

purchases. At present rates, future subscriptions to these four databases will total \$8,240 per year. Based on the present cost of supplies for our Info-Trac workstations, we estimate that a maximum of \$1,300 per year will be needed for paper and ink cartridges for our five new workstations.

Choosing CD-ROM products for a Reference Department is a complex process. This rapidly developing technology has problems today that may be solved tomorrow. Vendors cannot answer every question and prices are subject to change. Several vendors offer demonstration disks that are helpful in making decisions and others send sales representatives to demonstrate their products.

Librarians who are willing to try out the new technology have the opportunity to make a major impact on product development. Librarians can provide information on making the databases more usable; vendors can provide information on obtaining hardware inexpensively. This is an opportunity for entrepreneurs to package computers especially designed for public CD-ROM use, to design security devices to protect all workstation components, and to write manuals for end-users. Most significantly, this is an opportunity for librarians to evaluate the effectiveness of CD-ROM technology in meeting the user's information needs. ■ ■

Charging for online search services in academic libraries

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Can you afford the high costs of free access?

Relatively recent technological advances have enabled many libraries to supplement their traditional information resources with online searching of national databases. This new service comes at great cost in terms of equipment, personnel, and access fees. Determining how these costs are paid has sparked heated controversy on a theoretical level and little concurrence on policy and procedure in actual practice.

The purpose of the traditional American library is to select, preserve and organize the records of human achievement which collectively represent society's "public knowledge."¹ The library and its

services are perceived as public goods: they are funded through taxes and tuition money and exist for the good of the entire society. For these reasons, it is very difficult for people, often especially librarians, to accept the idea of charging fees to users of the new online searching services. On the surface it seems hard to justify creating two very similar end-products with two different price tags: a manually-created bibliography which is unquestionably free and an electronically-created bibliography which is rarely free and seldom cheap.

Information Science, *The Role of Fees in Supporting Library and Information Services in Public and Academic Libraries* (Washington, D.C.: NCLIS, April 1985).

¹National Commission on Libraries and Inform-

Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the costs involved with online searching are tremendous. When this service was first introduced, many academic libraries were able to meet demand by setting up referral services with nearby institutions. However, by the late 1970s demands from faculty forced even small academic libraries to acquire online searching capabilities.² This meant that each library had to purchase computer equipment, set up proper telephone access lines, pay database fees and telecommunications charges, and train personnel. The technology is always changing: systems must be updated, librarians retrained. The staff will want refresher courses and retraining sessions which may only be available off-campus. Such training alone comes to an estimated \$1,500 to \$2,000 annually per librarian.³ Once trained, the librarian either has to train users or perform searches for them. All of this is in addition to regular duties.

To make matters more complicated, user demand is projected to increase steadily over the years to come. An example of user increase exists at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. In 1975 online services were initiated. During that year, 88 searches were performed through one vendor. By 1983, 1,696 searches were done through six vendors with access to over 200 databases. The only publicity was word-of-mouth and bibliographic instruction. Users seem to have a high level of awareness and an interest in these new sophisticated services. Unfortunately, similar increases in overall user awareness are widespread and come at a time when fiscal limits are forcing academic libraries to reexamine services that were once considered public goods; traditional sources of funds are simply drying up. Thus demand increases as supply decreases, and, for some, the only way that online services can be offered at all is with the help of user fees.

Even then, some feel that the user should not be forced to fund the majority of all expenses incurred, but rather that the library should carry most of the financial burden for all computer-related services. Richard DeGennaro writes: "...those who use libraries, and those who provide their financial support must recognize and accept this new reality. The explosion in quantity, cost and communicability of information is a new phenomenon which calls for new responses.... The pattern of expenditures will change and an increased proportion of the library budget must be increased substantially and its function expanded to include acquiring and providing access to collections of information in electronic form."⁴

²David Carlson & P. Grady Morein, *Online Bibliographic Database Searching in College Libraries* (Chicago: ACRL/ALA, 1983).

³Robert J. Bassett, et al., *Report of the Study Group on Electronic Access to Information* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, December 1984).

⁴Bassett, p. 8.

Nevertheless, DeGennaro reminds us that a precedent for charging fees to cover the expenses of a new technology does already exist: the copying machine. When introduced in the late 1930s, copying processes were very expensive and not available as a self-service operation. It was universally agreed upon that those who use the service should pay for it: it is limited, measurable, and consumable and its use is optional. Fees for copying recovered costs for the libraries and discouraged abuse of the service. All of the above applies as well to online searching services. The product is tailor-made for one user, and costs involved can usually be attributed directly to that user because the product is a discrete entity. In these respects, both copying and online services can be seen as markedly different from the library's general collections in print which can be used repeatedly by many different users. In summary, a price tag may easily and justifiably be attached to online search services in most situations.

DeGennaro writes: "The arguments for pay libraries may be made in the name of economic theory, efficiency, or inevitable economic trends, but in essence it is a political idea just as the concepts of free public library service or free public education are political ideas."⁵

If one considers free library service as such, then one is classifying it as an American tradition. Another American tradition is the idea of charging for services rendered. Why cannot these two traditions coexist? Librarians object to anything less than free information for everyone, but why shouldn't fees be charged to those who really need a great deal of highly specialized information and are more than happy to pay for it? DeGennaro suggests that the most reasonable solution to this emotionally and politically charged controversy is rational compromise with policies and procedures which are flexible and based on local needs and budgets. Fees should be low enough to be as nondiscriminatory as possible, and yet high enough to discourage misuse and to provide libraries compensation for exhaustive searches done for those willing to pay for them.

Here is what is occurring in practice. In 1983, Carlson and Morein conducted a survey of academic libraries and learned that of those who offer online services, 73% charged or planned to charge fees to faculty and students. This figure is consistent with the results of the 1981 American Library Association survey which found that 68% of two- and four-year colleges and 93% of universities surveyed assessed fees.

The current trend is that such fees cover direct costs incurred by online search services: connect-time, off-line printing charges and telecommunications costs. Public funds, that is taxes and/or tuition money, cover indirect costs: staff time,

⁵Richard DeGennaro, "Pay Libraries and User Charges," *Library Journal* 100 (15 February 1975):363, 366.

equipment and supplies, utilities, training, etc. In effect, then, each search is heavily subsidized by the academic institutions themselves.

The ALA survey found that 60% of academic libraries distinguish between either two or three classes of clientele and charge fees at separate rates. Such classes run as student clientele, faculty/staff clientele, and community clientele; or as student/faculty/staff clientele and community clientele. The percentage of institutions charging community clientele for online search services is surprisingly low: 69.7%, according to the 1984 study by the Center for Business Research of Long Island University.⁶ The ALA survey offers an explanation: in many cases academic libraries offer the first ten minutes of search time free. In effect, this makes searches free for most individuals, especially community clientele who may be pursuing simple, non-scholarly questions.

The percentage of libraries charging a fee increases as the length of time increases; that is, the longer a library has been offering online searching, the more likely it is to charge a fee. In 1976, the Wanger study of online search services found that 41% of educational users reported their original cost recovery goals changed: "The majority of those who changed their cost-recovery orientation had moved toward recovering some portion of the costs incurred by the online searching. For the most part these respondents began their online program using grant funds and hoped that their grants would continue to be renewed. As the grant funding ended, they found that continuation of the service dictated that the end-user pay for some portion of the search costs."⁷

⁶See NCLIS, above.

⁷Judith Wanger, Carlos Cuadra, and Mary Fishburn, *Impact of On-Line Retrieval Services: A Survey of Users 1974-75* (Santa Monica, Calif.:

Similar financial constraints are reflected in the following findings. The Carlson and Morein study of academic libraries found that of responding libraries, the 35% of libraries which did not offer online searching, the three reasons given for lack of service were "expense," "insufficient use expected," and "lack of personnel," with the reason "expense" being given twice as often as the other two reasons combined. Of libraries who do offer online searching, the ALA survey found that 71% cited "level of funding available" as the reason for charging a fee. Of those not charging a fee, a mere 1% gave the reason "philosophy of service" and 2% cited "belief in free public library."

These facts indicate that for all the eloquence of those arguing against fees on the basis of the tradition of free access to information in American libraries and for all the emotional outcry about discrimination, these arguments carry little weight in the real world where bills must be paid. Online search services simply cannot exist in American academic libraries without some costs being passed on to users.

Many librarians may remain stubborn and resist fees as much as possible; however, they appear to be unavoidable. Studies cited above show that the most common reason for a library not providing online search services is lack of money. Libraries which do provide online search services seem to try to avoid imposing fees for as long a time as possible, but are usually forced to do so when initial funding for such services dries up.

Once these facts are faced, it is hoped that the emotionalism will die down, and perhaps clear the way for compromise. One bright thought for the future; it is often the case that new technology becomes less expensive through the years. ■■

System Development Corp., 1976), p. 157.

Academic library statistics now available

ACRL University Library Statistics 1985-86 and 1986 "100 Libraries" Statistical Survey has just been published by the Association of College and Research Libraries.

The 149 academic libraries responding to this survey included 81 university libraries, 42 college libraries, and 26 community and junior college libraries. Modeled on the survey conducted by the Association of Research Libraries on its member libraries, this statistical report includes 26 categories of data under four broad groupings: collections (size and growth); expenditures (library materials, binding, salaries and wages, other operating expenditures); personnel (professional, nonprofessional, and student assistants FTE); and interli-

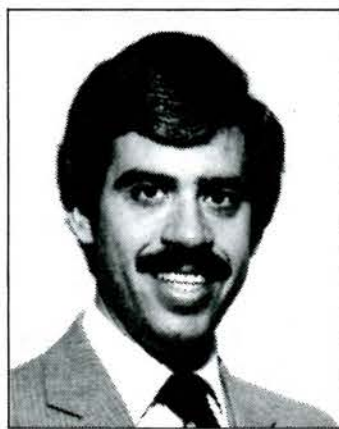
brary loans (total items loaned and borrowed). This report also includes, for each institution, ten ratios comparing library operations and expenditures.

ACRL University Library Statistics 1985-86 and 1986 "100 Libraries" Statistical Survey (ISBN 0-8389-7144-X) was compiled by Robert E. Molyneux, assistant professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois. Copies may be ordered from the ALA Order Department, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. The 110-page paperback sells for \$30 (\$24 for ACRL members). ALA members receive a 10% discount off the list price. ■■

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