August 26, 1998

At the direction of the Committee on Instruction (COI), the University Library Committee (ULC) has been involved in extensive discussions as to the role of the ULC in journal and periodical decisions and steps that might be taken to address faculty concerns. The ULC sees its primary role as insuring adequate and practical access by the university community to journals and periodicals that this community feels are essential for teaching, research and scholarship. Presently, the ULC is optimistic that it will be possible to avoid a major deselection process over the next few years, once the current round of review and balancing is completed among a remaining minority of departments. This optimistic estimate is based on 1) cost/inflation estimates for existing titles and 2) the commitment of the University administration to annual 9% increases in the total journal/periodical budget under the five year strategic plan. Our hope is that very shortly the university can reach a period of relative stability with respect to journals and periodicals.

Despite its relative optimism, the ULC still has significant concerns about the journal and periodical collection. Previous deselection processes may have unconsciously affected the balance of titles acquired, since the process of acquiring new or different titles has been kept separate from recommendations for deselection. The ULC therefore recommends that during the 1998-99 academic year university departments and programs undertake a review of the journal and periodical collection from the viewpoint of curricular and scholarly needs.

The attached document, approved by both the ULC and the COI, outlines a proposed procedure for this and future reviews of the periodical and journal collection. The proposed process ensures faculty representation in decision making through recommendations from departments, departmental library representatives, and the ULC. Our desire is that this process will aid in a careful, reflective review of journal and periodical needs in other than the “crisis” atmosphere previously associated with journal deselection. The membership of the ULC appreciates the desire of the university community for resolution of this issue. We believe this proposal offers an appropriate way of achieving this.

Brian Williams, Chair
University Library Committee
Proposed Journal Review Process

The ULC recognizes that questions relating to the titles and format of journals and periodicals to be acquired by the library are important for the university. Excellence in teaching and scholarship requires adequate access to those titles different members of the community need, balanced against the constraint of providing such access in a cost effective manner. Concerns among the university community about the process by which such decisions have been reached in the past have prompted the ULC to consider how such decisions should be made in the future. In the following, we propose a process to be followed in future university-wide reviews of journal and periodical titles which we hope addresses some of those concerns. Our goals here are twofold: first, to explain clearly steps to be followed in any future review and their rationale, and second, to expand the decision-making role of the ULC in the final steps of such reviews.

STEP 1: Departments, through their library representatives and in consultation with their subject librarians, present a list of journal and periodical titles to their subject librarians and the ULC which they have rated as “essential”, “important”, “supplementary” or “no longer important”. These lists are meant to include titles each department thinks are or could be of importance for teaching and scholarship within the department, regardless of whether or not the library is currently acquiring the title or in what format it might be acquiring it. Departments and individual faculty and staff should ensure that these lists make clear their usage and needs for titles which might be considered as falling within the interests of another department. At this stage, departments do not need to state the reasons for their particular priorities unless they care to. However, with or without such reasons, they should be carefully considering the reasons for their decisions at this stage in light of later steps in the review process. Departments are also encouraged to work closely with subject librarians in determining their final priorities and list of titles.

Rationale:
- Departments and programs need to set their own priorities, based on needs rather than what has been historically acquired or previous precedents
- Departments need to make clear at the outset of any review process what they believe they need so that throughout the review process the ULC can assess the degree to which those needs are being met

STEP 2: Given the lists submitted by each department or program, the subject librarian indicates points of agreement or disagreement as to priorities and his or her ratings or comments with respect to each title. The subject librarians also attempt to identify “trade-offs” among titles currently acquired and new titles, and also makes suggestions for practical and effective means of alternative access to subscriptions in paper text. At this step, it is understood that no decisions are to be reached as to whether or not a title is to be acquired or by what means of access.
Rationale:
- Subject librarians, through their professional knowledge (e.g., use statistics, relative importance of titles in a particular discipline, modes of access, interdisciplinary usage) can help correct any possible tendency of departments to submit lists perhaps overstating their real needs or neglecting the importance of interdisciplinary titles.
- Subject librarians are likely to have the best overall understanding of the current standing of the library collection in their disciplines and possible gaps or needs individual departments may not be aware of.

STEP 3: Departmental library representatives and subject librarians meet to discuss their separate lists, attempting to find agreement where possible with the emphasis on “essential” titles. If titles identified in this comparison are 1) “cost-neutral” in the sense that they do not incur major additional costs unsupported by current or projected library budgets and 2) do not require the deacquisition of a journal title with interdisciplinary significance, these facts are made clear, and the list of such titles is forwarded to the entire ULC for final approval without extensive additional review.

Rationale:
- There is no need for further extensive review where agreement can be reached.
- The comparison of title lists in Step 3 serves to identify where cost or other factors lead to significant disagreement. This puts departments or programs making costly requests or changes on notice that there will be further need to justify such requests at higher levels or review, in competition with other unmet requests or changes.

STEP 4: Where resolution is not easily reached as to “essential” titles, both subject librarians and departments then need to develop and present clear-cut reasons as to why a title or form of access is essential. This information is given to the divisional representative on the ULC, who, in consultation and collaboration with librarians, departmental representatives, chairs, and other interested parties, attempts to prioritize the needs expressed. It is suggested that in this process, the divisional representative to the ULC hold a general meeting with library representatives from all departments in order to 1) better understand the reasons for departmental priorities and 2) attempt to establish possible consensus within the division as to the most important priorities.

Rationale:
- The divisional representative on the ULC is perhaps in a better position than individual departments or subject librarians to get a broad view of journal needs within his or her division, and is also in a position to identify interdisciplinary needs.
- Review by the divisional representative to ULC again helps to distinguish actual needs from things which are perhaps only desirable or overstated.
- Actively including departmental library representatives in the process of setting priorities at the divisional level should give more importance to their role and perhaps encourage departments to give more careful consideration to their appointments.
STEP 5: After divisional representatives develop their lists of priorities, the ULC, in consultation with senior library staff shall meet and formulate a university-wide priority list. With regard to retaining and acquiring materials and their corresponding medium, this list shall reflect the university’s commitment to teaching and scholarship. As part of this effort, “essential” needs will be defined and placed as top priority. It is expected that except under conditions of extreme fiscal exigency, the ULC recommendations to maintain or acquire essential materials will be met through the existing library budget and additional university requested funds rather than the reallocation of a fixed periodicals budget.

Rationale:
- There is a need for some final authority which decides questions as to what can or cannot be supported. The ULC is probably the best place for this authority to rest in that 1) its structure provides for representation from all interested parties (faculty, students, library staff and administration), 2) through the proposed review process it has the most information on which to make recommendations and 3) it serves as a “buffer” between faculty and the administration where communication can be established between both parties.
- Once a journal, for example, is deemed essential at the Step 5 level (by faculty, department reps, divisional reps and senior library staff), it should be considered “off the table” for the current deselection process. Also, the library must meet the teaching and scholarly demands of the university as most recently expressed in the faculty meetings on merit review. These ideas form the rationale for the a strong statement of commitment to the goals of the university of teaching and scholarly activity as well as a commitment to finance essential materials out of new funds rather than reallocations, if necessary.