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History of E-Journals and Electronic Databases in the URI Libraries

William T. O'Malley

University of Rhode Island, rka101@uri.edu

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E-JOURNALS AND ELECTRONIC DATABASES

- I. **Policy:** Since the early 90s URI began acquiring electronic versions of the major reference databases, initially on CD-Roms, and after 1996 as their web equivalents. Since 2000, the Library's policy is to acquire the electronic versions of journals, as long as the access is to the full text, and the cost is neutral.
- II. **Strategy:** We have expanded our electronic holdings of journals, as publishers have introduced 'packages' that have made their products more affordable [we now acquire all of the Williams and Wilkins, University of Chicago, Cambridge University Press, and many other scholarly publishers] for slightly more than we were paying for only some of their titles. We have also increased our access by subscribing to 'aggregator' services, that combine what was traditionally just an index to the most significant journals in a broad field, with full-text access to many of the journals indexed [Academic Search Premier, or the business source ABI/Inform, or Lexis/Nexis].
- III. **Risk:** We have followed this policy and adopted these practices fully aware that, the risks are and were substantial. In the electronic environment, we no longer purchase subscriptions [with print, they send us issues, we eventually bind them together, and place on shelves for future consultation], but lease access to that same information today. As we increasingly rely on 'packages' we can no longer efficiently trim our individual subscriptions, as the new environment is more of an 'all or nothing' choice.
- IV. **Costs:** Serials costs from 1984 through 2004 rose by 194%. This year it will cost us more than \$2.6 million to maintain the subscriptions we held in 2005/06. Yet, the Library materials budget over the past 10 years has increased by only \$600,000, in two spikes of \$300,000 in '03 and '04, with no increase during the past two years.
- V. **Pricing:** Publishers have shifted their pricing to increase sales [such as 'packages] or to increase income [subscribers pay according to their student fte, or the Carnegie level of the institution, or the presence of particular programs [[e.g. if you have a medical school you pay much more for NE Journal of Medicine]]. All of these modifications have substantially increased the cost of electronic access over print.
- VI. **Peers:** while we were way ahead of our peers in implementing our policy and strategies, their library material budgets have expanded substantially while we lose further ground. Since forever, URI Library always matched up well with Vermont and New Hampshire, with Maine far behind. These institutions are no longer our peers. Because of new pricing structures, small libraries can acquire access to large databases and packages that we can not afford. Within HELIN [our Rhode Island based library consortium, Bryant, Johnson & Wales, PC, and Salve all provide greater access to electronic journals than we can, because they can rely on more 'aggregator' databases than we can. Their access costs are substantially lower than ours [due to student fte, lack of research expectations]. We worry that we can no longer compete with Salve Regina. WTO'M 10/10/06