MARION T. REID

Coping with Budget Adversity: The Impact of the Financial Squeeze on Acquisitions

Effects of budget adversity on acquisitions procedures in research libraries were studied through visits to ten ARL libraries, interviews with more than 100 individuals, a literature search, and consultation of current ARL library annual reports. The findings are reported in three sections: (1) organization and procedures; (2) budget considerations; and (3) selection. The most positive result noted is the speed with which libraries are developing cooperative acquisitions programs.

THE PROBLEM OF REDUCED or virtually frozen library budgets is a national one. Indeed, William S. Dix warns, "This is the day of adversity, and most university libraries are going to have to make do for a while with relatively less money than we have become accustomed to."[1] H. William Axford concurs, urging more efficiency: "Real progress in making the library a vital and dynamic center for inspiration and information . . . cannot be gained during a severe budget crisis unless our labor-intensive organizations can achieve a higher level of manpower utilization than is now generally the case." He further observes, "It is clearly in the interest of the profession and its users that the motivation for change be internal."[2]

If libraries have less money to spend, they are presumably buying fewer titles. Without as many books to process, what are they doing with the acquisitions personnel left? For the most part, there is no leftover personnel. In some cases, technical services staffs were not increased when book budgets were in the 1960s. Acquisitions personnel had more to spend; they began buying books in exotic languages that were more difficult to obtain; their card catalogs and order files became more complex as more entries were added, so more time was required for searching. In other cases, acquisitions staffs have been cut as much as 20 percent—primarily by attrition. In still other cases, libraries have reorganized, shifting positions from acquisitions functions to other areas. Such manpower loss seems to exceed the amount of work lost through budget cuts. So how are acquisitions personnel coping with this situation?

To "take a hard look at the whole sequence of functions and procedures in this area"[3] of acquisitions, the author visited libraries at the following ten universities: Columbia University, Cornell University, the University of North Carolina, the University of Oklahoma, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, Southern Illinois University,

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the University of Tennessee, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and the University of Utah. According to Association of Research Libraries (ARL) statistics from 1969–70 through 1972–73, the total expenditures for books and binding for nine of these schools were reduced at some point or remained virtually static, thus causing a loss of buying power. Although the library at the tenth school—the University of Tennessee—had not suffered financial acquisitions setbacks within the past five years, it was included in the study because it is practicing economies that should be considered by research libraries that are affected by budget adversity. In addition to the information gained from interviews with over 100 people at these ten universities, the author has drawn on information in the literature, thirty current annual reports received from ARL libraries not visited, and personal experience at the Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge) Library.

Organization and Procedures

Several libraries have made organizational changes in an attempt to smooth the flow of work in technical services. Two of them have established groups to act as buffers between acquisitions and cataloging. In one library this group is a section of the acquisitions department; in the other it constitutes an entire department. The primary functions of these groups are to locate Library of Congress card information for titles lacking it and to funnel the books to the proper person or group in the catalog department. One library has a bibliographic search unit which does all searching and verification for acquisitions and for cataloging. To "improve the flow of materials through units, working on backlogs, preparing for automation of processing procedures, processing bulk collections, and serving as a productivity 'yardstick' or procedure evaluation agency and change catalyst to improve methods of handling materials," the UCLA Library established a task force during the 1968–69 year. In 1972 its duties expanded to include collection development and public service assignments. The task force, which was at first under the supervision of the assistant university librarian for systems and technical services, is now a unit of the regular library administrative network with full departmental status.[4]

Staffing

In many acquisitions departments the searching staff is inundated with work during the first fiscal quarter and at loose ends by the end of the year. Two acquisitions librarians stated that, if the searching work load were spread out more evenly during the year, fewer searchers would be needed. Two suggestions for achieving a more even acquisitions work load are: (1) Work out a schedule so (a) the *bulk* of the more difficult-to-obtain items (geographically hard-to-get or bibliographically hard-to-verify) are handled first; and (b) the remainder of the orders to be processed are distributed more evenly over the first half of the fiscal year. (2) Give the acquisitions unit more manpower during its heaviest ordering season by hiring part-time personnel on a temporary basis and/or shifting other library staff to ordering duties on a short-term basis.

To combat the paucity of salary money while being faced with a great amount of work, two libraries have converted each of several vacated professional positions into two support staff positions. Such action requires an evaluation of the remaining professional positions within the department as well as the positions being downgraded so that a general retrenchment of duties occurs, with the most routine tasks delegated to the new support staff.

Two acquisitions departments stress in-depth training of their staffs. Each job can be handled by two or three people. Two people can train others for any support job. Such versatility allows each staff member to understand his department better, and it permits work to continue in spite of professional meetings, illnesses, vacations, and resignations.

Searching Considerations

Stevens suggests verifying entries only for items above average cost, for corporate entries, and for items with difficult personal names.[5] Axford agrees that the main entry should not be established prior to ordering: "A considerable amount of wasted time can be avoided if the acquisitions department confines itself to determining if the library has an item, if it is on order, or if it exists, and leaving the descriptive cataloging to be performed by the catalog department after the item arrives."[6] If the search unit *is* responsible for providing the catalog department with card information (and the majority visited were), then acquisitions personnel should at most look for card information in the two LC/NUC sets in which a card would most likely appear. For example, a 1906 imprint would be searched only in *A Catalog of Books Represented by Library of Congress Printed Cards Issued to July 31, 1942* and in *The National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints,* while a 1957 imprint would be searched only in *Library of Congress and National Union Catalog Author Lists, 1942–1962* and *The National Union Catalog* for 1963–67. A card search for an out-of-print item should be made only *after* the item's availability is verified or after the book has been received.

Nine of the ten libraries visited estimate the cost of a title whose search reveals no price rather than making an exhaustive search in available tools and/or requesting a price quotation from the publisher. Estimates can be based on average trade prices presented in the most recent edition of the *Bowker Annual.* Instructions accompanying purchase orders to dealers can request notification before shipment if a title is more than the estimate shown, thus safeguarding a library against getting a $300 book for which it expected to pay $15.

Items designated "rush" require special handling and stop the normal flow of work, thereby reducing productivity. Available percentages of rush orders in the libraries visited covered the wide range of 2 percent to 21.6 percent. Perhaps more libraries should consider handling fewer titles on a rush basis.

Approval Plans

In four of the eight libraries that had some sort of approval plan, acquisitions librarians emphatically stated that without an approval plan they would not be able to spend their book budgets. This may seem contradictory—if there is less money to spend, why rely on an approval plan? The chief advantage of an approval plan to an acquisitions area is the savings in paperwork: no purchase orders need be generated, for the necessary slips are supplied in the books. There appears, however, to be little savings in the time taken for review of books supplied on approval. Most of the libraries visited have established a routine for the review of approval books by subject librarians. Such a review seems to remain most valid over a long period of time if subject librarians are required to initial the slips of those books they wish to accept. Thus, all books not reviewed are automatically returned rather than automatically retained.

When determining whether or not to maintain an approval plan, the prime concern should be: Is a library's static book budget large enough to include that approval plan? Shepard points out that "the key question is whether the amount you have allocated, or might normally spend on a certain subject area, approaches the estimated cost of books published during the year in that subject."[7]

Forms and File Arrangement

Ford points out that the use of forms in acquisitions work "is an important feature in saving time in repetitive, routine operations and in assuring that work is done accurately and as completely as necessary."[8] Two libraries use in-house forms for problem receipts so that receiving clerks can quickly describe for problem-letter writers what is wrong with a book by checking off appropriate items. This practice allows both the receiving clerk and the problem-letter writer to work independently without having to make time for verbal discussion of each problem. One library has adopted the multilingual several-purpose form letter proposed by Shinn to achieve uniformity in exchange communication.[9]

Two libraries have changed their order file from main entry arrangement to title arrangement for greater speed in checking new orders against the order file. It took twenty people five working days to realphabetize 85,000 slips in one of these libraries. Its file is now displayed in open drawers on waist-high tables so that no user wastes time pulling drawers out in order to look at their contents.

Metcalf points out that "a record should not be kept unless in the long run it saves more time or money than it takes to make and use."[10] One library is removing branch library serials information from its serials Kardex record, for branch holdings are already listed on a computer printout. Two of the eight libraries do without any publishers' and/or dealers' catalogs file, relying on existing searching tools and advertisements or catalogs submitted with orders.

Budgetary Considerations

Obtaining Additional Funds from the University

Aside from doing what one university library did—ordering as usual and then cancelling all outstanding orders midyear when funds are exhausted (a most extreme procedure which is effective as a bargaining tool once at most), it seems that the best possible approach for getting more funds is to assure the university that *any* additional funds given the library will be spent—and then spend any that appear, no matter how late in the fiscal year they are received. One library has a list of priority items already selected so it can spend up to $200,000 extra within a week's time toward the end of the fiscal year.

Dealer Discounts

One library has a bond arrangement with its approval plan dealer whereby the entire approval fund is given the dealer at the beginning of the fiscal year and treated as a deposit account. In return, the dealer gives the library an additional 1 percent discount on approval plan items. Another library bargains with out-of-print booksellers for a discount, assuring a certain amount of business in a given year in exchange for a given discount. One library is using the same dealer for approval plan and continuations as a bargaining point for higher discounts.

Encumbrances

Several public-service area librarians with small funds expressed deep concern that encumbrances from the past fiscal year are being reencumbered against their funds for the present fiscal year. This charges such funds twice for each book not received during the year in which it was ordered. One effective solution offered is that all remaining encumbrances for books ordered during the prior year be deducted from the total book budget at the beginning of the new year and that the remainder then be divided among existing funds.

Serials Economies

The following trends have appeared in reaction to ever-increasing serials commitments: (1) Four of the libraries visited conducted organized reviews of their current serials, with an eye to removing duplicates and/or cutting off any fat that had accumulated during the more lucrative 1960s. (2) Four libraries dissolved their serials budgets by attributing each serial title to a subject fund and giving that fund an appropriate portion of the serials budget to cover the cost of that title. This action makes each subject fund coordinator responsible for cutting old titles to obtain money for ordering new ones. (3) Two libraries notify the appropriate subject bibliographer if a serial titles cost increases drastically. The next renewal is not honored unless that bibliographer has approved continuation.

Gifts and Exchanges Economies

Various libraries make money on unwanted duplicates by selling them to dealers on a bid basis; giving runs of serials to out-of-print dealers in exchange for credit; and selling them to their own faculty and students or to other libraries at bargain rates.

Galejs points out that "libraries should not ignore the possibility of exchanges as a means of serial acquisitions —especially in periods of austerity and reduced funds."[11] One of the libraries visited is converting as many serials as possible from purchase to exchange.

Librarians faced with meager rare book budgets might follow the method used at the Washington University (St. Louis) Library to build its special collection of modern literature. Matheson points out that this library has developed a most valuable collection with very little capital outlay by purchasing books by and requesting literary papers of contemporary writers and poets designated by consultants as people "whose abilities they particularly respected and who they felt stood a good chance of being important in fifty years."[12]

Other Economies

Several libraries have realized savings in other budget areas in order to maintain or add to their book budgets. One library puts book replacement fees directly into the book replacement fund. If a processing charge is added to the cost of the lost book (one library adds a $5 processing fee; another adds $9), this provides a considerable amount of replacement money. Another now contracts its supplies and binding on an annual bid basis. Two libraries are revising their binding requirements to stretch the binding dollar, using cheaper, light adhesive bindings for some titles and having others bound as they are.

Postage Savings

Some postage-saving practices are: Using light-weight stationary for airmail letters; using aerograms for foreign correspondence not typed on form letters and without enclosures; batching correspondence and sending it on a weekly basis; sending all domestic rush orders airmail *except* those mailed on Thursdays and Fridays; sending no domestic correspondence by airmail; and using postcards for serials claims and catalog requests.

Selection

Bruer, in his 1973 review of acquisitions, suggests that a new emphasis on collection development "seems to symbolize the response by acquisitions librarians to the strained budget conditions of recent years."[13] Reduced budgets are forcing changes in selection perspective and level of expectation. Collection development is harder; for although the same quantity of literature must be considered, fewer items may be purchased. Blanket orders are being reviewed annually. Sale and remainder catalogs are used more heavily. Some libraries are ordering reference books on an every-other-edition basis as suggested by Strain.[14] More microforms are being purchased in the interest of economy.

Library administrators expressed grave concern about what the diminishing budget is doing to quality education. A library cannot be a viable research institution if it provides everyday instructional materials alone. Special collections—the research library's most important area—cannot be measured in immediate productivity and may, therefore, be sacrificed for immediate instructional needs, which must be met first. Lyman urges coordination in any dismantling of collections, for "if the job is done on an individual basis, each institution thinking only of its own programs and assuming that no one else is contemplating cutting back in the same area of study, the results will be very bad."[15]

To keep special collections support reduction to a minimum while meeting current patron needs, research libraries are turning to cooperative programs. Eight of the ten libraries visited practice some means of cooperative acquisitions. These vary from a simple exchange of main entry cards between two libraries to the sophisticated coordinated acquisitions program being developed by the Research Libraries Group. Members of the Center for Research Libraries are becoming more dependent upon that center for little-used titles. Dix states that "it is becoming increasingly clear that one of the most promising means of slowing the growth of library costs is the sharing of resources among institutions."[16]

Summary

Librarians are examining structural organization, work procedures, budgetary operations, and selection practices, seeking the most economical measures in this financially bleak era. Such self-examination should be done on a continuing basis to assure that library operations are as streamlined as possible. However, a library can reach a point of efficiency beyond which it can recognize no great budgetary savings. If the internal efficiency is maximized, the only economy measures that can be made are cooperative ones. Perhaps the most valuable result of budget adversity is that it is forcing the still quite imperfect national network of research libraries to emerge as a "coherent, integrated whole"[17] much more rapidly than it would have, had libraries continued to receive the kind of financial support they did in the 1960s.

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ON OUR COVER

The independent research library, represented here by the Newberry Library, was a characteristic product of the philanthropic motivations that have enriched American library resources from the John Carter Brown and the Folger in the East to the Huntington and the Hoover in the West. The Newberry endowment was the richest up to its time, overshadowing the famous Astor fund of mid-century.

Although the Newberry well represents the privately endowed research library, its new building, occupied in November 1893, was a radical departure from traditional library structures. It was the embodiment of the years of thought that its librarian, William Frederick Poole, had given to ways of avoiding the wastefulness and inefficiency of the monumental libraries of the past. Taking account of new materials available to provide flexibility and scorning architectural display at the cost of convenience, the plans provided rooms with substantial natural light and ventilation but without the enormously high ceilings and ornate lobbies of the past. Service was to be offered in subject collections staffed by academically qualified specialists and housed on open shelves accessible to the users. The coupling of these ideas, a flexible building housing subject-oriented collections, took a half century to be adopted widely, but the concept largely began with this building.

The Spanish Romanesque structure itself was the work of a young architect, Henry Ives Cobb, who was employed by the Newberry trustees to serve them exclusively during the early years. Constructed of Connecticut granite, the building was 300 by 60 feet and four stories high. It was projected as only the first side of a future four-sided hollow square to occupy the whole of a city block.

The plan of service, requiring the employment of a large staff of highly qualified and consequently expensive department heads, proved uneconomical for a clientele that, by its concentration upon serious study, was limited in number. The \$550,000 spent for the building and the \$250,000 spent by 1893 for books made the rich endowment seem no longer limitless. As a result, the original plans for quadrupling the size were never carried out. Yet the building has been sufficiently adaptable that only after eighty years has a major addition become an absolute necessity. The original structure will continue to serve as an integral part of a handsome showplace for the rich collection.—*W. L. Williamson, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison.*

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