

Walking away from the 'big deal': consequences and achievements

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In 2004 the four member libraries of the Triangle Research Libraries Network in the United States did not renew their two large e-journal packages or 'big deals': Elsevier's ScienceDirect and Blackwell's Synergy. This paper details how the libraries informed their users of this decision; worked with university administrators and users around this decision; what the libraries continue to do to meet users' needs for journal issues in these two packages; and the continuing efforts they employ to work with the individual publishers to resolve issues and develop solutions regarding scholarly communication on their individual campuses.

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In the autumn of 2003 the libraries of the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) in the United States made the unprecedented decision to leave two 'big deals' as of January 2004. It was not an easy decision to make. However, it was determined this was a necessary decision due to increasing costs of journal titles, the inability to cancel journal titles in order to subscribe to new titles and, of course, the inevitable reason: declining or static budgets.

Background

The members of the TRLN are:

- Duke University
- North Carolina Central University
- North Carolina State University
- University of North Carolina.

These four institutions are all located in North Carolina within thirty miles of each other; three are publicly funded institutions and one is privately funded.

The ten libraries of these four institutions encompass business, health sciences and law collections in addition to major research resources in the humanities, engineering, sciences and technology, and the social sciences. These ten member libraries have combined holdings approaching fourteen million volumes, employ over one thousand staff and have budgets totaling in excess of eighty

million dollars, approximately thirty-five million of which is for collections.

All four schools work cooperatively in collection building and also in sharing print resources through consortium purchasing, sharing of a South Asian bibliographer, and borrowing, lending and delivering collection materials on a daily basis between the four universities. These arrangements are long-standing ones and have worked well in a print environment.

Several years ago the TRLN member libraries established an Electronic Resources Committee, charged to review and enter into license agreements for electronic materials for the ten libraries. Over the course of years, this group coordinated the purchase of a suite of consortium electronic products ranging from ScienceDirect and Web of Science to the Bibliography of Asian Studies and America: History and Life. TRLN has developed a set of licensing and operating principles that guide its work and promote work in that consortium environment.

The first two components of the TRLN licensing principles are:

- TRLN members have the right to manage their collections to meet the needs of their respective user communities and respond to changing budgetary realities.
- Librarians must also be able to manage the library budget and prioritize expenditures to ensure that funds are spent to meet the teaching and research needs of their institutions.

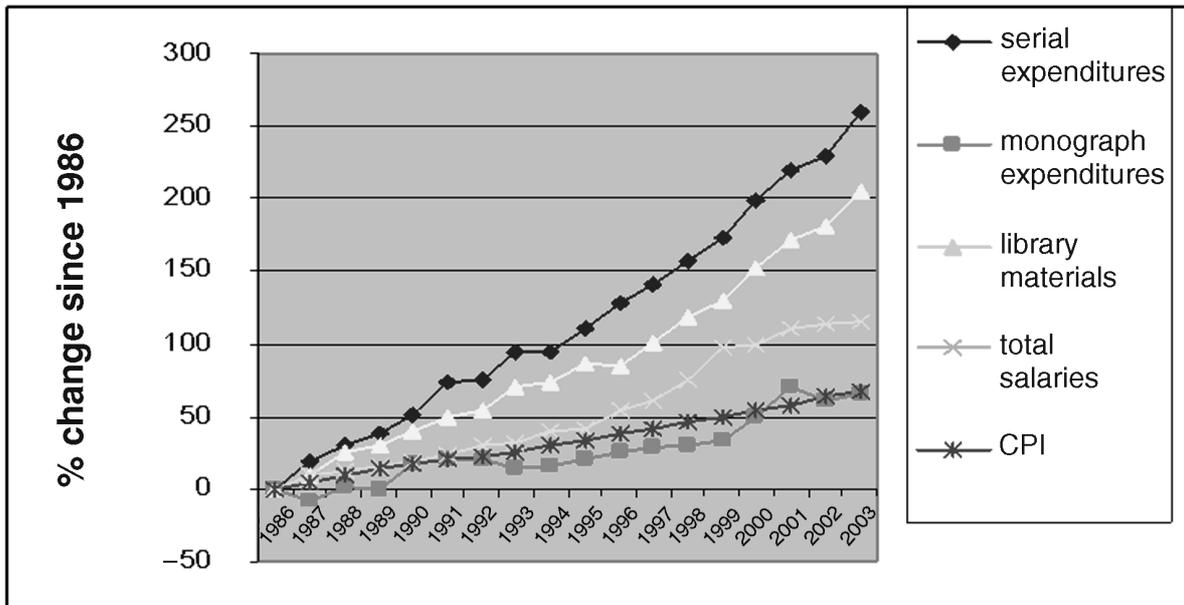


Figure 1. Expenditure trends in ARL Libraries 1986–2003

Courtesy of ARL

As with any university or college campus, research needs will change, grow or evolve each year. New faculty members come who have slightly different interests, other faculty change the ‘flavor’ of their research and need different resources, and still other faculty leave for other institutions. In the past, the TRLN Libraries were able to meet those changing research needs with existing collections

budgets, but in the late 1990s it was becoming apparent that serials costs were escalating faster than our budgets.

Figures 1 and 2 show recent trends in serials expenditure for the major research libraries in the United States, as provided by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL); three of the four TRLN institutions are members of the ARL. It is very

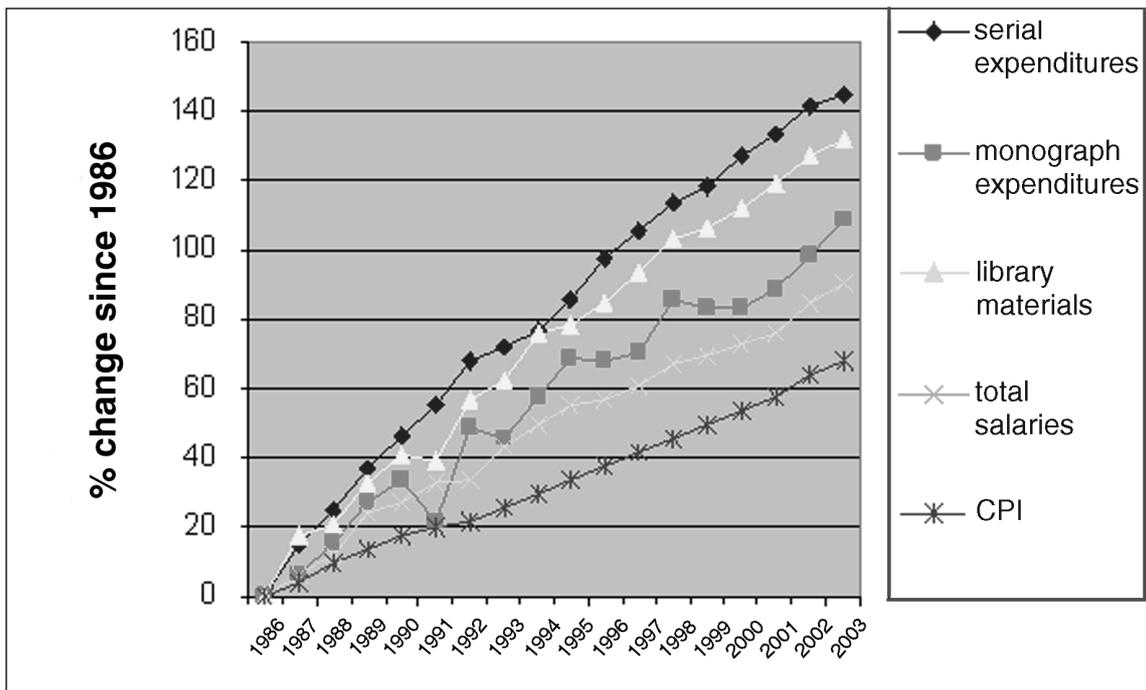


Figure 2. Expenditure trends in Duke Libraries 1986–2003

evident that serials costs outstrip budgets. At the TRLN institutions this is especially true because each supports sciences and engineering, and two of the institutions have medical schools. A third has a veterinary school. Scientific, technical and medical (STM) publishing consumes a large portion of all the budgets. Some librarians think that programs in the humanities, social sciences and international studies suffer as a result of increasing costs of STM materials.

The two packages I highlight are the Elsevier ScienceDirect package and the Blackwell Synergy package (comprising both the humanities and social sciences group as well as the science package).

The mechanics of each deal were:

- Elsevier: TRLN licensed this product in 1999 with a three-year deal and then extended it for one additional year.

We had access to a shared collection among all four schools with one percent cancellation clause across all four schools; a cap on pricing; ability to add new journals to our Elsevier stable but could not cancel more than one percent of the total contract's worth over the course of the entire contract. In Duke's case that amounted to ten thousand dollars over three years.

- Blackwell: this product was licensed each year; it began in 1999 for the 2000 subscription year.

We had access to the complete Blackwell journal collection but had a no cancellation clause.

An important component of each contract was the ability for our readers to have access to all titles subscribed to by our consortia libraries.

We knew we had overlap amongst our title lists but those title lists were based on print subscriptions, and collection development librarians were comfortable knowing the journals selected on their individual campuses met the teaching and research needs of their faculty and students. The non-subscribed, non-shared titles our patrons would have access to as a result of licensing these two packages were nice, but were not considered crucial to collection building on each campus.

Statistics showed, in Duke's case, that our patrons did access other titles but the predominant use by our patrons was of our core list of titles, those subscribed to and paid for by Duke. Later this became an important component in our release from these big deals.

Blackwell and Elsevier made it clear during the autumn of 2003 negotiations that cancellation of titles in order to subscribe to new titles was not an option; each would allow changes from print to electronic only to make some budgetary headway. The amount that would be saved, however, was not sufficient to respond to new research needs by the faculty and graduate students. With minimal increases to the collections budgets at each institution, and in some instances declines in budgets, it was becoming almost impossible to add new journals to meet new research needs without the cancellation of a similarly priced journal.

By the time renewal contracts were discussed in the late summer and early autumn of 2003, the situation was becoming very serious. Cuts in budgets and support for new programs were meeting head on with rising journal pricing, especially in the STM fields. Library directors at each campus knew of the worsening budget situations and were in touch with faculty administrators to determine the next steps. Infusions of one-time funding were not the answer as purchasing ongoing resources based on one-time money is disastrous. Members of the TRLN Electronic Resources Committee worked with their university librarians and these e-journal package providers to continue to find ways to subscribe to what our users needed, while university administrators met to decide what to do next. However, without some ability to cancel journal titles to control expenditures and the ability to purchase new titles, it seemed we had reached an impasse. As noted before, the TRLN licensing principles became a guiding force: librarians needed to be able to manage their collections and respond to changing budget situations.

During the autumn, each library continued to keep faculty and users apprised of negotiations on a big-picture level. Librarians met with faculty and student groups, wrote articles in the student newspapers, posted budget information on web pages, advanced different pricing models, etc., to make sure everyone knew what was occurring. Questions frequently heard and asked were: *What would this mean to the faculty and the students? Is there a way around this impasse? What can I do as an editor of one of these journals?*, and so on.

By the beginning of November 2003 it was determined each of our schools could no longer sustain the results of the no cancellation policies from these big deal packages. The package providers would not budge in the negotiations. Each

institution needed to subscribe to new titles, and to do that each needed to unsubscribe to other titles. Each school elected independently not to renew their Elsevier ScienceDirect and Blackwell Synergy products based on the TRLN consortia-negotiated license. Each university would subscribe individually with these two vendors for what their schools wanted.

For the Elsevier package, each institution would lose the shared access of its consortia partners; for the Blackwell package each institution would lose access to all but those titles it currently subscribed to on its own campus. The immediate effects of this decision were the loss of access to five hundred-plus Elsevier journals. All non-subscribed Blackwell journals were no longer accessible to patrons and faculty on our campuses.

The method of disseminating this information was crucial to the success of this decision. The announcement had to be carefully worded to inform faculty that journals they used in their research would still be available to them – maybe not on their desktop but we would continue to make every effort to get individual articles for them upon request.

The chief academic officers at each of the four universities in TRLN wrote letters to their faculty and distributed them on the same day detailing the situation at hand. These letters also addressed the consequences of these decisions as they related to faculty use. Collection development librarians made sure faculty representatives, library council members, and others knew that access would be limited and that there would be a need for different delivery models for materials held at the other campuses, or not held at any TRLN institution.

Not only did these cancellation actions have a great effect on the libraries' customers but also caused a ripple outward to the technical services staff at each institution and subsequently to our subscription agents. Each of our institutions' agents had put our Blackwell and Elsevier titles on hold. That is, they did not process renewals until the negotiations with Blackwell and Elsevier were complete. Serials staff were scrambling all over the Triangle to record subscription decisions that collection development librarians had determined. In most cases, institutions made a variety of subscription decisions for these two products. Our decision at Duke was: some print only; some electronic only; and some titles print plus online

(and online access could be for the rolling archive or the perpetual archive).

Good serials staff are always ready to spring into action and good subscription agents seem to take these issues in their stride. Consequently, most of the schools placed their renewals within a few weeks and our patrons were unaware of any delays in getting publications to the shelves. But there was much 'to-ing and fro-ing' between all of us as we worked out what titles would be cancelled, what new titles would be ordered, and what titles would have their method of access changed.

Of course, library staff at each school thought gloom and doom would descend on our campuses as faculty came to realize that journals they depended upon accessing at their desktops were no longer available to them. But that proved not to be the case! The provosts and the university librarians at each institution were poised to replace titles unavailable at the researcher's fingertips using different delivery methods. Each university set up accounts at various document delivery sources to facilitate quick and easy access to journals. Duke set up credit card accounts at Ingenta, CISTI and other document delivery providers. We encouraged public service librarians to use these services. For those journals held at another TRLN institution we would continue to process journal ILL in the normal way: borrowing from our partners through TRIPSAVER, a TRLN service which provides a photocopy of the journal article within 24 hours or a scanned copy of the article in a few hours to the user's desktop, depending upon license rights.

At Duke University, we have not seen a major upsurge in filling these ILL requests – one reason being that one of the two package providers was very late in canceling our online service for non-subscribed journals and our patrons therefore continued to have access well beyond the time for which we paid.

A review of the costs of the document delivery operations and the articles for which we are paying indicates that the majority of those requested are not from journals we cancelled in this event!

The consequences of these cancellation decisions are still being felt:

- We lost access to many journals throughout the Triangle; easily over 750 between the Elsevier and Blackwell lists.
- Our Elsevier subscription content cost increased from 7.5% in 2003 to 20% in 2004;
- Our Blackwell content cost increased to 16%.

Confronting access problems is a constant job duty for one staff member at Duke. The more we 'sliced and diced' the levels of access, the harder it was for the publisher to keep our account straight.

Consequently, each library had to cancel more titles than originally anticipated in order to meet budget targets.

Each institution has renegotiated its own Elsevier license on its own terms; and only one school has re-joined a consortia deal with the Blackwell package.

Schools and libraries have learned and profited from these experiences. Paramount among them is our ability to walk away from a deal and live to tell the tale. Positive outcomes have been:

- Our faculties applaud our decision, and each now has a heightened understanding of the budget situations in our libraries.
- We have seen greater interest among faculty to fight for larger increases in funding for the libraries.
- We have a large support network we can call upon when other situations similar to this arise.
- Our subject bibliographers collaborate with faculty in an even more mutual effort.
- It has allowed our subject librarians to review all titles from these two publishers and to make major changes consistent with teaching and research, as well as budget needs.

What does this whole experience mean for our collections and for those who select?

- It validated the original collection development decisions made before print was a secondary medium. Our selectors know their faculty and students and the titles purchased to meet their research and teaching needs are being provided for by the current collection of journal titles: print only, print plus online or electronic only.
- With the cancellation of a number of both Elsevier and Blackwell titles, the libraries at Duke and the other institutions in TRLN were able to subscribe to some new titles needed by faculty who are doing new and different research.

What did this mean for these two big deal packages and other deals to be determined?

- Vendors would have been better off giving us some leeway. We cancelled much more than if we had been given a little 'wiggle' room.
- The ability to monitor our subscriptions costs and to make cancellation decisions based on our faculty needs is primary to providing a well rounded collection at Duke. Those same TRLN licensing principles were invoked again:
 - manage the collection to meet user needs, and
 - manage the library budget and prioritize expenditures.

TRLN continues to collaborate with journal publishers and to enter into new agreements, but these must be on our terms. This is the first time our consortium collaborated in this way and there was a feeling of trust that I am not sure was quite as visible before. We and our faculty feel empowered and confident to talk about our budgets and our collections.

The support of the faculty has been critical to this whole effort. Faculty may not know the cost of their favorite journal, but they have a much better idea of the STM journal crisis on their campuses and how it affects the libraries.

We continue to have dialogs with our faculty; we are planning a day-long program to continue this conversation with faculty who serve on editorial boards from these journals. We also have had programs on each of our campuses on open access publishing models; these will continue, and I hope they will bring forth new ideas that can be used by all libraries and researchers.

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