



## SERIALS MANAGEMENT IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A GUIDE TO ISSUES AND PRACTICES

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**SERIALS MANAGEMENT IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A GUIDE TO ISSUES AND PRACTICES.** The Greenwood Library Management Collection. Farrington, Jean Walter. *Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997, 177 pp., \$59.95.*

Serials management is arguably the most neglected facet of librarianship in library science programs. Indeed, few library science schools offer any training in technical services beyond a few semesters in cataloging, and serials—if covered at all—are generally relegated to a small portion of a course. Serials management courses per se are rare in today's graduate library science programs. As a result, even entry level serials managers who possess some paraprofessional serials experience enter the professional arena only to face a formidable array of management concerns that they are not immediately prepared to handle.

Farrington has come to the aid of rookie serials managers with this primer in which she covers topics and issues that are shaping and redefining the work of serialists in the academic setting. The experienced serials librarian will recognize topics that have been presented in the professional literature and at conferences over the past five to ten years. Their expertise in managing such issues as serials budgeting, vendor selection and evaluation, and, most recently, electronic journals has been gained with sweat and tears, if not with blood. However, even the most seasoned serials librarian will find food for thought in this slim volume.

Conventional wisdom says that to get the answers one needs, it is necessary to ask the right questions. While Farrington does not make specific recommendations in any given area of serials management, what she does provide is an array of scenarios and current developments, which, in turn, inform the serials manager's decision-making efforts. Strewn throughout the nine chapters are the guiding principles of standards, efficiency, and flexibility. In addition, Farrington places heavy emphasis on automation, stating in her introduction that, "the means to achieving the greatest flexibility in tracking spending, monitoring staff productivity, and adapting work flow is automation, automation, automation" (p. ix).

The first chapter, indeed, is dedicated to the topic of automation. Most of this chapter covers factors to consider when selecting an automation vendor. Farrington rightly points out that the first step in automating any area of library work is to examine the current work flow to estimate where, or even if, automation will enhance produc-

tion. She then proceeds to give a general comparison of stand-alone versus integrated library systems, and to provide a list of questions that will help in the selection of a system. Although a serials manager stands a better chance of having some say in the selection of a stand-alone serials automation system than in the selection of an integrated library system, the questions she supplies are critical to the overall selection process, since as she points out, the once virtually invisible work of the serials staff becomes at least partially observable in the online public catalog of an integrated system. Hence, serious consideration should be given to the way serials information is input into the serials module as well as the way the produced information displays in the online public catalog.

One question that is noticeably missing from Farrington's otherwise thorough list is how well the system or module handles irregular or erratic publication schedules for journals that depart from straightforward weekly, monthly, or quarterly publication patterns. While she does include a question about special, supplemental, and extra issues, the flexibility required to handle these has far less impact on the daily processing of serials than the overall flexibility required to handle the wide array of deviations from the aforementioned basic patterns. Being able to accommodate "regular irregularities" is a critical feature of any check-in system because the absence of such flexibility reduces the efficiency of daily journals processing and increases the probability that mistakes will occur. These mistakes, in turn, produce erroneous holdings information that displays in the public online catalog. Unfortunately, when selecting an integrated system vendor, the serials module is not generally the module that commands the highest priority.

One of the more progressive topics that the first chapter covers is the advent of electronic invoicing and other serials applications of electronic data interchange (EDI). EDI technology is an excellent example of the role that standards continue to play in the ongoing quest for enhanced serials control. The chapter also covers other standards that have greatly influenced the efficiency of serials management.

Aside from the more technical aspects of serials management, Farrington provides information that is useful to other branches of academic librarianship as well. The chapters on budget development and collection development should prove to be valuable to technical services coordinators and directors whose background has not included extensive experience with serials. One issue in particular that will be

of interest to collection development managers is the relative proportion of the materials budget that should be allocated to serials. As part of this discussion, Farrington provides an overview of pricing issues and the relative usage of serials among the various academic disciplines, as well as new factors such as the electronic publishing venue. Not surprisingly, the author asserts that libraries will have to confront the changing emphasis from ownership of paper journals through traditional subscriptions to providing access to serials in electronic formats. As Farrington suggests, such a transition in the mode of providing research materials will necessitate a reexamination of staffing needs and possible realignment of work units in the library. Farrington also devotes an entire chapter to discussing the various types of use studies and some of the pitfalls to avoid. Such studies are a vital part of the collection development aspect of serials management, and Farrington goes further to include the treatment of electronic and other non-print formats.

The serials cataloger will find food for thought in the final chapter of the book. Here Farrington covers the range of serials cataloging trends and practices, from evolving staffing needs to format integration, and finally to cataloging of computer files and outsourcing of cataloging. Where appropriate, the author makes reference to other works where a particular topic, such as outsourcing, is presented in greater detail. The greatest benefit of this chapter, as well as the book itself, is that it provides an overview and some basic background for all of the trends and topics that a well-informed serials manager must know about in order to be prepared for the imminent changes in the academic serials environment.

While Farrington's book may be more useful to the novice serials or collection development librarian, the range of topics covered and the treatment of emerging trends—especially regarding automation and electronic journals—render this volume a recommended read for those academic professionals who realize the need to keep up with the inevitable changes to come.

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