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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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Charleston Observatory and the Global Library Survey

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Editor's Note:** In 2007, the **Charleston Conference** began the **Charleston Observatory** which was designed to be the research arm of the **Charleston Conference**. When **ebrary** and **YBP** approached the **Conference** about the Global library survey, it was decided that **CIBER** was the ideal partner. Accordingly, **ebrary** initiated the fourth in a series of library surveys this fall. It was constructed by the Department of Information Studies, **UCL Centre for Publishing** and **CIBER** research group with input from librarians around the globe. The respondents to the survey were self-selected from **ebrary's** email list of just over 10,000 international librarians and just fewer than 20,000 American librarians. The survey was designed to provide information on the effects of the global recession on libraries and to elicit insight on alternative ways librarians would respond to it. — **KS

Respondents and Institutions

Of the 835 respondents (3% response) who participated in the survey, the majority were from the US with 62.3%, followed by the UK with 12.7%. The remaining 25% of the responses were from the rest of the world. With respect to the institutions, 39.5% were from public universities or colleges, 24.1% from private universities or colleges, 7.6% from community colleges, 6.9% public libraries, 5.4% government or agency libraries, 5.3% corporate, 2.4% non profit corporate, 2.0% high school, 1.6% national libraries, and 1% hospitals.

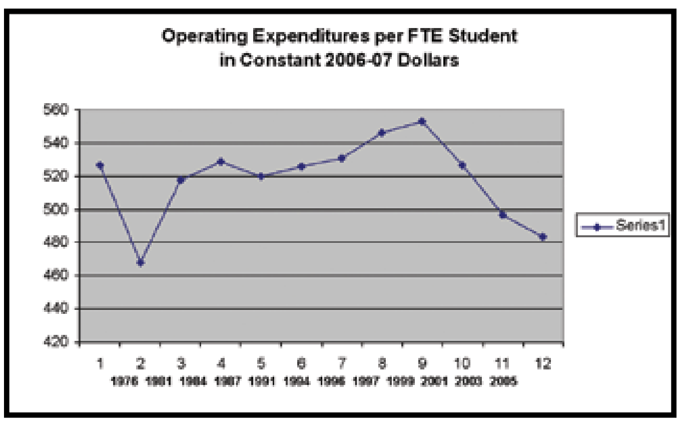
When asked which title best described their role in their institution 32.1% of those responding chose head or dean of library services, 14.1% collection development or acquisition librarian, 11% electronic resources librarian, 7.7% technical services librarian, and 1.3% serials librarian. The remaining 27.9% selected none of the above. Their decision-making roles were reported as 41.5% making the final decision, 36.8% making recommendations, 14.3% provided their views for decisions and 7.4% did not play a role.

When asked how many registered users including faculty, students, and staff were at their respective institutions, 55.7% reported less than 10,000, 15.9% reported between 10-20,000, 17.2% reported between 20-40,000, and 11.3% over 40,000.

The Financial Outlook

On average, the respondents reported that their total library budgets were down 3% from last year and they expect an additional loss of 1.7% next year and a .7% additional loss the second year out. The average total projected loss over three years is 5.4%. Of the respondents, 42% reported that their total library budgets were down and 15% reported them up; 32% reported that their total library budgets had stayed about the same and 11% reported that they were unsure at the time of the survey. For those reporting that their budgets were down, the average decrease was just under 9%. For those reporting that their budgets were up, the average increase was just under 6%.

For comparison purposes, I have included library expenditure data for the period 1976 through 2005. The chart below was constructed from **US Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics** data and shows library operating expenditures per student FTE in constant 2006-07 dollars for selective years over the 29 from 1976 through 2005. Expenditures fluctuated sometimes dramatically. After an initial drop from 1976 through 1981 of 11%, expenditures rose to a peak in 1999, which was 5% above 1976. Expenditures then declined by 14% between the years 1999 and 2005. The low point in 1981 corresponds to the beginning of the 1981 recession, which reached peak unemployment of just under 11% and lasted for two years. Most of the funding loss was restored by 1984. We could see a similar phenomenon with this recession albeit perhaps exacerbated or elongated by the already downward trending trajectory since 1999.



Year	1976	1981	1984	1987	1991	1994	1996	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005
$ per FTE	527	468	518	529	520	526	531	546	553	527	497	484
Rate of Change		-11%	13%	2%	-2%	1%	1%	3%	1%	-5%	-6%	-3%

US Department of Education – Center for Educational Statistics – Institute of Education Sciences – Digest of Education Statistics – Table 424. *http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_424.asp*

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Impact on Resources, Personnel, and Operations

This survey was designed to stimulate thought on how best to cope with the economic downturn by looking at a survey of responses to questions about the current situation in libraries. The experiences vary from dramatically worse off than last year to much better off than last year with the balance tipping downward. The remainder of the survey provides a view of how these libraries are planning to respond to their particular situations. The responses throughout reflect the pattern of the budget losses or gains reported above.

When asked which areas of expenditures (for resources, personnel, services, or infrastructure) the changes in funding would affect, 41% of the responses across all four categories expect no change in expenditures, 31% expect decreases, and 28% expect increases. Of the 31% of the responses that anticipate decreases in expenditures, 36% designated resources, 25% personnel, 20% infrastructure and 19% services. Of the 28% of responses anticipating increases in expenditures 32% designated resources, 29% infrastructure, 20% services, and 19% personnel. Infrastructure has a net gain of 9 percentage points of responses expecting increases. Services are nearly a draw between those expecting increases versus decreases. Resources are down by 4% of the responses and personnel by 6%.

Planned Budget Cuts

Resources — When respondents were asked if they planned to cut their resource budget over the next two years, 21.5% responded yes, 37.5% responded no, and 41% responded too early to say. When those that responded yes were further asked of the likelihood on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) through 4 (very likely) across the following categories, their responses in order of likelihood were: print-only serials (3.48), print books excluding monographs (3.44), monographs (3.37), print and electronic serials (3.08), database subscriptions (2.99), electronic-only serials (2.65), and eBooks (2.38).

Personnel — When respondents were asked if they planned to cut personnel costs over the next two years, only 17.3% responded yes, 52.2% responded no, and 30.6% responded too early to say. When those that responded yes were further asked about the likelihood on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) through 4 (very likely) of cuts occurring in different ways, the top four preferences were to use non-replacement (3.67), freeze on recruitment (3.53), restructuring (3.21), or early retirement (2.95).

Services and Infrastructure — When respondents were asked if they planned to cut services and infrastructure over the next two years, 10.9% responded yes, 55.4% responded no, and 33.7% responded too early to say. When those that responded yes were further asked about the likelihood of cuts occurring in different areas, all five responses were closely grouped on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) through 4 (very likely) with reduced open hours the most likely at 2.95, building plans shelved (2.87), planned IT projects put back (2.82), reduced enquiry desk services (2.81), and reduced library training (2.64).

Category	Decrease Responses (% of column)	No Change (% of column)	Increase Responses (% of column)
Resources	228 (36%)	117 (14%)	184 (32%)
Personnel	162 (25%)	245 (28%)	113 (19%)
Services	122 (19%)	294 (34%)	116 (20%)
Infrastructure	130 (20%)	209 (24%)	171 (29%)
Total Responses	642	865	584
% of Total Responses	31%	41%	28%

When asked about actual plans to cut particular resources over the next two years, the large majority of respondents either had no plans to cut resources, personnel, services or infrastructure or they had not yet made that decision. For the minority that had already decided on cuts, 21.5% planned to cut the resource budget, 17.3% personnel, and 10.9% services or infrastructure.

Resource Expenditures

Respondents were first asked to report the percentages of their budgets spent across seven categories. The responses in descending order of average percentages of the budget spent this year on various categories were: databases 27.3%, print books (excluding monographs) 23.8%, electronic only serials 18%, print and electronic serials 17.3%, print only serials 14.3%, monographs 14.2%, and eBooks 6.8%.

Balancing the Budget — Methods

Four methods were presented for ways to balance the budget: making cutbacks, greater cooperation with other libraries, seeking additional funding, or doing things differently. Slightly over a third (34.7%) selected doing things differently as the likeliest way to balance their budgets. Nearly a quarter (24.8%) expects that greater cooperation with other libraries will be most effective of these options. Making cutbacks (21.5%) and seeking additional funding (19%) also received respectable numbers of responses as preferred methods. Each of the methods was explored further by examining preferences for achieving each of them.

Doing Things Differently (34.7%) — Of the three methods of doing things differently to balance the budget, accelerating the move from print to electronic delivery was selected by just over half (53.4%) while 37.8% of the respondents selected directing users to free electronic resources. Outsourcing library services or infrastructure received 8.8% of the responses.

Cooperating with Other Libraries (24.8%) — Of the three methods of cooperation with other libraries as the means for balancing the budget, resource savings garnered 81.9% of the responses as the most effective option. Operational cooperation (11.1%) and personnel cooperation (7%) split the remainder.

Making Cutbacks (21.5%) — When asked which area was most effective for cutting the budget, resources scored 41.6% of the responses, operations 35.4%, and personnel 23%.

Seeking Additional Funding (19%) — There were three choices for seeking additional funding as a way to balance the budget. Two of the options split the responses nearly evenly. Lobbying internally for a greater share of the budget garnered 47.2% and looking externally for new sources of funding (e.g., grants or fundraising) 42.7%. The third choice, increasing charges for library users, was the preferred option for only 10.1%.

Managing the Budget

Two questions were asked concerning managing the budget. The first presented options for optimizing the purchase of digital resources. The second explored options for the decision-making process.

Purchasing Digital Resources — The first three preferences for purchasing digital resources in descending order are, the purchase of digital collections (27.2%), patron driven access models (25.7%), and purchase individual titles through aggregators and book vendors (22.8%). The other two choices, purchasing individual titles from publishers (13.6%) and approval plans (10.7%) closely split the remainder of responses.

Decision-making — In the question asking respondents which of four options provided the most effective method for managing the budget, nearly half (42.9%) selected demonstrating value through better usage and outcomes data. About a quarter (23.5%) chose getting a better understanding of costs (e.g., activity-based costing). Putting greater pressure on vendors over pricing was selected by 21.9%, and 11.7% selected more effective benchmarking and performance indicators.

Exploring Ways Forward

In an attempt to frame the survey amid broader expectations, the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with five general statements. The average of each of the five answers skewed to the positive side of a range from strongly disagree (-1.0) through strongly disagree (1.0). The highest rating (.91) was produced by agreement with the statement that the downturn will focus library resources where the greatest value is delivered, which was followed closely by a rating of .83 in agreement

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that the downturn will focus library thinking on return on investment. Both of these indicate an ability to see the rosy side of a bad situation, since the third highest agreement was with the statement that the impact on libraries would be severe and long lasting (.43). The positive response balance slipped to .29 with the statement that the economy would recover in the next two years. The positive score declined to .22 over agreement with the statement that library budgets will suffer in the next two years but then recover.

Summary

The survey was initiated by **ebrary** as the fourth in a series of library surveys. Approximately 3% of the nearly 30,000 librarians that comprise **ebrary's** email list responded to the survey. It was constructed by the Department of Information Studies, **UCL Centre for Publishing** and **CIBER** research group with input from librarians around the globe. The survey was designed to provide information on the effects of the global recession on libraries and to elicit insight on alternative ways librarians would respond to it.

On average, the respondents reported that they expect their total average projected budgetary loss over three years to be just above 5%. A mixture of responses was returned with respect to cuts that respondents would make to deal with budget shortfalls. Cutting resources topped the list with print books and serials the most likely candidates.

Four methods were presented for balancing the budget: making cutbacks, greater cooperation with other libraries, seeking additional funding, or doing things differently. A plurality of just over a third of the respondents indicated that librarians needed to change what they are doing. Of three change options provided in the survey, over half of the respondents saw the optimal change as acceleration from print to e-resources.

Implications

The longitudinal data provided by the **Center for Educational Statistics** reveals a downward trend for academic library funding that frames the implications of this study. Many librarians see moving more rapidly toward e-resources over print as the best way forward. This is both a solution and an indication of a problem. Efficiencies associated with electronic resource distribution are one way that the loss of funding for libraries over the last decade can be viewed. Libraries have been cutting print subscriptions and purchasing electronic versions for much less per title and faculty have mostly received online access well. This is largely because of the quantities of titles available in bundles and access options like pay per view. If the same phenomenon occurs with books and eBooks over the next decade as the **Google** deal portends, libraries may not see a return to the peak of 1999 but a further decline in budgets. Purchasing power by measure of the number of titles available is increasing despite the decline in budgets. The shift to online access has provided beneficial results with respect to increased access to information resources for faculty and students despite the downward budgetary trend.

There is at least one cautionary note implicit in this transition to e-resources as well as hope for the future. First the caution, the decline in library budgets does not permit libraries to respond adequately to other aspects of the changing information sphere. This survey focused mostly on the functions of the libraries that are associated with the transition to electronic formats of journals and books. It does not address the development of the future library needs of higher education that are related to the evolving Internet that are thus far only beginning to be defined in practice. Academic librarians must navigate access to the complex and rapidly evolving Websites, data structures and navigational tools of the Internet; articulate information literacy across the curriculum; increase efforts toward digital and physical archival preservation and access; attend to changing peer review and publication models as well as changes in copyright and fair use practices in an International environment. The reduction in budgets affects the rate at which these challenging issues will be addressed.

With respect to hope for the future, librarians have demonstrated in this survey that they are optimistic about the long term effects of this economic downturn. They overwhelmingly assert confidence that it will impose a discipline that is healthy for librarianship. Their attitudes reflect the promise many librarians see as the future for librarianship. The information sphere is exploding in diversity and complexity and therefore potential. Information professionals with a bent for harnessing disorder have a much larger and much more interesting job ahead of them than behind.