enlisted in modifying present practices.

Notre Dame has not been spared the consequences of this unfortunate situation. The University Libraries purchase approximately 13,000 serials, at a cost of just under \$1.5 million. Between 1978-79 and 1988-89, the number of our subscriptions rose 14%, and our serials expenditures by 164.4%, both higher than median figures for ARL libraries. In contrast to the common pattern for libraries, Notre Dame's percent of materials budget devoted to serials dropped from 54.9% in 1978-79 to 52% in 1988-89. One reason for this phenomenon is the very great increase in our endowment income which made many more dollars available for book purchases. A deliberate effort to strengthen our serials collection, decimated by cancellations in the 1960's and 1970's, also contributed. For several years, funds were designated for new subscriptions. When rising costs made that unsustainable, individual disciplines could reflect priorities by transferring money from book funds to cover the serials they regarded as most important. Even now, we hope to be able to sustain the improvements we have made in our serials collection. Unfortunately, the dramatic escalation in costs has put the major expansion of that collection, which many of you desire, beyond our reach.

Furthermore, prudence dictates that we do what other libraries are doing: namely, join with faculty members in exploring alternative ways of supporting research. How can we best utilize the funds available to provide the information you need, when you need it and in a usable form? Under what circumstances would purchase of reprints of articles make more economic and academic sense than subscribing to the journal? What potential is there for information transmitted electronically? Can we improve joint decision-making and document delivery sufficiently to make resource sharing work, in even a limited way? What level of price increase should trigger consideration of cancellation? The University Libraries will be challenging you with these questions, and others, as we attempt to fulfill our mission in the face of the reality of soaring serials costs.