Pragmatic Assessment for Building Sustainable and Effective Collections

Devin Savage

Dean of Libraries

dsavage@iit.edu

ABSTRACT

Academic library collections budgets continue to be strained at many institutions, as the prices of electronic resources continue to inflate while cost control imperatives from University Administrations continue to proliferate. At our mid-sized, research intensive, doctoral-granting institution, we looked to gather evidence that our inability to keep up with the ever-inflating scholarly communications prices were hurting the educational efforts of our faculty, as well as putting them at a distinct competitive disadvantage for their research work. However, as we moved through the assessment, communication, and implementation cycles, we found that our strategic directions continually needed to shift even more radically if we desired to actually implement a sustainable collections plan that would assist our stakeholders both now and into the foreseeable future.

CONTEXT AND FIRST STEPS

Illinois Institute of Technology's Paul V. Galvin Library has been facing austerity for a number of years, and had an essentially static collections budget from FY2007-FY2017. The inability of the budget to continue meeting the needs of the stakeholders threatened research, accreditation, retention and persistence of students and faculty, and was having a noted impact on the undergraduate curriculum as well. Over those ten years, in addition to constantly dropping lower use electronic resource subscriptions, Illinois Tech libraries had reduced its full-time and student workforce, reduced maintenance and replacement of technology and furniture, ceased purchasing plans for monographs and standards, and closed a branch library. As a result, the expendable non-salary budget of the Galvin Library had become almost entirely collection-centered (84%) , and electronic resource subscription was almost the entirety of that budget (95%).

FY2015: Non-Salary Budget: 84% Collections

Collections Operating Budget: 95% eResource
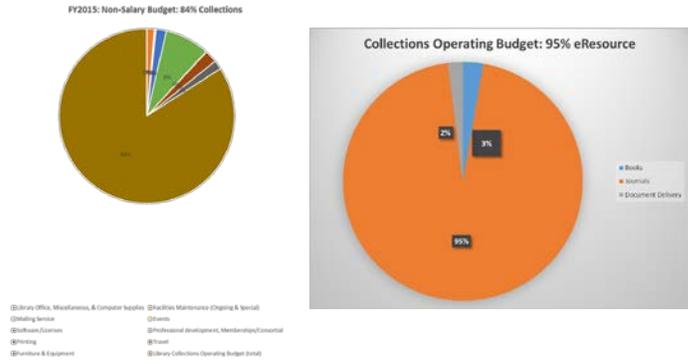
Setting the Stage: Collections And Resources Steering committee and consensus

Facing an unsustainable situation with static budget that only allowed us to about 60% purchasing power for what we need to reach perceived adequacy, the Galvin Library Administration approved the creation of a Collections And Resources Steering committee to find a solution for FY 2016. The CARS team, convened by the Assistant Dean for Assessment and Scholarly Communication, analyzed the e-Resources commitments and expenditures and took three options to the library liaisons for a discussion on possible paths forward. Dividing the databases up into tiers helped us understand that the inflation was coming primarily from our top tier of the largest ten commercial databases – an incredible 80+% of the cost. The options were:

I. Cut the largest package entirely (Science Direct) – by far the most expensive, but also highly used and valued

II. Cut all of the smallest, low-use packages – this had been the default model for the last ten years.

III. Identify the weakest performers in each tier (of database size) and downsize only those packages

COMPREHENSIVE COLLECTION ANALYSIS

The third option was chosen as it was the most popular among liaisons. In addition to some lesser cuts, comprehensive collection analysis allowed for the renegotiation and downsizing of the largest two subscription packages, allowing the Library to stay under budget for FY 2016 and FY 2017 despite continued price inflation. This analysis was routinized and enhanced by the installation of an Open Source ERMS (CORAL). This gave us more automated access to **use and cost/use data**. Additionally, I experimented with two unique metrics.

Creation of a **What We Value metric**=
I had liaison librarians rank their top ten databases for each of their areas, and compared these rankings to what was actually appeared in their LibGuides. Then I used these rankings to create a "What We Value" metric to help resolve some of the questions that inevitably come up regarding interdisciplinary utility, etc.

WWV Metric= total librarian top ten score + incidence across diversity of subjects + incidence across diversity of librarians + Libguide traffic/referral rankings)

Creation of **Academic Size Index**
Another index I created to try to understand if we were proportionally supporting various Academic units was the Academic Size Index (ASI). I excluded research centers and the Law School (and their library's expenditures). I compared the percentage of the faculty, courses, undergraduate bodies, and graduate bodies to create a metric to compare the size of each unit (such as the Armour College of Engineering, or ACE) to the Library's expenditures that supported each area.
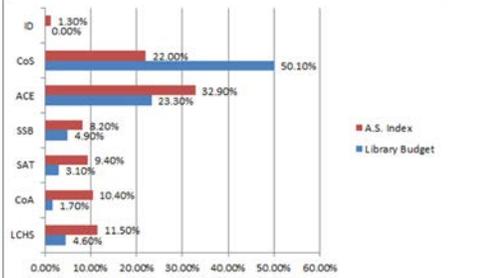

FURTHER AUSTERITY

An unexpected financial downturn for the university in the Summer of 2016 required sudden cuts, which would've meant a 7% reduction in the recently stabilized collections budget. We were able to leverage scheduled meetings with library liaisons with departments to mobilize faculty to advocate for the restoration of these funds. We also used these conversations to create an e-Resources survey to send out to faculty to helps us go beyond cost/use metrics. There were three specific provocations, raised earlier by faculty, that we then were able to answer.

FINDINGS FROM E-RESOURCE SURVEY OF FACULTY

➤ The Big Deal model seemed to be generally advantageous, although 20% of faculty rejected the premise of picking their three most important journals, we were able to gather enough information to discern that subscribing to individual journals would triple our costs, even if limited to 3 per journal. There was a duplication of needed journals, even within departments, & the Library was not "oversubscribing."

➤ More abstract and indexing resources were required beyond what scholars could find through Google Scholar (only 27% rated it to mostly or completely meet their discoverability needs).

➤ There were not clear relationships to size and expense to overall faculty valuation of our top databases – as shown in the following bubble chart. Furthermore, the "long tail" of small databases and e-resources was clearly the most valuable to our faculty.

Cost, Value, Usage of e-Resource Packages
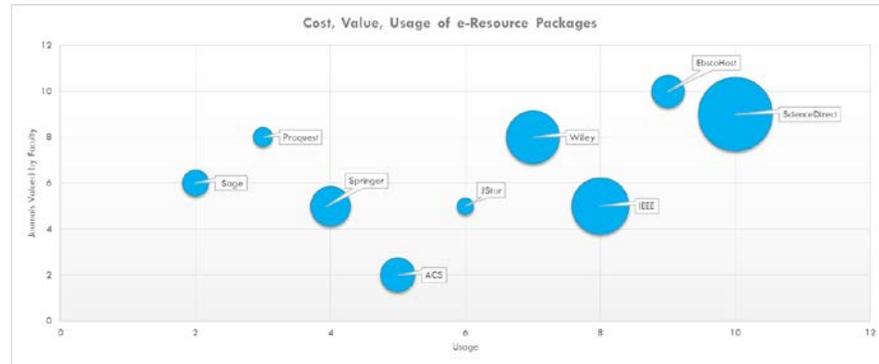
CLOSING THE LOOP WITH AN ALL-FACULTY PRESENTATION

Leveraging the initial conversations sparked through academic departments and the Research Council into a more formalized communication with our our Faculty Governance body. As budget freezes and austerity continued, we were able to grow this conversation to a point where we were invited to give a presentation to a joint meeting of all faculty and university administration.

In addition to being able to articulate the inflationary and scholarly communication crisis, as well as clarify the above findings, we were able to impart the financial unsustainability of the current situation,. We also were able to communicate the plummeting satisfaction with library subscriptions in LibQual and other Campus-wide Surveys, and discuss some proposed strategic directions. The presentation was positively received, and University administration committed to raising the collections budget of the library for that year and the next.

2006-2014 Expenditure Percentage Increases

2006-2016 COMPARISON
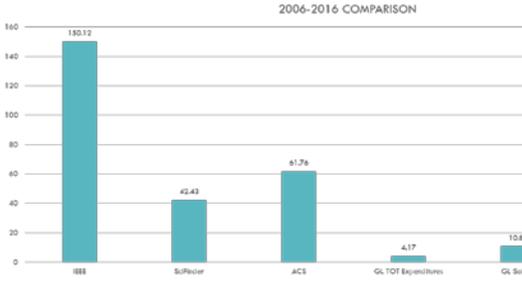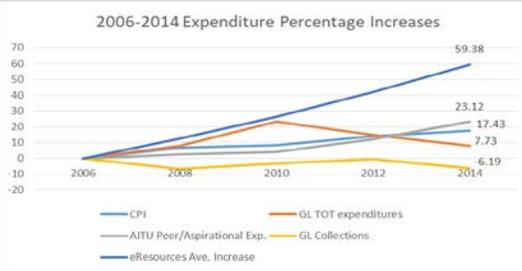
STRATEGIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Although the "wolf at the door" had been temporarily chased away, the continual inflation still required a more strategic reset, and the library worked with our Faculty Library Committee to refine several options for a new Collection Development Plan. We then set up meetings with representatives from (almost) every Academic Units to discuss these options and brainstorm new possibilities.

Reaching Out to Faculty for a Strategic Shift in Collection Development – The Options

1. Big Deals
2. Curricular Support
3. Support Scholarly Society Publishers
4. Support transition to "Open"

We heard intriguing feedback about all of the options, as well as new suggestions

➤ Faculty Feedback on options
- Preserving as much as access as possible was preferred, but discussions suggested that unbundling might be appropriate.
- Support for the Curricular or Scholarly Societies was very mixed.
- A surprisingly widespread amount of support for Open Access was present

➤ Unexpected concepts discussed
- Strong support for ILL, particularly for enhancements
- Support for expanded access through consortiums
- Faculty welcoming of library outreach and awareness campaigns
- Increased funding should be sought through multiple channels

LOOKING FORWARD

The Galvin Library was enable to create new **Collection Development Plan** with the data, and has been able to situate a number of strategic decisions as the natural outgrowth of these conversations. Additionally, the increased funding we received has not yet been threatened during the current financial environment.

- **Consortium access:** We were able to get needed resources for lower prices by joining new consortiums (including consortium membership!)
- **Vendor Negotiation and Unbundling:** We have felt empowered to approach vendors with more of an ability to walk away, at least temporarily, from access to specific databases. We notably unbundled our biggest Big Deal, and although our ILL borrowing increased for that publisher (+60%), there has not yet been a discernable negative effect on our users. This has stabilized the inflationary pressure on our budget for the next 2-3 years, and we will continue to push in this direction to gain the needed "swing space" to transition to the new environment.
- **Advancing Open:** The Galvin Library launched a new IR, has begun to support several new campus journals through OJS, and is actively working with Faculty Governance to sign onto DORA and create APC grants for OA publishing.
- *Further Assessment and Communication are imperative*