UNC E-Journal Efficiencies Working Group Assessment of Improvements in 2017

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 across six program areas within the UNC System, one being e-journal acquisitions. The consultant worked with UNC System 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, including five annual assessments to ensure that the strategies produced positive results. When the five year assessment period concluded at the end of 2016, ULAC asked the Efficiencies Working Group to continue gathering and analyzing e-journal data. This document is the sixth Efficiencies Working Group annual report, focusing on 2017.

Analysis:

The Working Group collaborated with all 17 UNC System libraries to gather, validate, and normalize 2017 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 2016, the 2017 UNC System-wide data show that:

- Our aggregate total cost rose by 3.2%, from $19.9 to $20.6 million
- Our aggregate total usage increased 11.9%, to 6.9 million
- Our aggregate average cost-per-use (CPU) declined 7.8% from $3.25 to $3.00
- The aggregate total number of titles used at least ten times rose 1.9%, from 40,099 to 40,847

We are pleased to report that the 2017 data clearly demonstrate improved efficiency. Our 2017 spending increase of only 3.2% was 40% lower the average national journal inflation rate of 5.4%. Our usage increased by a record 730,000, which represents the second largest annual percentage increase since our data analysis began in 2009. As a consequence, our e-journal cost per use has fallen to a record low of $3.00.

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

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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 6+ million uses over tens of thousands of journal subscriptions at 17 different institutions.

Conclusion and Summary for 2017:

Our 2017 cost and usage data for the seven largest academic journal publishers present a clear picture of improving efficiency in the provision of academic e-journals to the faculty, students, and people of North Carolina.

UNC E-journal Efficiencies Working Group 2017 membership:

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