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Honoring Past Practices While Increasing Collection Budget Flexibility: Designing and Communicating a New Budget Model

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Abstract

When LBJ was president and the Beatles were all the rage, Southwest Texas State College adopted a library allocation formula. Five decades later, the Texas State University Libraries administration decided it was time to stop adjusting the formula and adopt a completely new collection budget model with more flexibility to meet changing needs. This paper discusses the process used to develop a new model, communication strategies with the campus, and ways the new model impacted serials workflow. It also includes a few sample slides that were particularly effective in presentations to faculty.

Why Change?

In 1966, Southwest Texas State College's Learning Resource Center adopted a formula to allocate book funds among academic departments. Over the next 50 years, the formula was modified several times by adding serials, modifying the average cost of materials component, rewriting the formula completely to include additional factors, and weighting some factors with the advent of PhD programs. During the same 50-year period, the institution's name changed twice, enrollment more than doubled, and the curriculum expanded and added graduate programs. Information resources changed, too, with the advent of the World Wide Web, online journals, e-books, and streaming video. Despite these changes, the allocation formula used in 2013 was very similar to the rigid allocation formula developed in 1966. The formula was designed to meet the needs of a teaching-focused university in an all-print world.

Process for Developing a New Collection Budget Model

In September 2014, the university librarian charged a small task force with developing a new allocations model that (1) focused on the expanding missions of the library and university, (2) responded to shifts in ways information is generated, packaged, and sold, (3) simplified the formula as much as possible, and (4) was not a quick fix. The five-person task force spent the fall of 2014 on research, identifying broad trends in the scholarly record, research methods, and library services; examining how university programs and enrollment, library budget, and

acquisitions budget were growing; benchmarking with several research libraries to learn how they allocated collection funds; and conducting a literature review.

In December 2014, the task force reported on their research, emphasizing that no library had developed a perfect way to allocate the collection budget, but identifying several promising approaches. The first approach suggested was considering a simplified formula for allocating a portion of the budget to meet department needs. The second was forming collection development groups, with subject librarians working together to manage an allocation in order to meet the needs of a group of departments with related interests. Third, a new model might include methods to adjust allocations based on data showing need. Fourth, a budget committee could be established to allocate funds annually to meet strategic needs. The task force recommended that they proceed by combining these approaches to develop some scenarios for testing. Shortly after the recommendation was approved, the head of Acquisitions resigned and work on the project paused.

In summer 2016, the new head reconvened the task force to review their earlier work and develop scenarios. Over the course of the summer, the task force outlined a model. First, the task force agreed that the model should retain departmental allocations, both because those allocations were important to faculty and because allocations ensure that all programs receive some support. Second, serials would not be assigned to departments and paid from departmental allocations. Taking serials out of department allocations would make it easier to manage e-journal

packages, as they would no longer be charged to 30 or more allocations. It would also relieve issues with some departments needing to drop heavily used subscriptions while other departments could afford to keep unused subscriptions. The new model would use collection development groups to manage serials. Third, the task force agreed that funds would be set aside for library initiatives such as patron-driven acquisitions and major e-resource acquisitions. Fourth, the new model would include adjustment mechanisms. For example, a team would review needs and set serial group allocations annually. Also, an adjustments fund would be created so subject librarians could request mid-year allocation increases based on departmental needs.

Having outlined a model, the task force tackled development of a formula for departmental allocations. The task force used simplified formulas from the literature review to do mock allocations using real data on programs, majors, faculty, and enrollment. After testing more than a dozen variations, using different variables, and weighting the variables in various ways, the task force examined the results of each scenario with several questions in mind:

- Does every department have a reasonable minimum allocation?
- Will disciplines where few monographic materials are published be able to spend their allocations?
- Have we avoided extreme variations?
- Is the data for this formula easily available?
- Which departments will need adjustments? Up or down?

None of the formulas tried were completely satisfactory, but the task force had already agreed to create an adjustments fund to provide flexibility. The proposed formula consisted of a base amount for each department, plus an amount calculated from three factors (degree programs, majors, faculty), limited by a cap amount. The base and cap would be set annually, guaranteeing the smallest departments received a reasonable minimum, while avoiding extremely high allocations for large departments.

As the task force discussed a new model and tested scenarios, they frequently reminded themselves that there is no perfect model. The goal wasn't perfection; it was a workable, transparent, and flexible model.

Communication Strategies

Having developed a model that was considered workable, transparent, and flexible, the task force started thinking about communication strategies. They agreed on a few points to emphasize. First, they would address the need for change with two points:

- The university has changed. So has the way information is packaged and sold.
- The old formula was developed for a print world, but 70% of the budget is spent on e-resources.

Second, the task force would emphasize that the new budget model:

- Aligns with the way information is packaged and sold today.
- Allows the library to address the needs of emerging programs.
- Gives the library flexibility to meet changing needs.

The task force set up a communication timeline to introduce the proposed model to campus:

- Oct. 2016: University librarian.
- Oct. 2016: Library Advisory Committee (focus on need for change).
- Dec. 2016: Library Directors' Council.
- Jan. 2017: Subject librarians.
- Feb. 2017: Library Advisory Committee (details of new model).
- March 2017: Departmental representatives.

When the timeline was established, no one but the task force was familiar with the proposed model. The task force was prepared to stop at any point and adjust the proposed model based on feedback received.

The first hurdle was acceptance by the university librarian. She asked some questions that helped the task force clarify the proposed model, then approved the plan to communicate the proposed model to campus and proceed based on feedback received. As the proposal was shared with each group, the task force noted that people seemed to understand that change was needed. The task force added some

details to the proposed model in response to questions, but did not change the overall model.

After the initial planned communication, the head of Acquisitions did follow-up communication. First, she sent e-mails with projected allocations to department representatives and chairs. She copied the university librarian on selected replies, ensuring the university librarian was aware of the handful of faculty who were concerned about projected decreases. She also compiled a spreadsheet with every response, which proved helpful in reviewing feedback with the task force and university librarian. After subject librarians began asking for help with faculty questions, the head of Acquisitions wrote talking points for subject librarians. Next time a change is proposed, the talking points document will be written earlier. The head of Acquisitions and the university librarian expected to have additional meetings requested, but were pleasantly surprised that only one department, the Faculty Senate, and the Council of Deans requested meetings during spring 2017.

Since overall feedback was fairly positive, with a few concerns about projected allocations but no objections to the overall concept, the library began implementing the model with the spring 2017 serials review. In September 2017, the new model was briefly reviewed in allocation e-mails to departments. The annual Collection Development Lunch Meeting for departmental representatives focused on the new model, with a follow-up e-mail offering to meet individually or with faculty groups. Two

departments asked for presentations to their faculty; their questions focused on understanding the new model and ways to obtain new subscriptions or an increased allocation. Recognizing that change is difficult, being patient, and being open to questions was essential in communicating with campus.

Sample Slides

The Collection Budget Model Slides Fall 2017 are available at <http://www.library.txstate.edu/about/departments/acq.html>, but a few of the most effective are presented here. Figures 1 and 2 focus on why change was needed, while Figures 3 and 4 focus on explaining the new model. Figure 1, which used graphics to show the range of allocations under the old formula, made an obvious impact on faculty. While Figure 2 is extremely wordy, it helped people follow, as when the issues of serials inflation and e-journal packages were discussed. Faculty often referred back to the simple statement in Figure 3 when asking questions and sometimes used it as a lead-in to a suggestion about ways to collect feedback for assessing and improving the model over the next few years. We used the graphic representation of the collection budget in Figure 4 twice, to introduce the new model before slides focusing on each element and to summarize the new model after discussing the details.

Impact on Serials Workflow

Implementation began in spring 2017 with serials being removed from departmental allocations for

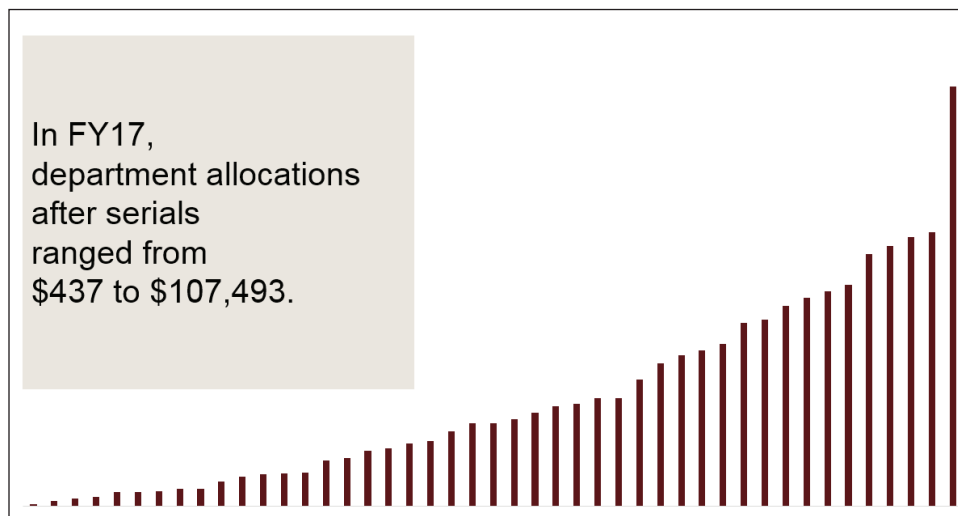


Figure 1. Slide showing extremely high and low allocations as reason for change.

Managing serials inflation

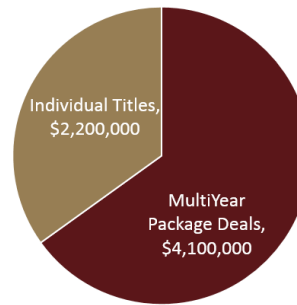
Buying serials in multi-year package deals helps control serials inflation.

It also provides access to journals and databases we couldn't afford if we bought everything title-by-title.

Serials inflation (6% avg.) meant some departments frequently needed to drop titles to stay within their budget.

We can't drop titles that are part of multi-year deals.

Library staff spent time working around departmental serials allocations.



Transfer titles from one department to another? Require departments to drop individual titles that are being used? Transfer titles from department to general?

Figure 2. Slide explaining serials inflation as reason for change.

No library has developed a perfect way to allocate the collection budget.

\$60,000 is budgeted for allocation adjustments.

Figure 3. Slide to introduce adjustments and flexibility.

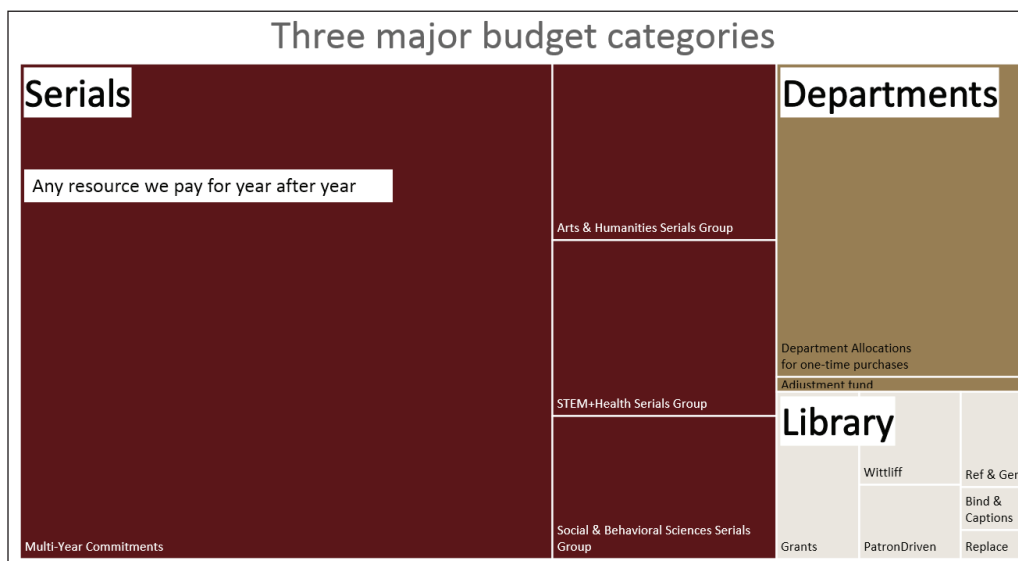


Figure 4. Slide showing overview of new budget model.

the annual serials review. To implement the removal of the serials out of the formula, the Continuing Resources (CR) librarian had to assign each serial to a subject librarian group or the multiyear multidisciplinary group. A few titles were designated uncancellable, but 99% were assigned to a subject librarian group for review including past Reference and Library General items. The three subject librarian groups used were Arts & Humanities, Social & Behavioral Sciences, and STEM+Health. We retained our historical data about the department that originally requested each serial.

This assignment work was followed by performing serials estimates for renewing all the titles assigned to each subject group. Titles that could not be cancelled immediately due to multiyear contracts were assigned to the Multi group (\$4 million). Estimates for the three subject groups ranged from \$600,000 to \$700,000 each. In the new model, the serials estimates were then given to a budgetary team consisting of the head of Acquisitions and the head of Research, Instruction, and Outreach (RIO) so they could assign a budget for each subject group. They decided in the first year of the new model to give each group just enough to renew all of their existing subscriptions. If a group wanted to add a title, they would have to cancel.

To roll out the new process to the subject librarians, serials review meetings were set up with each subject group. In these meetings the head of Acquisitions, head of RIO, and the Continuing Resources librarian communicated the tasks needed from them during the serials review process, reiterated reasons for the budget model changes, answered their questions and concerns, and introduced the review spreadsheets. On each of the spreadsheets were the estimated next-year prices for their group's subscriptions, their group's total budget, a list of suggested drops based on data, and a list of suggested adds based on data. Because this data was shared via Microsoft Office 365 groups, each subject group could see the other groups' spreadsheets to see how turnaways differed among groups, and so on. The CR librarian emphasized that while he was giving them recommended add/drops based on data for no-use, low-use, high-cost-per-use, high turnaways, and high ILLs, he was relying on their expertise as subject librarians to determine the value of each serial to their programs.

As the serial review progressed, the subject groups would ask for price quotes and additional information about possible adds and drops. As add/drop decisions were made, a subscription change spreadsheet was sent out to all of the subject librarians so they could see the dollar amounts of any drops and adds, and consider picking up a drop from another group. In the past, faculty requests were automatically ordered throughout the year from departmental allocations. In the new model, requests would be routed to the subject groups to be part of the serials review process with approved requests batch-ordered in the fall.

Since the Multi serials were not assigned to a subject librarian group, a mechanism was needed to ensure the multidisciplinary, multiyear contract items were reviewed as well. The Springer journal package, a multischool and multiyear deal, was coming up for renewal in 2018. The CR librarian provided all subject librarians title lists and overall cost per use for the package, so they could decide whether acquisitions should begin negotiations with the vendor for renewal. Time constraints limited the data presented to subject librarians, but the CR librarian plans to provide additional data with the help of a newly hired data visualization specialist for future reviews. In future years, smaller multiyear packages may be assigned to one group the year before it is to be renewed, with larger packages reviewed by all subject librarians.

With serial group budgets set nine months in advance of the fiscal year, Acquisitions was concerned about adjusting to last-minute changes, such as the approval of a new PhD just before the fiscal year started. The first year, additional subscription monies were provided in the summer before the fiscal year began, allowing the CR librarian to test processes for adding titles in the fall. Luckily, subject librarians had already been informed of this possibility and so had been asked to make a prioritized wish list. The budgetary team divided the new funds between the three subject groups, and then the subject groups were given two months to make additional subscription decisions. One lesson learned from this is that we need to set earlier deadlines for fall changes to avoid processing new orders and the main renewal invoice at the same time. The subject librarians also told us that it was hard to meet during the busy fall semester.

As a result of moving serials out of departmental allocations, reviewing them in subject groups, and providing lots of data to the groups, more low-use titles were dropped than in previous years. The CR librarian also answered many more detailed questions from subject librarians. For future reviews, the subject librarians requested more information about the Multi titles, even though they could not cancel titles in multiyear contracts. Changing the serials review process was time-consuming, but resulted in more attention being paid to usage and more cooperation among subject librarians as they worked to meet interdisciplinary needs and the needs of emerging programs.

Conclusions

Midway through the first year with a new budget model, the Acquisitions librarians are fairly pleased with the way it is working and with the reaction of faculty. The change has required updating some processes and responding to many questions, but the new model has provided needed flexibility. Acquisitions will continue to invite feedback, to keep notes on what is and isn't working, and to consider ways to improve the collection budget model. A perfect budget model does not exist, but the new model is meeting the goals of being workable, transparent, and flexible.

Selected Literature on Collection Budgets

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