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Upcoming project to solicit input for library electronic subscription adjustments

Submitted by: Russell Thackston

10/5/2016

Discussion:

The Dean of the Library and the Chair of the University Library Committee will outline an upcoming project to solicit input from academic departments regarding needed adjustments to the Library's electronic subscriptions to scholarly journals and collections. The adjustments are necessary to address a significant budget shortfall. The goal of the solicitation project is to identify subscriptions that may be dropped from instance electronic access -- inter-library loans of printed/PDF articles will still be possible -- with the least impact to research and academics.

Rationale:

This project will involve all academic departments on campus. This presentation by the Library Dean and Committee Chair will be the first public opportunity for the Faculty Senate to be informed of the project, ask questions, and provide feedback.

Response:

Minutes 10-31-2016

Russell Thackston (CEIT) spoke as a representative of the University Library Committee. He distributed a [fact sheet](#) for the project he was there to discuss. The Library will conduct a review of the electronic subscriptions we have on campus to see which are either no or low-use, and which might be considered low impact in order to identify candidates for subscriptions “that can be moved . . .” They’re avoiding the word “cancelled” because such items will “move” from being instant online to available via

Interlibrary Loans. You'll still be able to get most of the materials you are looking for, it just may take up to four or five days for it to come in paper form from another library. The Library has reviewed the current subscriptions and there are some journals or databases that have not been accessed over the last year, and some have been accessed a very few times at a very high cost per access. They will send out to each of the colleges a list of what they see as the 150 lowest accessed publications or databases. The Deans will pass that on to the Department Chairs to solicit feedback from their faculty. They want faculty to drive this project. The Library wants to know what databases faculty find critical to both their academic programs and individual research activities, and want faculty to justify keeping them. The Library will then be able to determine if there are any "undefended" and switch them to an interlibrary loan model. The reason is budgetary. Right now we are about \$900,000 in deficit for the Library budget for those particular items. Since the 1970s electronic subscriptions have gone up about 6% a year and our funding has not kept pace. In previous years, the University has covered that budget shortfall through year-end money, but that amount is unknown until we get to the end-of-the-year and so no amount is guaranteed. The deficit is so large this year the Library doesn't want to wait on uncertain funding and also be unable to get feedback from the faculty on this. Also, the survey that went out a few months back on the Library and the quality of services they provide found that the largest area of dissatisfaction among faculty was the information resources that were being provided. So in order to address that, we're either going to need more funding or we're going to have to adjust existing funding. He added that the Library might make this a regular procedure for the sake of fiscal responsibility to taxpayers to make sure that we are not subscribing to things that aren't needed or that aren't being used regularly.

[Secretary's Note: There was an inaudible question.]

Thackston said they didn't want to make any assumptions about what a department may be using, so they're going to start off with 150 of the least used, or highest cost per use subscriptions, and everybody will get the same list to start with. He noted that the Library could provide, if it is wanted, the full list of the more than 800 subscriptions we have for the University. Some very obviously are not going to get cut; they are used tens of thousands of times a year.

Moderator Flynn recommended that Senators read the Library report in the Senate Librarian's Report because there is a chart in there that shows that, compared to our peer institutions, we have a very low per FTE expenditure. The lowest on the list. He thought it might be an appropriate factor to consider how underfunded our Library is when we are making these decisions.

Ming Fang He (COE) praised the Library as an important academic foundation of the University and praised the job being done by Dean Mitchell. She asked Provost Bartels if it would be possible to maintain or increase the end-of-year money that goes to the Library.

Provost Bartels said that giving end-of-year money to the Library is routine, the amount is usually significant, and GSU always looks for ways to increase that funding. She had already asked that for the 2018 budget we think about formalizing some part of that so that it is consistent. She added that the low-funding number might be misleading and asked Dean Mitchell to comment.

Dean Bede Mitchell (LIB) noted that we are thirteenth out of fourteen in per FTE student spending in the Library, and twelfth out of fourteen in terms of total budget. Our so-called peers actually are much better funded than our institution is. Moderator Flynn asked if he meant “our institutions as a whole,” and Dean Mitchell said yes.

Matthew Flynn (CLASS) asked what our savings would be if we move those 150 subscriptions from direct access to the interlibrary loan model format.

Thackston said the goal is to not to target a dollar amount, but to actually target the subscriptions that are not defended/justified by departments. A dollar target might end up with the cutting of something that is considered critical. The goal is to remove what is obviously easy to take out and then look for year-end money to make up the difference.

Moderator Flynn noted that some research sources have tiers of service that include certain journals, so you can't go journal by journal. He felt that already our tier of service isn't high enough. How would the Library make that kind of decision?

Dean Mitchell (LIB) noted such sources have such high usage figures that they will not be on the list.

Li Ma (COSM) asked if we will be able to maintain the response time for interlibrary loans. Thackston said there will probably be an increase in the amount of work that the Library has to do for interlibrary loans. He also thought that increase might not be as much as it appears because some people might decide an item isn't all that urgent and not put in an ILL request. Whatever, they believed they could “keep up to a point with the increase in requests coming in.”

Moderator Flynn foresaw a problem with students getting needed items for their papers via ILL since he already has a hard time motivating them to do so.