INNOVATIONS

Automatic circulation of new journal issues

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Of the many ways libraries have used to provide current awareness services to users, one of the most common is routing or circulation of new journal issues. Tom Whitehall, in his overview of British current awareness services, refers to two methods of journal circulation as the "pass the parcel" method and the "ballgame" technique (*Practical Current Awareness Services From Libraries*, Gower, 1986). The former describes traditional routing, which suffers from the obvious difficulty of tracing the whereabouts of individual issues. The "ballgame" technique alleviates that problem by circulating issues to named individuals who return them to the library, which in turn circulates them to other individuals and so on, like the game of "toss and catch."

For the past 15 years or so the Biological Sciences Branch Library at the University of New Hampshire has been automatically circulating new journal issues to faculty who have requested the service. The service is called "Special Circulation" because the one-week loan period is the same as the regular circulation period for periodicals. Over 65 faculty members are currently involved in the program which circulates (through campus mail) every issue of over 290 titles, or about 7,000 issues per year. Issues of *Current Contents* and selected printed indexes are also circulated.

In terms of market penetration, the service reaches every department in the college served by the branch but one. With the exception of the largest department, the participation rate per department averages 50%. Several other departments and research units across campus also have participants despite the fact that little organized promotion of the service has ever been carried out.

Over the years a set of policies and practices evolved to ensure the smooth flow of new issues through the program. This set of rules was first written down only about three years ago. The focus of this paper is to describe and briefly discuss the written guidelines that have worked in this situation and that probably will work in other situations.

Every faculty member interested in Special Circulation receives a copy of the following guidelines before he or she enters the program:

Guidelines for special circulation of new journal issues

1. All new issues of research journals are put on display for two weeks before entering the Special (automatic) Circulation program. Issues on display do not circulate.

2. Special Circulation is available to faculty members only. It is not intended for graduate students or staff members.

3. Service is initiated at the faculty member's request.

4. Faculty in the program must confirm the titles to be circulated to them at the beginning of each semester and the summer session by responding to a letter sent to them at those times.

5. Issues of all journals circulate for one week.

6. Faculty will be sent overdue notices weekly. With the third notice all Special Circulation will be temporarily suspended until the overdue issue is returned. Any time after the third notice faculty can be billed for the overdue issue at the cost of replacement plus a $5.00 service charge.

7. When more than one faculty member has requested the same title, priority is given to those with the best record of returning issues.

8. No more than three issues of one title are sent to any individual faculty member. No subsequent issue of that title will be sent until one of the previous issues is returned.

9. The maximum number of titles on any individual faculty member's list is 30.

10. Only unbound issues (not bound volumes) will be mailed. Titles which have bound current issues (i.e., *Journal of Physiology*) will be placed on "Hold" at the Main desk and a notice will be sent. These bound items will be held for 1 week and will be signed out in the regular manner for journals.

It is hoped that some or all of these guidelines will be of help to those developing similar current awareness services. However, a few additional notes and comments are in order.

Originally, new journal issues were on display for one week. The display period was extended at the request of the dean and Executive Committee of the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture which the branch serves. Issues checked in over a two-week period are batched together for display the following two weeks. The display is changed every other Monday morning. Issues to be circulated under the program which are marked at check-in according to flagged Kardex cards are then separated for processing.

Some issues are returned with routing slips attached. Apparently some faculty members "subcirculate" their issues to graduate students. This is allowed as long as the time limits are observed.

Although sending a confirmatory letter to all participants three times per year is labor intensive, the benefits of allowing faculty to review their titles regularly and of informing us about planned time away from campus are substantial. This practice reduces the problem of issues being sent to an empty office.

Suspending faculty who fail to return any one issue within three weeks provides a nonmonetary penalty that is entirely within the control of the library. On this campus, fines and bills are handled by university administrative offices and provide little leverage. This provision reassures the majority of faculty who return issues on time that other issues are not allowed to sit on the desks of a few faculty members.

Recording the number of overdue notices sent to individual faculty members and ranking the priority of receipt by the number of notices sent provides an incentive to return issues quickly. Michaelson pointed out in a book review that the incentive described here has been used successfully in at least one other library (*College & Research Libraries* 49, (November 1987): 539–542). Admittedly, a large commitment of time and labor is required. A cooperative campus mail service is also essential, since issues are distributed to buildings across campus and to a estuarine research lab more than 5 miles away. Obviously, a tradition of circulating periodicals and detailed check-in and special circulation records are also necessary.

The question can be asked: Isn't this just a high-cost method of routing? We prefer to think of it as an extended library service that brings the library to the user with the library bearing the cost of improved access. The user isn't merely informed of current, and possibly useful, citations as in table of contents or online SDI services. The user doesn't have to make a trip to the library for the actual article or make a special request for document delivery. To an individual faculty member this service is tantamount to a free personal subscription and obviously saves considerable time and effort. Because new issues are on display for two weeks before circulating, regular users of the library need only check the display twice every month.

On the other hand, anyone searching for an issue that is circulating may request that a "Hold" be placed on that issue. Much of the time a particular issue is involved in the program is spent in the library awaiting processing. While in the library the issue is always available on request.

About once a year someone, usually a new faculty member, questions the circulation of new journal issues. Once it is explained that the latest issues on display do not circulate, that Special Circulation is not routing, and that a large number of faculty members participate, the new faculty member usually joins the program.

Occasional verbal and written feedback has been very positive. One faculty member said that he and his colleagues "cherish" the service. In considering whether the benefits justify the costs, the benefits must be said to include the good will that accrues to the library as a result of performing this service. The question has even been raised on this campus: When will other branch libraries be offering the service?

Since the program is similar to regular circulation we hope to make use of the circulation component of the integrated library system (LS/2000) currently being installed in the branch. This should reduce the load of manual record keeping for the service. A PC-based database of faculty names, campus addresses, and requested titles has already been created. Future development of the service could include evaluation by means of brief questionnaires and wider promotion. Eventually, when more full text articles are available online and subscriptions to printed journals decline, the old ballgame will become obsolete.

Innovations: Allocating one-time funds on the basis of weighted need

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In December 1989, the Auburn University at Montgomery Library received $200,000 in one-time money from the University administration, to be used for the purchase of library materials. Because the acquisitions staff is small (one professional, two paraprofessionals and two students), the influx of these funds on top of the allocations already made for the fiscal year would have swamped the unit.

To prevent creating an unmanageable burden on the acquisitions staff and to ensure that the available monies were spent as effectively as possible, the library began examining ways to allocate the funds. Traditionally, funds were allocated to the teaching faculty of the university's five schools (Business, Education, Liberal Arts, Nursing, and Sciences) according to a formula which took into account the credit hour production of each of the schools and each of the departments within the school. Using credit hour production as the driving mechanism for dividing the funds, however, fails to take into account the needs of the various programs or differences in costs associated with meeting those needs. In considering how to spend the new monies, two elements were needed:

- a plan that would ensure the efficient and effective expenditure of resources by permitting the library to funnel monies into those areas of the collection showing the greatest need; and
- a formula to fairly match the allocations with collection needs.

After much discussion, it was determined that the most efficient method of expending the one-time funds was approval plans. These plans would permit the library to acquire current materials in support of the university curriculum while permitting the teaching faculty to use their allocations to purchase retrospectively. Three vendors were invited to make presentations: Blackwell North America, Baker and Taylor, and Yankee Book Peddler. Blackwell's approval plan was chosen for breadth of coverage, discounts, availability of electronic ordering, and the management reports offered.

With a vendor selected, the library was now required to determine the allocations for the approval plan. The library staff worked with Vaughn Judd, an assistant professor of marketing in the school of business, to devise a formula that would identify the relative needs of the collection.

Before the formula could be constructed, the collection needed to be measured against something. *Books for College Libraries*, 4th ed. was selected for comparison because of its breadth of coverage and because it emphasizes the holdings of undergraduate libraries.

The formula developed included the number of books BCL listed for a subject, the number of books included on the BCL list but missing from the library collection (based upon a sample), the percentage of deficiency (the number of books in the core list which the library lacked divided by the total number of books for the subject in the list), the average book cost, the deficiency cost (number of books deficient ↔ average cost per book) and the weighted need (deficiency cost ↔ percentage of deficiency).

To determine the number of books the library lacked, the staff began sampling the collection. Matching the number of titles held against the