

2010

# Serials Collection Management in Recessionary Times: "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats"

Karen G. Lawson  
*Iowa State University*, [klawson@iastate.edu](mailto:klawson@iastate.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/libcat\\_pubs](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/libcat_pubs)



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/libcat\\_pubs/52](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/libcat_pubs/52). For information on how to cite this item, please visit <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html>.

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Collections and Technical Services at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collections and Technical Services Publications and Papers by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

---

# Serials Collection Management in Recessionary Times: "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats"

## **Abstract**

Difficult economic times often require that librarians make difficult decisions during a period of great stress. Declining budgets compete with rising expectations, along with ever changing licensing and service models from publishers and vendors. Serials librarians struggle to maintain and expand accessibility in an increasingly complex environment. Depending on the direness of the situation, the options can be threatening. During an economic downturn, the ideal of collection expansion can turn into a struggle to maintain current access along with the imperative to cancel important serial titles.

## **Keywords**

inflation, serials, "collection management," cancellations, strategies

## **Disciplines**

Library and Information Science

## **Comments**

This is a post-print of an article from *Serials Librarian* 59, no. 2 (2010): 137–146, doi:[10.1080/03615261003623146](https://doi.org/10.1080/03615261003623146). Posted with permission.

**Serials Collection Management in Recessionary Times:  
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats**

**INTRODUCTION**

by  
Karen Lawson

Karen Lawson is Associate Dean for Collections & Technical Services, Iowa State University Library, Ames, Iowa, 50011. e-mail: [klawson@iastate.edu](mailto:klawson@iastate.edu)

## Serials Collection Management in Recessionary Times: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

### INTRODUCTION

Difficult economic times often require that librarians make difficult decisions during a period of great stress. Declining budgets compete with rising expectations, along with ever changing licensing and service models from publishers and vendors. Serials librarians struggle to maintain and expand accessibility in an increasingly complex environment. Depending on the direness of the situation, the options can be threatening. During an economic downturn, the ideal of collection expansion can turn into a struggle to maintain current access along with the imperative to cancel important serial titles.

Recessions are recurring. Take, for example, this LJ (Library Journal) News Report **(1)** from 1981 that described an economic crisis eerily similar to our latest Great Recession:

- The lingering recession is taking a human toll: people of all classes are queuing up at unemployment lines
- The tight economy threatens to undermine America's public institutions
- War in the oil empires reinforces fears of oil shortages. Libraries have had to budget for long-range energy savings and spiraling fuel bills
- Cynicism about the promise of new technology is rapidly fading in the face of mounting evidence that electronic gadgetry will enhance the exchange of information and shape the destiny of society and institutions

What was true in the 1980 economy was reflected in the library and publishing worlds. In "Prices of U.S. and Foreign Published Material" **(2)** Sally F. Williams wrote: "Library budgets are being stretched to the limit due to double-digit library materials inflation, decreased value of the dollar abroad, and increased volume of publishing worldwide. Therefore, materials budgets need to be carefully allocated." The PW

(Publishers Weekly) News Report for that year noted: “1980 was a remarkable year in publishing history – one that may well come to be regarded as something of a watershed year, in which many of the book world’s assumptions, relationships, approaches of long standing began to be decisively altered ... It was a year, for a start, of considerable economic hardship for many publishers, one in which inflation continued at a steady and unacceptably high level and the cost of borrowing money rose at some point over 20 percent.” **(3)** During 2009/2010 the library and publishing worlds are once again dealing with an economic recession and its companions: rescissions, reversions, and cancellations.

Eberhart had this to say about the more recent 2001/2002 Recession, which accelerated after the September 11 terrorist attacks: “ As tax revenue dries up, bankruptcies escalate, jobless claims rise, and the costs of domestic security skyrocket, libraries nationwide are beginning to face new hurdles in obtaining basic funding sources.” **(4)** Concurrent with these domestic woes was a period of extensive investments in serials expenditures. Orsdel and Born wrote: “Between 1986 and 2006, journal expenditures of North American research libraries increased by a staggering 321% as libraries expanded access to journals by licensing bundles of journals (e.g., Science Direct) from different publishers (e.g., Elsevier). At the same time, the average journal costs increased by 180% while the U.S. Consumer Price Index rose by 84%. In other words, journal costs have outstripped inflation by a factor of more than two.” **(5)**

Will Manley takes us back even farther to the Depression of the 1930s and wrote in a 2007 issue of *American Libraries*: “Read through editions of this magazine, from the 1930s – the decade of the Great Depression. Money became the big concern of the library profession. More and more articles in the *Bulletin of the American Library Association* (precursor to *American Libraries*) were devoted to securing funding through trusts, charitable donations, and government support. ... Actually, the decade wasn’t all bad for libraries; the public used them as never before.” **(6)** Concerns and conditions within libraries

today are quite different from the 1930s or even the 1980s. Technology, digitization, platform/content fees are just a few of the game-changers. During 2008 price indexes for library materials generally outperformed the U.S. Consumer Price Index (CPI). As usual, periodicals significantly outperformed the CPI. (7)

The best time to have plans in place for serials collections management in recessionary times is during non-recessionary times; there is no time like the present to plan for the next one. Recessions test the strengths and weaknesses of our relationships with our partners in higher education and with the publishing world. We must maintain our focus on university goals, reuse existing good solutions, invest in robust, scalable “foundation” technologies, and build services collaboratively. While maintaining fundamental services, there should also be a place for speculative efforts and pilot projects.

Strategic planning, collaboration, continual stewardship, best practices, and re-engineering can provide librarians with a toolkit of innovative strategies that meets the worst of economic times with bold, persistent experimentation. This special section of *The Serials Librarian* is devoted to the topic of “Serials Collection Management in Recessionary Times.” Here you will find a wide variety of insights on the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities involved with serials collection management in recessionary times, written by academic librarians, vendors, publishers, fundraisers, and higher education professionals, as the following list demonstrates.

- **“The Global Economic Crisis: Libraries and Publishers”**

**Karen Hunter** is Senior Vice President within Global Academic & Customer Relations.

For the past 33 years, Karen has been a driving force within Elsevier, leading the start-up of ScienceDirect and the migration from print to electronic for the academic S&T community. She currently represents Elsevier on the boards of CrossRef, the Copyright Clearance Center and the CLOCKSS digital preservation partnership. She has published

numerous articles and has graduate degrees in history, library science and business administration from Cornell, Syracuse and Columbia Universities respectively. **Robert Bruning** is the Regional Sales Director and head of Government Sales in North America for Elsevier. Bob is a veteran of the information industry with over 20 years of experience in sales and product development, and in working with the corporate, government and academic library communities.

“Librarians and publishers have a history of working together – and independently -- to improve journal access and economics. In the recent period of economic crisis, stakeholders have found innovative ways to reduce pressure and continue joint efforts for the benefit of our shared research and student customers.”

- **“Evaluating Usage and Impact of Networked Electronic Resources: Adding Value to Research, Teaching and Learning”**

**Martha Kyrillidou** is the Director of ARL (Association of Research Libraries) Statistics and Service Quality Programs. She is responsible for all aspects of the statistics and assessment capability at ARL, which offers assessment products and services to the library community ranging from descriptive statistics to evaluative tools focusing on service quality improvements in libraries. Martha provides analytical support to libraries and other program areas within the ARL office and has widely disseminated assessment developments through a rich publication record.

**Terry Plum**, Assistant Dean, Simmons GSLIS, is responsible for technology and GSLIS West, the satellite site program at Mount Holyoke College, at Simmons GSLIS. With Brinley Franklin, he is the co-developer of MINES for Libraries, and has published a number of articles reporting web survey data. He has participated in a number of

international projects involving libraries and library science, including programs in Vietnam, Kosova, and Georgia.

**Bruce Thompson**, Texas A&M University, is Distinguished Professor of Educational Psychology and CEHD Distinguished Research Fellow, and Distinguished Professor of Library Science. Thompson is a former member of the Council of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), a former nominee for AERA President, and a former editor of *American Education Research Journal –Section on Teaching, Learning, and Human Development*, and several other journals. Bruce is especially known for (a) his work on effect sizes, and (b) his contributions to creating the LibQUAL+(R) protocol. He has published numerous articles and papers in both areas, and has written several standard textbooks in statistics.

“This paper outlines issues with implementation methods and sampling plans for point-of-use studies of networked electronic resources in libraries. Based on the methods and sampling plans used in numerous point-of-use surveys presently underway, this paper makes recommendations for the survey methodologies and sampling plans that are the best fit for libraries. The recommendations are efficient, sustainable, realistic, and inexpensive.”

- **“A Steep Part of the Landscape: Serials, Acquisitions, and the Challenges Faced by Higher Education”**

**Patricia Maloney** is president of Higher Education Consulting and Research, and is a researcher and practitioner with a background in higher education policy and management at public and private colleges and universities. Dr. Maloney has taught at

Drexel and George Mason Universities, and is currently engaged in research on STEM college faculty engagement in K-16 partnerships.

“This overview provides an illustration of challenges facing serials librarians in a period of high uncertainty for both public and independent higher education. Higher education faces unprecedented economic problems affecting both private and public support at the same time that libraries’ serials costs are increasing and publishing outlets are decreasing. This essay will illustrate these conditions, and suggest possible solutions for policymakers and libraries.”

- **"Open Access Journals in College Library Collections"**

**William H. Walters** is Dean of Library and Information Services and Associate Professor of Social Sciences at Menlo College in Atherton, California. His recent research has focused on the institutional costs of Open Access publishing, departmental fund allocation methods, and the long-term sustainability of academic library collections. Dr. Walters holds a doctorate in sociology (demography) from Brown University as well as master’s degrees in geography and librarianship. **Cheryl S. Collins** is Technical Services Librarian at Menlo College in Atherton, California.

“Students and scholars can take full advantage of Open Access journals only if libraries make them available through mechanisms that patrons are familiar with. This study examines the extent to which 30 American liberal arts colleges have provided access to 166 Open Access journals through their journal title lists (Serials Solutions, Ex Libris, etc.) and their OPACs. While 57 percent of the colleges provide access to at least 90 percent of the journals in our sample, 20 percent of the colleges provide access to fewer than 20 percent of the journals. Large and high-impact journals are especially likely to appear in

libraries' catalogs and journal lists. There is no systematic trend by publication fee status or country of publication, however. The study concludes with a discussion of the strategies libraries can use to select Open Access journals and add them to their collections."

- **"Shared Digital Access and Preservation Strategies for Serials at the Center for Research Libraries"**

**Bernard F. Reilly** is President of the Center for Research Libraries, a partnership of 245 U.S. and Canadian universities, colleges and independent research libraries. Reilly was principal investigator for two digital preservation projects funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: the Political Communications Web Archiving Investigation (2002-04) and the Auditing and Certification of Digital Archives project. Reilly was previously Director of Research and Access at the Chicago History Museum (1997-2001).

**James Simon** is Director of International Resources at the Center for Research Libraries. He is also the director of the Global Resources Network, a collaborative initiative of major North American universities and research libraries to promote the widespread availability and exchange of knowledge and source materials for international studies. Simon is responsible for the coordination of such CRL programs as the World Newspaper Archive, Digital South Asia Library, the International Coalition on Newspapers, and the Area Microform Projects of the Center.

"The Center for Research Libraries and its members have engaged in several strategic programs in recent years to provide persistent access to electronic versions of its historical collections, particularly serials. One of these programs is the World Newspaper Archive, a partnership of CRL member institutions and Readex, a division of NewsBank.

Through the World Newspaper Archive program, CRL provides its members robust access to historical newspaper content, federates the costs of this large-scale undertaking, and provides for community control over content, archiving provisions, and future collections. “

- **“The Paper Divide”**

**Wayne Pedersen** is the head of the Acquisitions Department and Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Librarian, Iowa State University Library.

“The transition of serial collections from a paper format to an electronic format has created a syndrome of rising expectations in academia. The speed and convenience of accessing peer-reviewed journal articles at the desktop has led to an increasing demand for more electronic serials. Concurrent with improved access to journal articles via locally owned electronic serials, Interlibrary Loan services offered by large academic libraries are now routinely providing electronic versions of scholarly documents to the user’s desktop in one or two days. This has created a situation where electronic ownership of a serial is the preferred option but electronic delivery via Interlibrary Loan is a reasonable alternative. Locally held paper serials used to be the best option for users. Now paper serials are increasingly viewed as an inconvenience, creating a “Paper Divide” between electronic serial ownership and electronic ILL service. Moreover, published reports indicate that electronic serials are less costly to maintain than paper serials. Because of user preference, cost considerations and space considerations, the move to electronic serials is inevitable. This paper explores the implications of the

Paper Divide and how academic libraries are coping with this challenge.”

- **“A Reprise, Or Round Three: Using a Database Management Program as a Decision Support System for the Cancellation of Periodicals and Serials”**

**Judith M. Nixon** is the Education Librarian at Purdue University. At the time of this project she was the Head of the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library at Purdue University

“Annual journal inflation rates of eight percent or higher has compelled libraries to cancel journals. Since 1992 Purdue Libraries have had three major cancellation projects. This article reviews how the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library approached this task in 2009 and developed a database management program to identify titles based on two criteria: low use or availability of the title in full text in one of three aggregator databases. The education and humanities departments reached the cancellation goal, but several social science departments had to transfer funds from the book budget to reach their goal. This indicates the importance of the journal to research in these areas. “

- **“Assessing Your Vendors’ Viability”**

**Virginia Kay Williams** is the Acquisitions Librarian, and **Kathy Downes** is the Senior Associate Dean for University Libraries, Wichita State University.

“Modern libraries invest substantial resources in print and electronic serials. Unfortunately librarians do not always understand how financial issues faced by vendors in today’s economy can impact library services. Librarians are careful when initially selecting major vendors; however, good stewardship demands that libraries continue to

assess their vendors' financial health throughout the relationship. This paper discusses the risks that vendor financial difficulties pose to library operations and recommends methods for librarians to monitor vendor viability."

- **"All In This Together: a Subscription Vendor's View"**

**John Lumsden**, B.A. is President and General Manager of EBSCO Canada Ltd. John has been working with Canadian Libraries since 1990. **Kittie Henderson**, M.L.S., is the Director of the Academic and Law Divisions of EBSCO Information Services. Kittie joined EBSCO in 1992. **Allen Powell** is President of EBSCO Information Services and is responsible for operations worldwide.

"These are challenging economic times for everyone. Many libraries are reporting budget reductions and staffing re-alignments. This article will discuss the impact of the economic downturn on Canadian libraries as well as vendor services that can facilitate re-engineered processes and procedures to maximize resources."

- **"So Poor We Can't Even Pay Attention: Identifying New Serials for Political Science During the Great Recession"**

**Edward Goedeken** is Humanities Bibliographer and Collections Coordinator at Iowa State University Library.

"The article exams the most prominent political science journals and discusses a method for using the ISI Web of Science database to identify titles that the local academic faculty are using to support their scholarship."

- **“Managing Resources to Maximize Serials Access: The Case of the Small Liberal Arts College”**

**Susan H. Zappen** is Associate College Librarian for Collections at Skidmore College's Lucy Scribner Library. Since 1991 she has been a regular presenter at the Charleston Conference Serials Management pre-conference. She is currently Past President of the Eastern New York Chapter of the Association of College & Research Libraries.

“Given the current economic recession, small liberal arts college libraries can maximize serials access by better managing physical, human, and fiscal resources. A key component of serials access in today’s economy is managing the transition from print to online resources. Libraries can eliminate some physical resources such as bound and older volumes and the GPO depository and eliminate binding of periodicals, thus permitting a reallocation of both physical and human resources to other tasks and services. They can ensure optimal management of fiscal resources by participating in consortia; tracking the price inflation of serials, monitoring impact of inflation upon the materials budget and library collections; determining the cost effectiveness of serials by ongoing analysis of usage statistics; and reducing serials expenditures by making prudent choices to contend with the challenges of the current recession.”

- **“Raising the Library Profile to Fight Budget Challenges”**

**Lynda James-Gilboe** is senior vice-president of marketing for ProQuest and a 30-year veteran of library and publishing industries.

“As university budgets tighten academic libraries are becoming more aggressive and innovative in raising awareness of their services to protect needed funding. In the age of Google®, that means marketing collections to both students and faculty as a key

component of building a positive, essential profile. ProQuest is completing a study of academic library efforts to build awareness and market the breadth of collections. This article will summarize the results of that study, providing not only raw data on the state of marketing collections, but also: Best practice techniques for raising awareness and protecting budgets, Emerging models of success, Role models for effective marketing, Effective vendor support: where to turn for products that conquer barriers between libraries and users, and Effective marketing support: where to turn for expert advice.”

- **“Thinking Outside of the Box: Fundraising During Economic Downturns”**

**Carolyn Taylor** has worked as an independent grant writer and consultant for the past 15 years. She is currently a program manager at the University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work in Houston, Texas. Previously, she served as the director and senior grant writer for a non-profit organization focusing on housing solutions for people with disabilities. Prior to her local efforts, Carolyn worked as a Senior International Consultant for humanitarian programs focusing on land mine victim research, in-depth program evaluations, creating innovative socio-economic models for people with disabilities, and general fundraising activities. Principle clients included the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, World Rehabilitation Fund (WRF), and the U.S. Department of State (Inter-Agency Working Group). Carolyn received a Master’s of Public Health (MPH) certificate from The George Washington University School of Public Health, Washington, D.C. in 2002. Also, she awarded a Master’s of Science in Library Science, (M.S.L.S.) from Case Western Reserve, Cleveland, Ohio which she completed in 1978.

“Libraries across the country are looking for new sources of money to replace the funds that have disappeared from their budgets during this economic recession. This article examines the potential that the American Economic Recovery Act (ARRA) of 2009 has for academic, public, and school libraries. Also, trends in foundation giving, corporate giving programs, and community foundations are analyzed in order for libraries to develop a successful, updated strategy that meets the challenges of the current economic climate. Each library must consider a multi-level strategy that includes federal funding sources, but, equally important, balances the possibilities of corporate and foundation giving. Competition for all sources of funding is expected to be fierce, so the first step of any library’s strategy is to define what makes your institution unique and highlight the benefits of newly created partnerships. Finally, librarians are encouraged to think like entrepreneurs, i.e. creating merchandized products, to establish long-term funding streams that will guide them into a financially stable future.”

- **“The View from the UK: the Economic Crisis and Serials Acquisitions on an Offshore Island”**

**Tony Kidd** is Assistant Director, Financial & Corporate Services, at the Library of the University of Glasgow, Scotland. He has long experience of budgeting issues in research libraries, with particular reference to the acquisition of serials and other information resources. He is currently Chair of the UK Serials Group, and a member of a number of national advisory bodies including the JISC [Joint Information Services Committee] Journals Working Group and the SHEDL [Scottish Higher Education Digital Library] Steering Group.

“This article considers the case study of university libraries in the United Kingdom, and their exposure to the effects of the worldwide recession. Exchange rate changes have been a noteworthy aspect of the UK situation, with the pound sterling deteriorating markedly against both the Euro and the US Dollar. Examples of the impact of these changes are outlined. The implications of government spending plans over the next few years are also examined. Some possible ways of coping with these changes are explored, including the expansion of shared services, a reduction in the prevalence of publisher bundle subscriptions, and an increase in the impact of open access activity.”

## References

1. LJ (Library Journal) News Report, *The Bowker Annual* 26<sup>th</sup> ed. (1981): 1-2, 11-12.
2. Sally F. Williams, "Prices of U.S. and Foreign Published Material," *The Bowker Annual* 26<sup>th</sup> ed. (1981): p. 342.
3. PW (Publishers Weekly) News Report for 1980, *The Bowker Annual* 26<sup>th</sup> ed. (1981): 42.
4. George M. Eberhart, "The Recession Comes Home to Libraries," *American Libraries*, 33, no. 1 (Jan. 2002): 26.
5. Lee C. Van Orsdel and Kathleen Born, "Periodicals Price Survey 2007: Serials Wars," *Library Journal*, April 15, 2007, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6431958.html> (accessed October 17, 2009).
6. Will Manley, "Our Great Depression," *American Libraries* 38, no. 5 (May 2007): 88.
7. Narda Tafuri, "Prices of U.S. and Foreign Published Materials," *Library and Book Trade Almanac* 54<sup>th</sup> ed. (2009): 483.