

Report of Senate Library Committee, May 2016

While the University of Winnipeg Library has faced several issues in the past year, the most important by far has been the ballooning cost of database subscriptions (for both journals and e-books), and this issue dominated the business of the Senate Library Committee over that time frame. Over the long term, the library has been able to plan for sustained database price increases imposed by publishers, which has of course squeezed the portion of the acquisitions budget available for hardcopy books; this year, the poor CAD-USD exchange rate greatly exacerbated the problem since most publishers charge subscription fees in USD. Though hopefully the exchange rate will return to a more manageable level in the near future, the Library and SLC recognize that database subscription costs will nonetheless remain a major issue for academics at the University since library acquisitions are critical for the University's twin functions of teaching and research. The SLC recognizes with gratitude the University's efforts to provide the Library with additional funding to meet some of these challenges.

As a result, the librarians and the SLC held significant discussions regarding how the Library can manage these ongoing and increasing costs. As the SLC heard, we would like to stress that the Library already engages in several cost-cutting measures and is studying other possibilities for saving. Crucially, the University of Winnipeg Library is a member of several consortia which pool funds from several universities and negotiate lower subscription costs. In addition, the Library is working hard to identify savings both in redundancies among databases and in low-usage services that might be canceled without a significant impact on service to the University community. Unfortunately, these efforts are slowed in several ways: there is no unified system to retrieve and organize database usage statistics, many subscriptions can contractually be canceled only at certain times, and in many cases a single desired journal title costs as much as an entire database. The SLC also discussed a number of other ideas. For example, the Library could partner with the University of Manitoba Library to a greater extent, though savings may be offset by the need to increase staff for inter-library loans. In the future, open access publications will likely be a great support to library services at small universities like the University of Winnipeg, but that appears to be some time off due to the lack of alternatives to commercial journal publication except in a few disciplines. Nonetheless, the University Library has been broadly supportive of the open access model, both in educating faculty about methods to meet Tri-Council open access requirements and in joining international, inter-institutional efforts (such as SCOAP3) to promote and reduce costs of open-access publishing.

The costs of subscriptions and their effect on acquisitions were the focus of presentations to the University Senate (by Dean of Libraries Gabrielle Prefontaine) and the broader community (through the SLC-hosted Library Users' Group meeting). The Users' Group meeting in particular highlighted an additional impact of database-based acquisitions --- the old formula for allocating discretionary acquisitions funding to departments is somewhat obsolete because the inter-disciplinary nature of e-book and journal databases makes it impossible to determine what funds have already been allocated to a given department. As a result, the Library plans to consult with department representatives on alternative methods for allocating discretionary acquisitions funding, keeping in mind the varying needs of the different departments. Furthermore, as database subscriptions come up for renewal, Library staff will be asking departments for their cooperation in identifying which subscriptions are more and less important for the library to carry, especially the subscriptions which apply mainly in one discipline. As these processes commence, the SLC asks that faculty think more about whether their department's needs are met in an efficient manner rather than the amount of funding allocated.

The SLC did consider several other issues. For one, the Library faces several problems with its physical space, of which University administration is aware. As these impact the ability of the Library to serve student academic needs, we hope they can be addressed quickly. In addition, inspired by the formation of the ad-hoc Senate Standing Rules Committee, the SLC spent some time discussing its role

and how it can best help the functioning of the University Library. We intend for the SLC to continue in its role as an advisor to and strong advocate for the University Library. In the next year, the SLC plans to hold an organizational meeting, two meetings with the librarians and departmental library representatives (formerly known as SASOL meetings), and one summary meeting at the close of the academic year. We believe this will be a collaborative way for the Library and the broader University community to develop an understanding of “departmental spending” in today's interdisciplinary digital arena.

--- Andrew Frey, SLC Chair, for the SLC