**UNC E-Journal Efficiencies Working Group Assessment of Improvements in 2015**

**Background for this document:**

In early 2012, UNC General Administration and the NC Office of State Budget and Management hired an outside consultant (Dan Costello) to identify potential collaborative efficiencies of six program areas within the UNC System, one being e-journal acquisitions. The consultant worked with UNC Libraries to gather and analyze the system’s e-journal cost and usage data for the calendar years 2009-11. His final report recommended that the UNC Libraries develop and implement a five year plan to improve the cost/benefit ratio of our e-journal subscriptions system-wide. ULAC responded by appointing the E-Journal Efficiencies Working Group. The Working Group developed a multi-pronged strategy (see Appendix 1), including five annual assessments to ensure that the strategies produce positive results. This document is the fourth such annual report, focusing on 2015.

**Analysis:**

The Working Group collaborated with all 17 UNC System libraries to gather, validate, and normalize 2015 usage and price data for seven large academic journal publishers – Cambridge University Press, Elsevier, Oxford University Press, SAGE, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley. Compared to 2014, the 2015 UNC System-wide data show that:

- Our aggregate total cost rose by 4.5%, from $18.3 to $19.1 million
- Our aggregate total usage declined 1.2%, to 5.8 million
- Our aggregate average cost-per-use (CPU) rose 5.8% from $3.14 to $3.32
- The aggregate total number of titles used at least ten times rose 5.5%, from 36,771 to 38,778

Compared to the first year of UNC System-wide data collection (2009), the 2015 data indicate that:

- Our aggregate total cost rose by 26.4% over the 6 year span, from $15.1 to $19.1 million
- Our aggregate total usage rose 53.6%, from 3.7 to 5.8 million
- Our aggregate average cost-per-use (CPU) fell, declining 17.7% from $4.04 to $3.32
- The aggregate total number of titles used at least ten times rose 33.6%, from 27,523 to 38,778

After several years of very clear improvement in the UNC System’s cost/benefit ratio of its e-journal expenditures, the picture for 2015 is more ambiguous. Our spending increase of 4.5% was 25% less than the average 2015 national journal inflation rate of 6% overall and 6.6% for publisher packages¹. Unfortunately, our total usage fell slightly (1.2%), resulting in a CPU increase of 18 cents per article.

Although the drop in usage is small, it is significant because that number has risen each of the previous years since we began data collection in 2009. The Working Group will be watching usage numbers

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closely as we gather next year’s report (for 2016 data) to see if the 2015 usage numbers are an anomaly or the beginning of a trend.

The Working Group acknowledges that our data analysis is based solely on quantitative cost and usage data and thus cannot present a complete picture of e-journal efficiency. For example, a purely quantitative analysis presents any high-cost, low-use journal as “inefficient.” But even a low-use title can have high impact, and its cancellation could result in difficulty recruiting or retaining faculty and graduate students, in the inability to bring in a large grant, or in damage to classroom instruction. Those negative impacts certainly would not be considered “efficiencies” on UNC campuses! It is unfortunate that we cannot more fully address title-by-title qualitative measures in this report, but it is not possible to do that adequately for 5+ million uses over tens of thousands of journal subscriptions at 17 different institutions.

Conclusion and Summary:

Our 2015 cost and usage data for the seven largest academic journal publishers present a mixed picture with respect to e-journal spending efficiencies. Our cost increase was 25% below the national average, but our usage declined slightly. The Working Group will continue to seek additional efficiencies, with the caveat that at some point we face the likelihood of diminishing returns on our efforts.

UNC-Ejournal Efficiencies Working Group 2015 membership:

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