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## The City University of New York: 24 Colleges, 5 Boroughs, 1 Collection

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### About City University of New York

City University of New York's (CUNY) library system is a federation of 33 libraries and the CUNY Central Office of Library Services (OLS). The purpose of OLS is to support the University's libraries so that they may better serve their students and faculty. At each college, the library plays a major role in supporting academic programs, meeting accreditation requirements, teaching, and facilitating the curricular and research activities of faculty and students. As a system, CUNY's libraries maintain extensive print and electronic collections, including the electronic resources provided by the central office and are available to all.

Some details about the City University of New York include:

- Largest public urban university in the US
- 24 institutions
- 269,000 degree-seeking students
- 270,000 certificate/continuing education students
- 33 libraries
- An extensive collection of electronic journals and databases, supporting more than 23 million database searches conducted a year
  - 459,000-plus e-books
  - 990,000-plus e-subscriptions
  - Plus 6.5 million print volumes
- Annual expenditures of \$55 million
- Expenditures of \$13 million on e-resources

- Faculty and professional staff of about 330 people

On top of the electronic resources made available systemwide, the colleges also make substantial investments in materials in all formats to meet local needs. While we strive to support the mission of the University, it is not all ice cream and butterflies. CUNY is a huge system and part of two even larger systems. Our community colleges are funded by New York City while the rest of the University is funded by New York State. The Office of Library Services has money from both entities, so our procurements run through both systems. In the recent past, both the city and the state have introduced new financial management systems, changing how the University systems must interact with them. Most recently, the University has undertaken the implementation of a PeopleSoft system we call CUNYfirst. This massive, enterprise-wide initiative has affected many aspects of university life, but none more so than how we do procurement. It has been a major disruption as we are still early on in the learning curve.

### Procurement

In olden times, the way our libraries procured electronic resources was to set up a vendor demonstration, decide if it was something we wanted, and, if so, sign the order form. When the invoice came in, we would submit it along with a requisition and wait for the vendor to be paid. And while this was an effective way to provide resources for our patrons, it was not fully compliant with University policies.

Over the past few years, we have been working to reduce these nonconforming practices. The largest change has been in signing authority. In January 2011, the University's General Counsel

issued a memo clarifying who had the authority to sign contracts and which contracts required review by legal staff. The upshot was that very few people actually carried the authority to commit university funds and that librarians fell outside this group. As one person put it, "Only the Purchasing Department has the right to purchase." The days of signing renewals and reviewing our own license agreements had come to an end.

What has followed has been a transition period. The Central Office moved immediately to bring its practices into tighter compliance. We also began an informational campaign to bring the colleges in line. All new communication and business workflows were needed. Renewals, which formerly could be achieved by replying to a vendor's e-mail with a simple "I agree," were now vetted by Legal and signed off on by Business Officers. All licenses were now funneled to an attorney in the General Counsel's Office for review. Unsurprisingly, these changes in workflow and procedure resulted in slowdowns and confusion that are still being worked through.

In addition to the focus on signing authority, CUNY's libraries have also become more cognizant of the need to maintain fair and transparent business practices. This means that resources which surpass certain financial value thresholds are now advertised in the New York State Contract Reporter, giving other possible suppliers the chance to reply.

The changes we have been introducing have had implications for procurement offices and legal offices as well as the libraries. A positive way to look at this is that librarians are driving change at our university, changing the system to make it more inclusive to support our needs. Part of the reality, however, is that there has been resistance from all quarters. Nobody likes change, and everybody claims to be overextended and overly busy. On electronic resources alone the libraries are spending \$13 million per year, and this represents a lot of purchases to put through the system, a lot of license agreements to be read and negotiated, and a lot of invoices to be paid. The librarian community, as well, is concerned about these changes, as the process now takes a lot

longer, they receive concerned phone calls and e-mails from unpaid vendors, and they are on the front lines should any service discontinuities occur as a result of unpaid invoices. We have tried to communicate with vendors about the new routines, and the results have been mixed.

One proactive approach we took last month was to call a meeting of librarians, procurement directors, and legal representatives to discuss the issues and perhaps develop some more standardized good practices. It was a very productive meeting; some of the issues we discussed are were:

- Is there some way we can easily find out the status of negotiations on a license?
- How can we ensure that licenses are reviewed in a timely fashion?
- What types of changes to license agreements are Legal and the Business Office making? I am concerned that business or usage terms could be changed without my input.
- When assessing our current licenses, which sections do I need to review in order to decide if the license needs to be redone? Or should I forward any agreement from the past 4–5 years to CUNY legal to decide?

## Licensing Terms

Though changes in Procurement and Licensing workflows have resulted in some serious growing pains, we have also seen some early benefits, chiefly in licensing. In the past when librarians were independently reviewing licenses on their campuses, they largely focused on business and usage terms. The legalese contained in the agreements was mostly ignored, and, due to lack of coordinated efforts, two colleges within the same consortium could easily negotiate different terms from the same vendor.

With the knowledge that the colleges will more easily be able to purchase new content if there is an existing license in place, OLS has started signing umbrella licenses when possible. For example, when the University bought systemwide access to

3 years' worth of Springer e-book titles, we wrote the contract as a master license. Colleges wishing to purchase additional content simply needed to complete a short rider laying out business and fee schedules. The terms and conditions were already set.

As the number of licenses negotiated by individual colleges rises, we are now moving into a second phase. We are in the process of creating a list of every license signed by a CUNY member library. This will be visible to both librarians and to business officers. The hope is that it will better allow colleges to see what their colleagues have already done so that they may benefit from existing work.

The Central Office has preferred usage terms that cover topics like interlibrary loan, course packs, and inclusion in course management systems such as Blackboard. Because nearly all library licenses are reviewed by the same attorney, she is able to use the University's preferred language over and over, including it in new contracts as they cross her desk. This both creates consistency across the system and across resources and strengthens the argument for using these terms. It is a powerful negotiating tool when we tell a vendor, "But three other publishers in your field agreed to these same terms. They are our standard."

## **ERAC**

Vendors that wish to sell an electronic resource to some or all of the libraries of CUNY begin by either contacting the Office of Library Services or visiting the individual campuses. Ever aware of their limited budgets, campus librarians often refer a vendor to our Electronic Resource Committee (ERAC), in hopes that the resource will be purchased in total by CUNY Central. Unfortunately, this is not the case in most instances.

Centrally, we try to negotiate with the vendor for a price that will make everyone happy. We look for a price for the system, then we look for a price contingent on one, two, five, or ten libraries that might want to subscribe. Often there are savings in numbers, and we get a percentage off the more libraries that join in the purchase. Vendors are

often glad to get their foot into a CUNY library because they know that we talk to each other. Our ERAC bimonthly meetings bring together representatives from every campus, and librarians are never shy about saying what they like and, more importantly, what they do not like about a resource.

If the CUNY system chooses to pick up a resource we expect that vendors will offer some incentives, and they usually do. The price offered to CUNY Central is always much less than the aggregate price of campus libraries subscribing with their own funds. After all, we offer vendors one invoice, one license review, and, we hope, faster payment. These elements are worth a lot both economically, in time and effort. Working collectively allows us to extend offerings to colleges that otherwise would not be able to provide access to a collection. One striking example is that all of our community colleges have access to ScienceDirect, and they are heavy users of it.

## **ERAC Survey**

Beginning with the year 2000, we started surveying spending on Electronic Resources by OLS and the Campuses. We wanted to find out what the campuses bought, what vendor they bought from, and what they paid. This information, reported annually, is really valuable to the individual campus libraries and provides an excellent bargaining tool.

When a number of campuses are buying the same database, it becomes an excellent candidate for a "take over" by the Central Office. A good example of this is JSTOR. In the early years, many individual campuses were buying the Arts and Science Collections. These collections were heavily used, and as multiple schools began to subscribe, OLS took it over and has provided access to the Arts and Sciences IX Collection ever since. Currently, JSTOR is one of our most used databases. In the last year, we logged over a million full-text downloads.

Black Thought and Culture and Women and Social Movements from Alexander Street Press and the individual journals JAMA, Nature, ScienceOnline,

and NEJM were also taken over by the Central Office, providing access to everyone that is CUNY affiliated.

## Universal Access

Because of our open access policies (students and faculty have access to every CUNY campus library) students often expect that a resource they use on one campus will be available at every CUNY library they chose to visit, or remotely from their offices or homes.

Though this is not always the case, universal access is the underlying goal of CUNY. Currently, a community college faculty member or student has the same basic access (remote and on-site) as the faculty member or student at our Graduate Center, to the resources provided by the Office of Library Services. But there is not universal access to campus offerings.

We currently have a group working to widen universal access to STEM resources. We have asked for quotes for the CUNY system (all faculty and students) for a 5-year term. We are looking at different ways to allocate the cost and plan to request some financing from other areas of the University. True to form when dealing with CUNY-wide pricing, some of the quotes came in with substantial discounts.

Over the years, we have worked to develop an allocation methodology that tries to fairly allocate costs across a disparate range of colleges. Generally, there is an acceptance that sometimes a college will have to contribute to support a resource that they do not necessarily require, but they make that sacrifice for the good of the collective. In building the allocation methodology, a variety of factors are considered:

- Number of undergraduate students
- Number of graduate students
- Carnegie class
- Electronic resource spending
- Spending per FTE
- Full text usage of Academic Search Complete

- Average of full text usage of JSTOR and full text usage of Project MUSE

These various factors are weighted, and then each college is assigned a share. The costs of a resource are then doled out on the basis of these shares. The formula is not perfect, but it is transparent and has been accepted by the campuses. It is updated and reapproved every year.

## Assessment

Usage certainly is the best assessment for the resources, but we use other means as well. Liaisons check with their subject faculty to get feedback on content and platform usability. If one campus subscribes to a resource, we often ask them to report on their experiences for the benefit of other campuses considering the same product. We also look at tools such as Google Analytics to see what devices and operating systems are being used for access and how many of these are mobile. This influences decision making as there are wide disparities in the quality of mobile interfaces that products provide.

## Technical Service Implications

The ways in which CUNY acquires and licenses resources are many and complex. It only stands to reason that our cataloging and access services are equally baroque. The most straightforward piece of this operation is the Central Cataloging Unit. This group receives, catalogs, and processes print and other physical media on behalf of the colleges. They also provide support for campus catalogers, instilling best practices, training on new areas such as Resource Description and Access (RDA), and leading catalog maintenance.

Once we leave the print world, providing clear and consistent access to users across the system becomes more complicated. Everyone has access to the core set of CUNY-wide e-resources. In addition, each campus has its own rich set of electronic materials. Naturally, it would be too easy to track all of these things in a single knowledge base. MARC records for files between 50–20,000 records are batch loaded into the catalog by the central office. In recent years, the Central Office has also worked with campuses to

load records for patron-driven acquisition programs and is also close to implementing its own pilot in this area.

In addition to e-book records, the Central Office also processes and loads MARC 360 files for every e-journal subscription within CUNY. These MARC 360 records are triggered by changes to local Serials Solutions A–Z lists. These are maintained on each campus. Currently changes to the A–Z list also trigger changes in WorldCat via the OCLC e-holdings service. In addition to campus maintenance of the A–Z list, there is also a central instance of SFX, the CUNY-wide link resolver. When colleges add or drop resources, they must make an update in their local knowledge base and send in a work ticket so that SFX will be centrally updated. If the holdings listed in our union catalog, the A–Z lists, SFX, and OCLC were to be made into a Venn Diagram, it is of deep concern that the areas of overlap might not be as large or as reliable as we wish. Though we work hard to provide terrific content, there are many ways in which access could be partial or confusing to the end user.

### **Future and Wrap Up**

As we look to the future, we think there are a lot of aspects of our model that work well and should be sustained. By making a substantial investment at the university money to purchase materials, it frees up funds at the campus level to invest in resources of more local interest. There are benefits in how we leverage the power of the system for CUNY, such as lower costs, allowing multiple stakeholders to have a voice in decision making, and sharing data, but also for our vendors in terms of a single point of negotiation and licensing and single invoicing. We are increasingly establishing longer-term license agreements.

These cut down on the administrative overhead costs but also build in a predictable rate of increase over the period of the license. Ideally, most of our licenses will be staggered on 5-year terms.

The system does not always work as well as it might. There are some inequities built into the system, usually due to historical pricing patterns, that mean that sometimes a college will pay more than perhaps they should. This can create bad feelings that may lead to a college choosing to pay more by going it alone to avoid “free riders” of working within the collective, but this does not often happen. We also need to continue to improve communications with all stakeholders. The work we have done with the procurement officers and legal counsel is just a start.

Our university is very data driven and evidence based. It is very useful that we can demonstrate, over time, how much our resources are used. We do need to do more to increase usage. The central office has worked with vendors to organize demonstrations aimed at faculty as well as librarians, but much of the marketing that occurs appropriately takes place at the college level. We are planning to purchase and configure the Primo discovery system, and if our experience is like that at other colleges, we should see a big bump in usage once Primo is in place.

So while much has been done, much continues to be accomplished. At CUNY we like to think of ourselves as an integrated university, rather than a consortium. Our libraries are very much at the vanguard of this as we work collectively, collaboratively, and consensual to leverage the power of the system to truly make us 24 colleges, five boroughs, yet one collection.