

Letters



To the Editor:

The article on "The Economics of Professional Journal Pricing" (*C&RL* 57 [Jan. 1996]: 9-21), by Michael A. Stoller et al., contributed to an interesting discussion of price discrimination, but it fails to analyze the causes of the current crisis and presents a poor review of the literature. I feel that it may mislead more than it will inform your readers.

The authors ignore a pivotal factor: how trends in circulation (unit sales) influence pricing decisions. Their heavy reliance on the unsigned Economic Consulting Services (ECS) study might have been a warning of defect. The ECS study admitted that it lacked the circulation data essential to any analysis of profitability. As such it was a spurious basis for its client's accusations of profiteering by publishers and excessive publishing by researchers. The impact of falling circulation has been well documented by Bernard M. Fry and Herbert S. White¹ and accurately forecasted by Donald W. King et al.² Subscriptions to the otherwise successful *Physical Review*, for instance, dropped to one-half the level they were twenty-five years earlier. Unit prices must rise simply to cover costs of editorial preparation and overhead.

Publishers do not operate in a vacuum. The more interesting economic trends are found in the budget priorities of universities. At the root of the falling circulation issue is the failure to provide financial support for libraries commensurate with the growth of research. Financial support (in constant dollars) to libraries increased only 1.4 times between 1977 and 1992, while expenditures for research increased 1.8 times. Database statistics indicate that the worldwide publication of journal articles and reports doubled during that period. Ris-

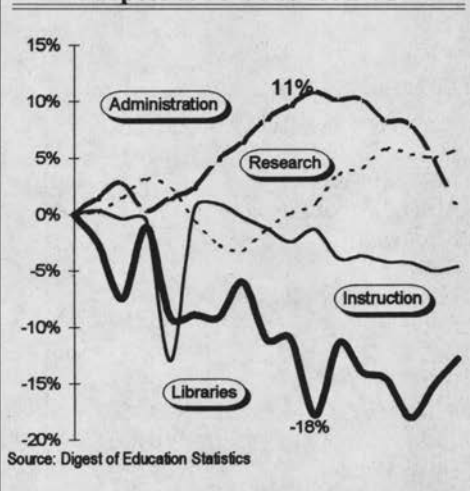
ing library collection failures have led to a skyrocketing demand for interlibrary loan and document-delivery services. This seminal issue of funding has been presented so often—notably in 1976 by Fry and White, in 1984 by Richard Talbot,³ in 1992 by the Advisory Panel for Scientific Publications,⁴ and in 1994/95 by Albert Henderson⁵—that its omission is truly puzzling. A likely contributor to universities' cuts in libraries has been the Weberian growth of administrative expenditures (see graph).

Aside from ignoring these basic economic factors, there are other major faults with this article. Not the least of these are its comparing library users with consumers of drugs, associating journal prices with the *Consumer Price Index*, and quoting that notorious financial illusionist, the late Robert Maxwell, as a reliable source!

Albert Henderson

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Trends in University Expenditures by Purpose 1976-77 to 1992-93



Notes

1. Bernard M. Fry and Herbert S. White, *Publishers and Libraries: A Study of Scholarly and Research Journals* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1976).

2. Donald W. King, Dennis D. McDonald, and Nancy K. Roderer, *Scientific Journals in the United States. Their Production, Use, and Economics* (Hutchinson Ross, 1981).

3. Richard Talbot, "Lean Years and Fat Years: Lessons to Be Learned," in *Bowker Annual 1984* (New Providence, N.J.: R. R. Bowker, 1984), 74-82.

4. Advisory Panel for Scientific Pubs., "The Cost-Effectiveness of Science Journals," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 8.3 (1992): 72-91.

5. Albert Henderson, "The Bottleneck in Research Communications," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 10.4 (1994-95): 5-21; and "Research Journals: A Question of Economic Value," *Logos* 6.1 (1995): 43-46.

To the Editor:

The January 1996 issue of *C&RL* is one of your best! The article by Michael Stoller, Robert Christopherson, and Michael Miranda was especially fine. It is an unexpected pleasure to read a clearly written, cogently reasoned analysis by au-

thors knowledgeable in the field of economics. In the same issue, Terry Meyer and John Spencer mention the "intellectual isolation" of library science. The Stoller et al. article is a step toward ending this isolation. The authors make the excellent point that the users of journals (faculty members) must be made more aware of pricing and price discrimination. An additional point that has been made elsewhere is the suggestion that authors not offer their work to those journals that discriminate; but this will not happen in the current atmosphere of urgency to publish.

It is wonderful to see articles in a library journal by nonlibrarians. More of this would be valuable; we all tend to become too involved in our own outlooks and the interdisciplinary approach is refreshing. More, please!

Jan Zuke
Librarian

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